

Critical and Collective Perspectives on the Global Food System

Winter 2025

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Study Programmes:

Agriculture, Ecology and Societies (AGES) (M.Sc.), Ökologische Agrarwissenschaften (M.Sc.),
Sustainable International Agriculture (SIA)

Time: Thursdays, 14:00-17:45, starting on 23. October 2025

Rooms:

- First half - Sessions 1-7 (23.10.2025- 04.12.2025) H12, Steinstraße 19, 37213, Witzenhausen
- Second half - Sessions 8-14 (11.12.2025- 12.02.2026) H33, Steinstraße 19, 37213, Witzenhausen

Information and resources: please register on Moodle to receive course material.

Information and resources will be uploaded via Moodle, please check regularly!

- Moodle Link of the course: <https://moodle.uni-kassel.de/course/view.php?id=19818>
- Course name on Moodle: E39-Critical and Collective Perspectives on the Global Food System. No enrollment key is required.

Information and resources will be provided via **the Moodle page** of the course! Please check page and your Uni Kassel email address regularly.

Website: <http://www.uni-kassel.de/go/iapug>

Introduction

In academia and partly also in political and civil society realms talk of the need for transformation of societies and social-ecological systems is extensive. However, what conceptual propositions guide the diagnosis of current environmental crises, how do these lenses help us to uncover injustice and underlying structures? What propositions may guide transformation to overcome phenomena of crisis and reconstruct a more just and sustainable world? How do these approaches connect to particular phenomena in relation to

the development of agriculture and food systems and its socio-economic and environmental dimensions in different parts of the world? In this module a number of lecturers will discuss these questions together with students.

Methods and approach

The course provides a mixture of teaching and learning methods including lectures by various academics, classroom debates, group work, literature discussions, student-led seminars, essays and case-study analysis. Prior reading is required. A day-excursion is planned for the 05.02.2026.

Literature

Basic literature and advanced texts will be **provided through Moodle® in separate folders**. For student presentations and student-led seminars, introductory literature will be provided upon request, yet students are expected to look for additional relevant sources independently.

Objectives, contents, and course work: divided into *first half* and *second half*

Details *first half* - Sessions 1-7 (23.10.2025 – 04.12.2025): Throughout the *first half* of term, students will become familiar with

- **de-growth thinking**, its underlying justification and conceptual foundations as well as its normative contents and implications for agriculture, the food systems and people's lifestyles and how society and social-ecological relations are constituted.

Topics (*first half*) - Sessions 1-7 (23.12.2025- 04.12.2025)

- Development
- Under-development
- Unlimited economic growth
- Critiques of growth
- Antropocene
- The origins of Degrowth
- Degrowth and Global South
- Degrowth, Agroecology and Food Systems

For the corresponding topic for in-class presentation, you have related the class topic to a problem of interest to you—a local, regional, or global problem (South or North). For example, the food system crisis, dual food problems (obesity or malnutrition), the industrialization of agriculture, the verticalization and integration of capitalist agro-industrial value chains, poverty, marginalization, biodiversity loss, climate change, and public policy, etc. The objective of the *first half* of the course is to relate the topic to a real-life local, regional, or global problem and Degrowth.

Course work of the *first half* (50% of overall module mark), related to sessions 1-7:

Write an essay (1,200 words). The essay should relate the theoretical and methodological aspects covered in the *first half* of the course and be closely related to the problem of interest. It is suggested that you write a critical essay with well-developed theoretical foundations. Basically, the essay should comprise three sections: introduction, analytical and theoretical development of the problem of interest, and a conclusion in the form of a *policy brief* (recommendation). And an executive presentation on the summary of the essay in a maximum of 10 minutes.

Please, note: The evaluation of the essay and presentation will give priority to: originality, innovation, creativity, and the relationship between the theoretical foundations learned in class and the case study or real-life problem.

Details *second half* - Sessions 8-14 (11.12.2025- 12.02.2026): Throughout the *second half* of term, students will delve into a number of **critical approaches to analyze the food system** and how they play out in specific analyses.

Specifically, students will be familiar

- with the concept of the global food system more in general and its development throughout several food regimes and how it developed in regard to justice and coloniality interrelated with this perspective.
- the role of European trade relations and the European Common Agricultural Policy for globalization of agriculture and its impacts on agriculture and socioeconomics and the environment worldwide.
- the role of the financial sector for investment and development of global corporate agriculture.
- the role of scientific approaches and knowledge for development of agriculture and food systems.
- the role of marginalized populations for environmental degradation.
- the role of consumption patterns and what triggers them in relation to agricultural development
- conflicts concerning landed relations in agriculture.
- the dynamics of crop booms
- the concept of environmental justice and alternative explanations to environmental conflict with special emphasis on food and agriculture.
- the colonial roots of the current global food system, viewed through the lens of food regime theory.
- the concept of seed sovereignty and alternative modes of organizing the seeds provision as core to agricultural development.
- the impact of international trading agreements and claim on patent rights on national seed policies in the Global South.

Course work of the *second half* (50% of overall module mark), related to sessions 8-14:

Course work in this regard consists of two parts of equal value for the entire module (each 25%).

Please, select a topic you want to work on from the list of lecturers below. Please, do so **at least 3 sessions before the corresponding lecturer and topic is scheduled**. For detailing your topic, please, **get in touch with the lecturer in charge** of the session. Also, indications for detailed topics in relation to sessions are given below for some of the sessions. Alternatively, you could also present an empirical case study in relation to the topic chosen. In relation to the topic, please provide for 2 pieces of course work:

1. 25% of course work for in-class presentation:

For the corresponding topic for in-class presentation, you have two options.

a. You can record a **Youtube** of up to 10 minutes (can also be much shorter) with an input for discussion on the topic. Subsequently, the Youtube will be played in class and discussed. In any case, what matters most is contents not presentation in the case of a YouTube for example.

b. you can hold a **Powerpoint** presentation on the topic of ten minutes as input for the discussion.

For both options, providing input for discussion and proactively moderating the discussion for at least 15 minutes is part of the course work and will be marked as well. It is more important than being very comprehensive in your inputs!

In both cases, please, also **indicate a piece of literature** that students should read in relation to the topic in order to enhance the discussion. The literature for reading needs to be identified and sent to lecturers **8 days before the session takes place**. The reading will be made available to students via Moodle for reading in advance and to prepare for the discussion.

Criteria for assessment:

- Timing – 5%
- Design (appropriate amount of text and readable of the slides) – 5%
- Understandableness (allowing audiences from a different field to understand the content) – 5%
- Content – 25%
- Discussion – 10%

2. 25% of course work for submission before 1st April, 2026:

On the same or a closely related topic, please write a 1200 words argumentative essay. This means, that you start the essay with a hypothesis and then discuss the hypothesis, relying on literature, your arguments, ideas, discussions. The same applies if you present an empirical case related to the topic.

Criteria for assessment

- Structure (logic flow of the essay) – 10%
- Formatting (including correctness of citation) – 10%
- Content (including link to critical perspective and criticalness) – 30%

Be aware that detection of plagiarism by corresponding softwares used at Uni Kassel implies **automatic failure of the module**. In drastic and repeated cases consequences will be more severe. Plagiarism is understood as the complete or partial adoption of words, ideas, or work results from another person's work without acknowledging the source. It **includes unacknowledged use of AI, mis-representing others' work or copying large sections** of work from AI tools.

In relation to some of the session topics of part 2 you can find more detailed suggestions for topic/ questions here.

Suggestions for topics/ questions for students for particular sessions

Session 8, 9, 10. - 11.12.2025, 18.12. 2025 and 15.01.2026: Critical agrarian studies

- Is land grabbing about resource grabbing?
- Who benefits from contract farming?
- Does marginalization yield degradation?
- Will digitalization make agricultural production more sustainable?
- Is critiquing genetically modified organisms unscientific?
- Is the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) effective in combating hunger?
- Are biofuels sustainable?

Session 11 - 22.01.2026: The coloniality of the Global Food System

- What are the colonial roots of the production and trade of specific commodities – cacao, coffee, cane sugar, etc. – and how have commodity-specific power relations changed in the post-colonial era?
- How and why does food marketing rely on colonialist and exoticist imagery even today?
- What do you consider globalized food items, and how did it come to be globalized? Consider sushi, pizza, or white bread... Trace the cultural production of a specific food in a meaningful way
- How do we critically approach gastro-nationalism in the face of agri-food globalization? What is it?
- What are the characteristics of the current food regime, which tensions and contradictions are apparent?

Session 12 - 29.01.2026: Environmental justice and the food system

- How is the sustainability transformation in the agri-food system itself sparking controversy and conflict? Explain with a case report.
- Considering the stark social and economic implications of an aging and shrinking demographic, why are (neo-) Malthusian ideas still widespread?
- How are concepts like ecological justice, or environmental justice with a more-than-human dimension, applied to modern livestock production systems? What ethical dilemmas are arising?
- How and why do environmental justice struggles arise around the subject of drinking water? Show with a case report.

- How are “sustainable lifestyles” in the Global North connected to environmental justice conflicts in the Global South? Explain with a case report.

Session 14 - 12.02.2026: Seed sovereignty, patent rights and international trade agreements

- Should seeds and plant varieties be patented? What are the pros and cons for patenting/ not patenting? (students should select a position and argument for it)
- How have transnational seed cooperatives change the power relations in international and national seeds systems (students can choose a country or region according to their interest)
- Are pluralistic seed systems a panacea to promote seed sovereignty and protect smallholders’ rights?
- Can seed sovereignty contribute to achieve a world without hunger? Or is it idealized?
- How has seed sovereignty been framed and practiced differently between the Global South and Global North?
- How do international trade regulations reproduce post-colonial power in national seed systems in the Global South?

Contact

Prof. Javier Becerril

Please, note: Meetings upon request by e-mail. Meetings can also be held via zoom

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Room: **3015**

Place: *usually Tuesdays* 11:00 – 12:00 o’clock at Universität Kassel, Fachbereich 11,

Ökologische Agrarwissenschaften, Steinstr. 19, D-37213 Witzenhausen

Room: Kloster/Monastery Room **2136**

Sue (Shu-Wei) Chow

Please note: meetings upon requests by *email*.

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Course Outline

	Date	Topic	Content (can be in bullet points)	Objective
1	23.10.2025 (Javier Becerril)	Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction</i>: the big challenges. • The Concept of Development. <i>Sen A., (1988)</i>. • The roots of Development Theory. <i>Lewis, W.A. (1988)</i>. • Classical and neoclassical theories. <i>Cypher, J.M. & J.L. Dietz (2009)</i>. 	Analyze the roots of development and theoretical approaches.
2	30.10.2025 (Javier Becerril)	Under - development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Invention of Underdevelopment. <i>Esteva, G. (2009)</i>. 	Analyze and understand the origin of the concept of underdevelopment
3	06-11-2025 (Javier Becerril)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited economic growth • Critiques of growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social process • Material process • Unlimited growth • Ecological • Socio-economic • Capitalism • South – North critique 	Study and understand the linear economic model, the crisis that has generated unlimited economic growth.
4	13.11.2025 (Javier Becerril)	Anthropocene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change and Loss of Biodiversity. <i>Otero, I. et. al. (2019)</i>, <i>Folke, C. et al (2016)</i>. <i>Folke, C. et al (2021)</i>. <i>Hickel, J. (2020)</i>. 	Systemic analysis on biosphere shaped by human actions, Anthropocene biosphere,
5	20.11.2025 (Javier Becerril)	The Origins of Degrowth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economics of degrowth. <i>Kallis, G., et. al. (2012)</i>. <i>Kallis, G. et. al. (2012)</i>. 	Understand the deep concept of degrowth.
6	27.11.2025 (Javier Becerril)	Degrowth & Global South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economics of degrowth • Post-Growth. <i>Kallis et. al. (2025)</i>. • Degrowth and the Global South. <i>Gräbner and Strunk (2023)</i> 	To address and analyze, in different case studies, degrowth in practice in the global south.
7	04.12.2025 (Javier Becerril)	Degrowth, Agroecology & Food systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degrowth & Agroecology. <i>Gomiero (2017)</i> • Degrowth and agri-food systems. <i>Guerrero Lara et al. (2023)</i>. 	Conceptualize: Degrowth supporters call for the adoption of a more <i>frugal lifestyle</i> , based on local production and food self-sufficiency, and of short food chains.
8	11.12.2025	Critical Agrarian Studies (CAS): which and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing Critical Agrarian Studies (continued in Session 10) 	Understand ontological, methodological and epistemological implications of

	(Ariane Götz)	whose reality counts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on Science, Critical Analysis and Challenges of Explanation Cases: GMOs 	critical analysis when approaching empirical phenomena
9	18.12.2025(Ariane Götz)	Landgrabbing Langgrabbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the dynamics and concept of land grabbing What is the interrelation between marginalization and degradation 	Understanding the phenomenon of land grabbing; Interrogating the prominent hypothesis that “poor farmers make poor soils”
Christmas holiday				
10	15.01.2026 (Ariane Götz)	The political economy of crop booms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discusses crop booms in the context of international division of labour, modernization, recasting of agricultural regimes and the question who benefits Case study: Asia, Latin America 	Understanding the international political economy of cash/flex crops and effects for countries and farmers
11	22.01.2026(Sören Köpke)	The coloniality of the Global Food System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotlight into colonial history of the food system Introduces Food Regime Theory Introduces agrarian extractivism as a lens to understanding commodity production Case study: Tea in Sri Lanka 	Understanding the Food System as historically shaped Considering continuities in food system structures across colonial history
12	29.01.2026 (Sören Köpke)	Environmental Justice and the food system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduces concepts of environmental justice and alternative explanations (environmental security, NIMBY, ...) Presents the Environmental Justice Atlas Poster session: Environmental Justice case analysis 	Understand the concept of environmental justice Discuss justice dimension of agri-environmental conflict situations Apply lens to case study
13	05.02.2026 (Sue Chow)	Excursion to seed company KWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excursion to KWS (Einbeck) 	Visit the work of huge seed cooperatives and local seed producers and connect with the discussion in class.
14	12.02.2026 (Sue Chow)	Seed sovereignty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concept and importance of food sovereignty and seed sovereignty. Formal and informal seed systems Current situation of global seed “industry”, particularly in the Global South Seed patents, international and regional trade rules, plant variety rights and intellectual property Reading: Seeds at Risk. Degolo et al. (2025). 	Understand the concept of seed sovereignty; reflect the impact of transnational cooperatives and international trade laws to local seed systems.