Farming and the Food System of Oaxaca.
2 Credits. March 19-28, Oaxaca, Mexico

Dr. Vern Grubinger, UVM Extension Professor, vegetable and berry specialist.
vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu

Course Description

This course will emphasize field experiences to explore:

- food production and marketing in Oaxaca
- historical and contemporary factors affecting Oaxaca’s food system.

This course will focus on short essay writing by students aimed at capturing their food system observations and using new knowledge to draw conclusions.

Course Objectives. To gain an understanding of:

- the variety of farming and food marketing methods being used in Oaxaca
- key issues affecting Oaxaca’s agriculture - in the past and the present

Learning Outcomes. Students will be able to explain in writing:

- common food production and marketing methods in Oaxaca
- sources of different foods widely consumed in the area
- the role and relevance of different scales of farming in Oaxaca
- ways in which external forces have affected local agriculture
- different approaches to improving the food system in Oaxaca / Mexico.

Journal for field trips. Keep a journal on all trips. Observe activities; record important information including date/location/names of sites, organizations and people; note key questions you have; describe things that surprise or upset or excite you. Use mind maps, sketches, diagrams to describe information. Refer to info in journals when writing your papers.

Required Pre-class reading:

http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/Intro_Food_Systems.pdf

http://www.uvm.edu/~fmagdoff/Magdoff2007JRAFS.pdf

Sustainable Peasant and Family Farm Agriculture Can Feed the World. Via Campesina Views. 2010.
**Paper #1:** Issues and Opportunities for ‘Third World’ agriculture. Describe some key problems facing food systems in developing countries and how you think these problems should be addressed. **Due by email: Monday night, 3/17.** (See the guidelines for papers, below.)

**Wednesday 3/19** Morning: Lecture and discussion (9 am at Solexico). Overview of farming systems and food system, sustainable agriculture and agroecology. Students share their experiences and observations with Oaxaca local food system to date. What are key issues around sustainability? How are they similar or different from the food system in the U.S. and Vermont? Review course schedule, readings. Feedback on first paper and guidance for upcoming papers. Lunch at restaurant on the way to Centro de Abastos

Afternoon: Visit Central de Abastos food market. Observe and ask questions of vendors. Work in teams to focus on 3 different categories of food products: fruits, vegetables, and meats. Document: the approximate number of vendors, types of products they sell, the range of prices for at least 3 different types of food in each group. Ask vendors about place of origin of their products (Do they really know? What is ‘local’ and what is not?).

**Group Paper #2.** Summarize the findings of your team’s research. What conclusions can you draw about the prices, sources and marketing practices of vendors at the market? **Due by email Thursday morning 3/20, before class.**

**Thursday 3/20.** Depart Oaxaca at 7:00 am from Conzatti Park; drive to Tehuacán (about 4 hours). Tour of ‘Mr. Harvest’ large-scale greenhouse tomato production (~25 hectares.) Discuss issues of ‘industrial’ vs. ‘ecological’ agriculture. Spend night at hotel in Tehuacán.

**Friday 3/21.** Breakfast in Tehuacán. Depart 9 am Nochixtlán, Oaxaca. Arrive ~noon. Visit with Center for Integral Development of Mixtecan Campesinos and Campesinas (CEDICAM). Talk with staff and visit museum. Lunch in Nochixtlán. Travel to San Isidro Tilontongo for village visit (about 1.5 hours). Overnight stay.

**Saturday 3/22.** Work on community service project. See wheat threshing and cleaning demonstration. Eat breakfast and comida with family in the community. Discuss issues of campesino life and sustainability. Travel home (~2.5 hrs). Arrival in Oaxaca ~6 pm.

**Paper #3.** Describe an experience/observation and something you learned from the visit to San Isidro Tilontongo, to be part of group report on the campesino food system. **Due Sunday night 3/23 by email.**

Monday 3/24. Morning: free time. Afternoon: noon to 2 pm at Solexico. Class discussion of individual papers, and how best to combine them into an overview of the campesino food system, given what we learned from our visits to CEDICAM and San Isidro Tilontongo.

**Tuesday 3/25.** Depart Oaxaca 7:15 am from Conzatti Park for visit to ITVO, a federal institution of higher learning, with majors in biology, forestry, agronomy and computer science. Tour their facilities and meet with students. Exchange descriptions of your school’s programs and your interests in food systems.
Afternoon: visit Cuilapam de Guerrero. Observe ‘local commercial’ farming methods guided by a farmer. Look at the complementarity of animal husbandry and traditional milpa farming, in terms of labor and land use, the use of modern inputs such as fertilizer, and contrasting with fields in the part of the village where irrigation is available.

**Paper #4**: Describe an experience/observation and something you learned from the visits to ITVO or Cuilapam de Guerrero. **Due Wednesday morning 3/26 by email, before class.**

**Wednesday 3/26.** Morning: Depart Conzatti Park 8 am. Visit small scale organic greenhouse tomato grower; discuss production systems and the impact of the government’s greenhouse subsidy program.

Afternoon: visit a home food production project organized by the grass roots community development NGO called COVORPA (Volunteer Committee for Protection and Reforestation). What are the problems the people you met today are working on? How do they obtain the social and financial support needed for solutions?

**Thursday 3/27.** Visit federal research and extension center station that is working to protect local maize genetics, called INIFAP. Discuss corn production in the U.S. vs. traditional Mexican methods. Discuss international corn markets and how they affect Mexico’s people and farms. Reading assignment before Thursday: Achieving Mexico’s Maize Potential. Antonio Turrent Fernández, Timothy A. Wise, and Elise Garvey. October 2012. http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/wp/12-03TurrentMexMaize.pdf

Hand in journals Thursday afternoon, to be graded and returned Friday.

**Friday 3/28.** Visit Sustainable Harvest coffee program office in Colonia Reforma, see http://www.sustainableharvest.com/about-us/. Have lunch locally the restaurant Itanoni which features regional recipes and locally sourced ingredients. Afternoon: final class discussion about what was learned in the class and how it could be improved. What experiences were most valuable? Least valuable? What insights did you have?

**Paper #5**: Imagine that a foundation has announced the availability of 1 million pesos to support practical projects that will increase the self-sufficiency, environmental stewardship and/or economic viability of local food systems in Oaxaca. The foundation invites students in the UVM food systems 2014 semester abroad program to submit individual proposals for projects to be funded over the next 1-2 years. To request a grant, complete the following:

1. Briefly describe the experiences that led you to the idea for proposal work (50 words max)
2. What is the specific problem/opportunity you propose to address? (100 words max)
3. Why is it important to the people of Oaxaca? (100 words max)
4. What is the measurable goal of your project? (50 words max)
5. What do you propose to do to address the problem/opportunity? (200 words max)
6. Who will be your key partners in carrying out the work? (100 words)
7. How will you measure your progress/success? (100 words max).

**Due Sunday night 3/30 by email.**
Grading and Assignments

The course will emphasize learning through personal observation, conversation, independent thinking and writing. Discussion will take place throughout: in the van, during the visits, and in short gatherings of the class before/after visits.

Participation (10%) is expected of all students: attend all classes; be prepared to talk about: what did you see/learn, what was surprising, upsetting, inspiring? What questions are on your mind? How did visits relate to others during the week and to other parts of the course?

Five Papers (18% each) two pages in length (~500 words), double-spaced in 12-point font. These short essays should tell a brief, compelling and informative story about a specific piece of the food system. The focus should be on a person, a farm, a community, a research project, an organization, etc. The papers must be factual but should also present and support a point of view. They must present a conclusion or recommendation that could be helpful to others in understanding how an issue can be acted upon or a situation improved. The papers must be emailed to the instructor (vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu) as a Word document; the due dates are above. If a paper is late an explanation must be provided.

Paper grading criteria: addresses the assigned topic; clear and interesting writing, factually correct, organized train of thought, helps the reader to understand the topic, expresses your new knowledge or information gained, makes specific recommendations or draws specific conclusions at the end. Optional: two of the first four papers may be revised and resubmitted by the end of the class (3/30) for a revised grade.

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Grading Scale.

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Optional Recommended Reading

A Perfect Red by Amy Butler Greenfield. Tells the history of red dye production from cochineal: how it’s done, what role it played in Mexico’s connection to Spain and to Europe; and how this history provides insight into the culture of Oaxaca today.

Values in the Food System. Chapter 4 excerpted from: Farms, Food and Community: Exploring Food Systems. Lisa Chase and Vern Grubinger, in press.

Revised 3-29-14