

**Title of Course: The Economics of Food**  
**Period: Fall 2025**

Instructor: Maria J. Bustamante, PhD

*(Please note: This is a preliminary version of the course syllabus and is subject to changes.)*

**Course description:**

As a basic tenet of life, everyone has a relationship with and is affected by food. The agriculture and food (agrifood) sector is a complex system influenced by market economics, culture and politics - all of which are constantly evolving. As our planet faces unprecedented environmental and political challenges, food has been raised as a central issue and interest in the sector is on the rise. The goal of this course is to introduce students to the economic, social and political perspectives on food system transformation within the Swedish context. By taking an ecosystem perspective and understanding key interrelationships, students will be encouraged to analyze and problematize Swedish food production and consumption in a way that integrates economic, cultural, environmental and ethical considerations.

In this course we will use key economic principles, such as supply and demand, subjectivity, efficiency, competition, and incentives, as a foundation to examine food production and consumption in Sweden – now and in the future. By first understanding the role of market actors, policy and individual choice, the overall aim of this course is to broaden the students' knowledge of the critical issues and trade-offs of the potential pathways to support more sustainable food production and consumption.

The course is divided into three main modules: 1) Perspectives on agrifood, 2) Examining sustainability in the agrifood system context and 3) The future of agrifood.

*Prerequisite:* an introductory course in Microeconomics and/or Macroeconomics

**Intended Learning Outcomes**

After completing the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of different perspectives on agrifood systems presented in the course and how they relate to each other, broadly and specifically in the Swedish context
- Apply economic principles to analyze food systems dynamics at different levels
- Understand how national, regional and global policies and culture affect Swedish agrifood development
- Assess the roles and market power of the various stakeholders in the agrifood sector
- Critically reflect on the complexity and potential contradictions as it relates to food systems transformation towards sustainability

**Course Literature**

During the course, we will draw on a variety of literature sources. We will read several chapters from the following books:

- *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature. This book is available open source: <https://library.oopen.org/handle/20.500.12657/90424>*
- *Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets. Routledge. 2nd edition.*

All additional readings will be available on the course web.

## Classroom expectations

Students are expected to prepare for class in advance by completing all readings and come to sessions with their own questions and reflections. The classroom should be seen as an open and safe environment where ideas can be expressed and debated in a respectful and thoughtful manner. As we aim to connect the dots between the course literature and practical application, please bring your own thoughts and experiences to the discussion.

*Laptops and phones:* Phones are not allowed during active class time (there will be breaks where you may check your phone). Laptops are highly discouraged but are allowed for notetaking if that is the preferred method of the student. However, if students are found to be distracted or disengaged due to laptop use, participation grades will be affected negatively. Please reflect on this. If you are easily distracted with your laptop open, it is strongly suggested to take notes with pen and paper.

*Class attendance:* Regular attendance is mandatory. One absence is allowed without penalty. Any additional absences must be excused by the instructor. We have one guest lecture planned, and one study visit planned during the semester. Attendance at these sessions is mandatory. Failure to attend these sessions will result in an automatic reduction of grade (unless an emergency is documented). The course instructor reserves the right to assign make-up assignments for missed classes.

*Class participation:* Class participation is assessed based on overall engagement during class time, e.g. are you listening, asking questions, etc. It is not the “quantity” of participation that matters, but its quality. The course will offer different ways to share ideas within class. If you feel you are facing any barriers or concerned about your participation, please contact the course instructor.

*Academic integrity and plagiarism:* All written assignments are expected to be independent and self-authored. Any use of concepts, ideas or figures from other materials should be properly referenced according to academic standards. Plagiarism of any kind is strictly forbidden. This includes any use of AI to assist in writing as well. If you use AI to assist you, you are required to submit a summary describing how you used AI to help you complete the assignment (e.g. producing text, proofreading, finding citations, etc.). In addition, you must clearly indicate which passages have been produced or assisted by AI, for example in a footnote that details how AI was used in that instance. Failure to acknowledge use of AI to complete an assignment will count as academic dishonesty and be subject to the same penalties as outright plagiarism or other forms of cheating. Please review the Plagiarism and AI policy in the Student Handbook.

## Grading

Your final grade will be based on the summation of points from the following:

<b>Graded activity</b>	<b>Points</b>
Class attendance and participation	15
Literature presentation	5
Small assignments (2 x 7.5 pts)	15
Mid-term presentation	15
Final Report & Presentation	50
- Outline/Draft (5 pts)	
- Final Report (30 pts)	
- Presentation (10 pts)	
- Discussant (5 pts)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 points</b>

A = 90-100 pts, B = 80-89 pts, C = 70-79 pts, D = 65 – 69 pts, F = 64 or fewer points

*Class attendance and participation (Individual): please see Classroom expectations above.*

*Literature presentation (1, groups of 2-3)* During one session of the semester, you and a classmate(s) will be assigned to present the assigned literature for that session. The goal is to reinforce learning in an engaging and creative way. Thus, the “presentations” do not need to follow a template but should be between 10-15 minutes. More details will be provided on expectations and grading criteria.

*Small Assignments (2, individual):* During the semester you will be required to submit two smaller assignments of 500-750 words each. The first one is due after the completion of the first module, and the second will be due after the completion of the second module. More details will be provided.

*Mid-term presentation (groups of 2):* Based on a specific case, you will evaluate and present a solution from the viewpoint of a specific stakeholder in the Swedish agrifood system. This will be done in pairs. Case materials, pairings and more details on the expectations and evaluations of the presentations will be provided.

*Final report and presentation (individual):* Throughout the semester you will conduct an individual research project on an aspect of the Swedish agrifood system that interests you (e.g. production, policy, consumer habits). It should be an in-depth study that incorporates the course literature, along with additional sources that support your overall research question. You should also interview at least one person that can provide insight into the area you are researching. To help develop your report, you will be required to submit some research tasks throughout the semester. These include:

- Submission 1 (ungraded): 2-3 topic areas of interest and potential research questions
- Submission 2 (graded): An initial outline/draft of your report, 1000-2000 words, excluding references
- Submission 3 (graded): Final reports should be 3000-4000 words in length, excluding references. Academic referencing is required. You will be given more details and guidelines for the structure and format of the final paper, as well as the grading criteria.
  - o Share your final report with your opponent and read the paper for which you have been assigned as opponent. Prepare questions and comments for final presentations.
- Presentation & Opposition (graded): In-class final presentations should be 10 minutes in length, with 5 minutes allotted for questions and comments from the opponent.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1: Introduction to the course**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Introduction to the course and main themes
- Getting to know each other
- Course practicalities and expectations
- High-level overview: The current situation of agrifood, health, the environment, and market drivers in Sweden

### **Prior to the session**

Read:

- Chapter 2: The Food Wars thesis in *Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets. Routledge. 2nd edition.*
- Executive Summary in Ruggeri Laderchi, C., et al. (2024). The Economics of the Food System Transformation. Food System Economics Commission (FSEC), Global Policy Report.
- Why are kiwis so cheap? (p. xv – xvi) in *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature.*

Other:

- Carefully read through the course syllabus.

### **After the session**

- Brainstorm potential topics and research questions for your final project

## **MODULE 1: PERSPECTIVES ON AGRIFOOD**

*During weeks 2-4, we will focus on analyzing agrifood in Sweden from different perspectives. Readings for each week give you a foundation for in-class discussions where we will apply the concepts and themes to the Swedish context.*

### **Week 2: The market economy and food**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics and activities:

- Actors and power
- Externalities and market failures
- Competition in the EU
- Literature presentation (*pre-assigned*)
- Discussion of final project ideas

### **Prior to the session**

Read:

- Chapter 6, The Food Wars Business (pg.168-195 only) in *Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets. Routledge. 2nd edition.*
- Chapter 11, Section 11.1 How Trade and Policies Link Local Markets and Global Food Systems in *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature.*
- Chapter 4, Section 4.2 Externalities: Unintended Side Effects of Market Activity in *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature.*

- Wilhelmsson, F. (2006). Market power and European competition in the Swedish food industry. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Industrial Organization*, 4(1).

Other:

- Submit project ideas and initial research questions

### **Week 3: Health, culture and food**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Dietary norms and food preferences
- Using behavioral economics to understand non-optimizing aspects of food
- Socio-economic factors of food
- Literature presentation (*pre-assigned*)
- Introduction of Mid-term assignment

#### Prior to the session

Read:

- Chapter 8, Section 8.1: Behavioral Economics of Food Choices for Future Health in *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature.*
- Chapter 3, Diet, Health and Disease (pgs. 58-76 only) in in *Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets. Routledge. 2nd edition.*
- Makenzius, M., Skoog-Garås, E., Lindqvist, N., Forslund, M., & Tegnell, A. (2019). Health disparities based on neighbourhood and social conditions: Open Comparisons—an indicator-based comparative study in Sweden. *Public health*, 174, 97-101.
- Section 4: Diet quality and health in Jonell, M., Alvstad, R., Eitrem Holmgren, K., Bengtsson, J., Fetzer, I., Gordon, L. J., ... & Wood, A. (2024). Climate, biodiversity and dietary quality targets for Swedish food production and consumption. *Mistra Food Futures Report*, (20).

### **Week 4: Policy and food**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Political economy and the welfare state
- Government policies and interventions
- Literature presentation (*pre-assigned*)
- Oxford Debate: Food Policy Intervention – to tax or not to tax?

#### Prior to the session

Read:

- Chapter 6: Collective Action: Government Policies and Program in *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature.*
- Chapter 8: Food Democracy or Food Control in *Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets. Routledge. 2nd edition.*
- Lundborg, P., Rooth, D. O., & Alex-Petersen, J. (2022). Long-term effects of childhood nutrition: evidence from a school lunch reform. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 89(2), 876-908.

Other:

- During class we will conduct an Oxford style debate where you will be assigned to argue either for or against a specific policy intervention: a meat tax. To prepare for this debate, please read:
  - o Säll, S. (2018). Environmental food taxes and inequalities: Simulation of a meat tax in Sweden. *Food Policy*, 74, 147-153.
- You will have time during class to prepare for the debate as a team and are encouraged to think about the three perspectives on food and agriculture that we have explored thus far to build your arguments. *Note: you will not know before class which side you will represent.*

#### After the session

- Assignment 1: Using the in-class debate as a starting point, further reflect on your assigned position. Selecting one or two key arguments from your opponents, prepare a 500–750-word rebuttal. Use the perspectives and literature from Module 1 to back-up your reasoning.
- Format: Times New Roman 12, double-spacing, academic referencing

### **MODULE 2: EXAMINING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM CONTEXT**

*During weeks 5- 8, we will deep dive into the questions surrounding sustainability in the agrifood system. Drawing upon the different perspectives explored in Module 1, this module will build your knowledge on the complexity and trade-offs of increasing sustainability in the sector.*

#### **Week 5: What is sustainable food production and consumption?**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Environmental consequences of agrifood
- Planetary boundaries
- Growth, a-growth and degrowth
- Supply and demand consumption patterns and effects on nature
- Literature presentation (*pre-assigned*)

#### Prior to the session

Readings

- Chapter 4: Food, environment and sustainability in Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). *Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets*. Routledge. 2nd edition.
- Van den Bergh, J. C., & Kallis, G. (2012). Growth, a-growth or degrowth to stay within planetary boundaries?. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 46(4), 909-920.
- Martin, M., & Brandão, M. (2017). Evaluating the environmental consequences of Swedish food consumption and dietary choices. *Sustainability*, 9(12), 2227.

Other:

- Submit Assignment 1 (see instructions under Week 4)

#### After the session

- Finalize Mid-term assignment

### **Week 6: Mid-term Presentations**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Mid-term presentations
- Mid-term check-in/evaluation

### Prior to the session

Read:

- No readings

Other:

- Prepare 15-minute Mid-term presentation

### **Week 7: Food systems transformation**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Economics of innovation
- Socio-technical transitions and the multi-level perspective
- Diet transitions and the politics of choice
- Ethics and just transitions
- Literature presentation (*pre-assigned*)

### Prior to the session

Read:

- Chapter 12: The Future of Food: Meeting Human Needs with Systemic Change in Food Economics in *Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health. Springer Nature.*
- Mylan, J., Morris, C., Beech, E., & Geels, F. W. (2019). Rage against the regime: Niche-regime interactions in the societal embedding of plant-based milk. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions, 31*, 233-247.
- Rööös, E., et al. (2021). Policy options for sustainable food consumption: Review and recommendations for Sweden

### After the session (Project Outlines):

- Finalize your final project outline. Share the outline with the members of your peer review group. During the Week 8 session, you will provide feedback on the outlines of your peer review group members.

### **Week 8: The politics of sustainability**

Location, date & time: TBA

TBC: Guest Lecturer

Main topics:

- Narratives and politics around sustainable food transitions
- Case: the protein shift in Sweden
- Final project outlines and feedback

### Prior to the session

Read:

- Patterson, J., Schulz, K., Vervoort, J., Van Der Hel, S., Widerberg, O., Adler, C., ... & Barau, A. (2017). Exploring the governance and politics of transformations towards sustainability. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions, 24*, 1-16.
- *Other readings to be determined with guest lecture*

Other:

- Submit your Final Project Outline/Draft.

- Read the outlines of your peer group members.

#### After the session

- Assignment 2: Find a news article from the U.S. that discusses some aspect of agrifood production, consumption or policy. In 500-750 words, critically analyze the article: what views/perspectives are used? What does it exclude? Compare and contrast how you might expect the same topic to be perceived in Sweden. Use course materials to support reasoning.
- Format: Times New Roman 12, double-spacing, academic referencing

### **MODULE 3: THE FUTURE OF AGRIFOOD**

*During weeks 9 – 11 we turn to the future of the agrifood industry and reflect on how it will be shaped by different stakeholders, policies and cultural developments.*

#### **Week 9: What and who will define Swedish/Nordic food in the future?**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Market power and food system stakeholders
- The role of gastronomy & shifting food preferences
- The Swedish food strategy

#### Prior to the session

Read:

- Tjärnemo, H., & Södahl, L. (2015). Swedish food retailers promoting climate smarter food choices—trapped between visions and reality?. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 24, 130-139.
- Öhlund, E., Hammer, M., & Björklund, J. (2017). Managing conflicting goals in pig farming: farmers' strategies and perspectives on sustainable pig farming in Sweden. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, 15(6), 693-707.
- Leer, J. (2016). The rise and fall of the New Nordic Cuisine. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 8(1), 33494.

Other:

- Submit Assignment 2. (see Week 8 above for details)

#### **Week 10: Study Visit**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Study visit: Urban/Vertical Farm(s) in Stockholm area

#### Prior to the Session

Read:

- Butturini, M., & Marcelis, L. F. (2020). Vertical farming in Europe: Present status and outlook. *Plant factory*, 77-91.



## **Week 11: Where and how will food be produced in the future?**

Location, date & time: TBA

Main topics:

- Urban and rural food systems
- The role of innovation and technology
- The role of policy
- Time for last questions on Final projects

### Prior to the session

- Shellabarger, R. M., Voss, R. C., Egerer, M., & Chiang, S. N. (2019). Challenging the urban–rural dichotomy in agri-food systems. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 36(1), 91-103.
- Bunge, A. C., Wood, A., Halloran, A., & Gordon, L. J. (2022). A systematic scoping review of the sustainability of vertical farming, plant-based alternatives, food delivery services and blockchain in food systems. *Nature Food*, 3(11), 933-941.
- Chapter 9: The future in Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2015). *Food wars: the global battle for mouths, minds and markets*. Routledge. 2nd edition.
- Epilogue: The Price of Kiwifruit, Explained in Masters, W. A., & Finaret, A. B. (2024). *Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health*. Springer Nature.

## **Week 12: Final Presentations & Course Wrap-up**

Location, date & time: TBA

Themes and activities:

- Presentations and defense
- Course evaluations

### Prior to the session

Read:

- No readings

Other:

- Submit final papers
- Prepare 10-min presentation
- Read the final paper of your assigned classmate and prepare questions and comments