

Agricultural Economics 399

Policy Issues in Agriculture and Natural Resources

Department of Agricultural Economics
College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Fall 2009

Course Details

AECN 399, Section 002, Call Number 1333
Credit Hours: 3
Monday and Wednesday, 2:30 - 3:45 p.m.
Filley Hall 302
Prerequisite: Sophomore standing or above

Contact Information

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Course Objectives

This course is designed to give students an introduction to public policy issues in agriculture and natural resources. Topics will be drawn from areas of farm policy and structure, food policy, trade, bioenergy, natural resources, and the environment. Policies and policy issues in each area will be examined for their scientific or mechanical elements, the economic implications, and the political factors at work, with a special focus on policies affecting Nebraska or addressing specific Nebraska issues. The course objectives are to:

- Understand the history and process of developing public policy in agriculture and natural resources.
- Analyze the development and mechanics of federal farm programs and integrate the economic impacts of farm programs into risk management decision-making.
- Explore the economic and policy issues relating to the structure of farms and the food marketing system, including the regulation of farm structure in Nebraska.

- Understand the economics and politics of food assistance programs and food safety and nutrition policies.
- Understand the economics and politics of trade and development and the role and impact of international trade agreements and negotiations on policy alternatives.
- Analyze the programs, mechanics, economics, and politics of conservation programs and environmental regulations, including the regulation of water in Nebraska.
- Understand the science, economics, and politics of bioenergy, including the development of the bioenergy industry in Nebraska.

Course Materials

Required text: *Agricultural and Food Policy*, Sixth Edition. Ronald D. Knutson, J.B. Penn, Barry L. Flinchbaugh, and Joe L. Outlaw. Pearson Prentice Hall. ISBN 0-13-171873-8.

This textbook presents a topical overview of many of the issues addressed in this course. Each chapter provides an overview of the issue at hand without becoming bogged down in economic and scientific jargon. Selected chapters will form the foundation of coverage of the key topics listed in the course outline.

Additional readings will be assigned to supplement the text and to introduce other policy issues not fully covered by the text. These readings will be drawn from government agency publications, university publications, journal articles, popular press articles, and other resources, including the web. The readings, or links to the readings, will be available on Blackboard at my.unl.edu

Course Evaluation

Grades will be assigned based on a weighted average of each student's performance in the following areas:

Discussion and participation in class and on Blackboard	15%
Quizzes	15%
Written assignments	20%
Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Final Exam: Wednesday, December 16, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.	20%

Letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following schedule:

<u>Weighted Average Score</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Weighted Average Score</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>
97-100	A+	77-79	C+
93-96	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	63-66	D
80-82	B-	60-62	D-
		0-59	F

Discussion and Participation. A key part of the course will focus on participation in class discussions of the various agricultural and natural resource policy issues. Just as the public policy development process does not happen without public deliberation, a thorough review of the range of agricultural and natural

resource policy issues cannot happen with quality discussion. The discussions will take place both in the classroom and on Blackboard. Students' grades for discussion and participation will reflect their effort to be involved in the discussions and their contributions to those discussions in both forums. Note that a student cannot earn better than a B average in the course without meaningfully participating in this discussion. Meaningful participation in this course includes 1) responding to relevant policy questions posed by the instructor or by other students; 2) contributing questions that generate meaningful discussion by others in the class; 3) providing useful information or other resources relevant to a policy issue addressed in class; or 4) discussing the relevant policy developments of the day at the state, national, or international level.

Written Assignments. The written assignments will include opportunities for students to explore policy issues and programs with two types of analysis. Some assignments will ask students to research and examine the data and mechanics of various programs and policies. Other assignments will ask students to research and develop brief reports on various policy issues from a range of perspectives. In the policy development process, written briefs provide the basic understanding of an issue, the potential impact of an issue, the stakeholders involved in an issue, and the policy positions surrounding an issue. These are "brief" reports, generally not more than one or two pages, that represent the types of information used by policy-makers, interest groups, or other stakeholders to track and discuss the various policy issues. (More information on the reports and the format of the reports will come with the first assignment.)

Quizzes. Several quizzes will be offered, in class or online, to track the performance of students and the comprehension of each key policy issue. Quiz dates may be announced or unannounced.

Exams. Two midterm exams and one final exam will be given to students. Each of the midterm exams will focus on the most recent material covered in the class. However, some of the fundamental information in the course is cumulative to the understanding of the whole public policy development process and may show up on each successive exam. The final exam will be a cumulative exam of the content covered throughout the course, with some emphasis on the most recent class material not already covered in the midterm exams.

Attendance. Regular attendance is expected and is necessary to perform well in the discussion and participation section of the course. Students are responsible for knowing the material presented and discussed during the class meetings and on Blackboard. Any student who cannot attend a class meeting is expected to obtain all of the class materials, readings, assignments from Blackboard and obtain any notes from fellow classmates.

Course Schedule

The course is scheduled for 2:30 - 3:45 p.m. each Monday and Wednesday from August 24 to December 9. The final exam is scheduled for Monday, December 15 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. There will be no class on Monday, September 7 for Labor Day and no class on Monday, October 19 for Fall Semester Break. And, on Monday, September 14, students will be expected to attend a lecture by former Congressman Doug Bereuter in the East Campus Union in lieu of class.

There will also be other limited times during the semester when the class will not be able to meet according to the schedule due to the instructor's travel schedule or family leave. In those instances, lectures will be taped and available on Blackboard for students to review. In the instance that the class schedule needs to be changed to accommodate a guest lecturer, the class may be tentatively rescheduled for a Friday session at the same time of 2:30 - 3:45 p.m. in the same classroom.

Course Outline

The course outline is listed in topical arrangement, consistent with the course objectives. Within each topic, the course will focus on the history and development of policy; the details, science, or mechanics of the topic; the economic impacts or considerations; and the political arena in which the topic is addressed. The text will provide a foundation for the discussion of each topic area and relevant chapters are listed with each topic.

- I. Public Policy Development in Agriculture and Natural Resources (Chapters 1-3, 12)
 - A. History of policies in the U.S.
 - B. Drivers of policy change
 - C. Role of public policy
 - D. Political economy
 - E. Policy leadership and development
- II. Agricultural Policy (Chapter 7)
 - A. Farm programs
 - B. Farm structure
 - C. Food marketing system structure
- III. Food and Nutrition Policy (Chapters 10-11)
 - A. Domestic food assistance programs
 - B. International food assistance programs
 - C. Food safety regulations
 - D. Nutrition guidelines, programs, and policies
- IV. Trade and Development Policy (Chapters 4-6)
 - A. International trade agreements
 - B. Trade development and assistance
- V. Conservation and Environmental Policy (Chapters 8-9)
 - A. Conservation programs
 - B. Environmental regulations
 - C. Bioenergy