

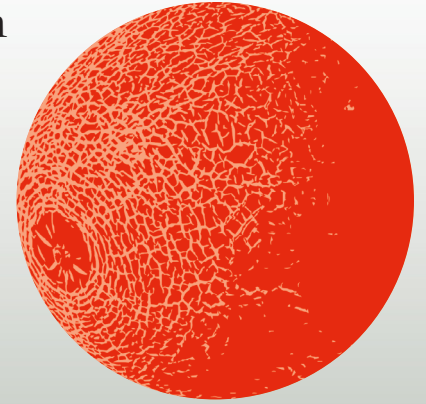


YALE
SUSTAINABLE
FOOD
PROGRAM

The Melon Forum provides a space for graduating seniors to share their culminating academic work in food systems study. The event borrows its name from Yale's beloved Mellon Forum, which bring together seniors in their residential colleges to present their theses. Convening students from a range of disciplines and departments, the Melon Forum celebrates food systems scholarship at Yale College. It is supported by a generous gift from the Northern Greening. The Yale Sustainable Food Program serves as a hub for creative and critical work on food and agricultural systems topics that are entangled with pressing problems of global significance. On the farm, in the classroom, and around the world, we aim to grow food-literate leaders.

For more information, visit
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9th annual melon forum



*senior essays on
food & agriculture*

2021–2022



Sol Thompson

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES (B.A.)

**Drought and Despair in New South Wales:
How Drought Indices Affect Mental Health and
Migration in Rural Australia**

Advisors: Robert Klee and Robert Mendelsohn

While conducting research in Australia, Sol Thompson spent much of his time either driving or traveling with farmers from town to town. Much of his research was conducted informally, sitting with a pencil and paper while eating with various families, taking pictures as he toured a property, or conversing with people he came across. Many farmers were hesitant at first to speak with him; the Green Party was known for sending reporters to various farms and making daily proceedings difficult as they attempted to paint farmers as villains. Once people learned that he was not, in fact, a reporter aiming to cast them as the cause of climate change, but rather a student from Yale interested in their perspectives and lives, they opened up, inviting him into their homes to eat with them and speaking candidly about what drought meant for them and their families. Thompson's research and research studies completed by Australian labs reveal similar results: with severe weather, incidents of severe mental distress rise. Alcoholism, spousal and child abuse, and suicide rates all rise when an area is struck by drought. What remains to be done — apart from stopping climate change — remains to be seen, especially in remote rural communities. This project stands as a cautionary tale for other countries facing increased incidence of severe weather, both pictorially and quantitatively.





Nat Irwin

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
(B.A., FOOD AND AGRICULTURE)

Grounded Healing: An Ethnographic Study of Regenerative Agriculture in New Hampshire and Vermont

Advisor: Maria Trumpler

This study aims to gain an understanding of the regenerative agriculture landscape in New Hampshire and Vermont, in terms of how “regenerative agriculture” is defined and perceived by practitioners, as well as how such agricultural practices are shaped and supported by state legislation. The bulk of this work is an ethnographic study around perceptions and implementations of regenerative agriculture in New Hampshire and Vermont. While the study focuses on how individuals define regenerative agriculture, the central questions herein consider who views regenerative agriculture as simply a set of agricultural practices and outcomes, and who perceives regenerative agriculture as a movement with an implicit set of social obligations. The interviews conducted revealed that many of the climate-motivated actors were heavily focused on practices and outcomes and tended to embrace the regenerative term and movement. However, the practitioners who were motivated by climate change mitigation, in addition to social regeneration, community healing, and equity were often critical of the movement as it currently stands. These farmers often wished to see more explicit mention of social change in the definition and broader implementation of regenerative agriculture. After considering the interview results, this essay turns to policy to explain why the regenerative agriculture term is more prevalent in Vermont than New Hampshire. By analyzing state Climate Action Plans, as well as Healthy Soil Policies, this study argues that Vermont had more established support mechanisms and economic opportunities for practitioners converting to regenerative systems. This difference has influenced the way that the regenerative movement is perceived and implemented in each state.



Camden Smithtro

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
(B.A., FOOD AND AGRICULTURE)

Regenerative Agriculture for Whom?: Producing and Consuming Agricultural Knowledge at The Land Institute

Advisor: Mark Bomford

The term regenerative agriculture (RA) encompasses an agriculture focused on improving soil health and increasing carbon uptake. Among agriculturalists, however, RA is perceived as a greenwashing and marketing technique. The concept is critiqued for lack of scientific integrity and political passivity. The Land Institute (TLI), a prominent agricultural research center and nonprofit studying perennial grains, distances their research from RA while simultaneously gaining funding and recognition through their association with the term. TLI’s interactions with RA demonstrate both a mainstream acceptance of their research, and their continued success in promoting a long-term holistic vision and producing accurate, nuanced representations of research progress. With the departure of TLI’s president and co-founder in 2016, as well as mounting criticisms of their vision’s apoliticism, this essay argues that TLI needs to champion a strong progressive political stance in their storytelling alongside their continued scientific specificity in order to avoid being swept up in RA’s greenwashing.





Alaina Perry

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
(B.A., FOOD AND AGRICULTURE)

**Representations of Consumption:
Desolation, Discomfort, and Empowerment in Late 20th
Century Visual Art of Food and Dining**
Advisor: Maria Trumpler

This senior essay explores the relationship between art and food by interpreting visual art from the late 20th century depicting food and dining spaces. This project features photographs, sculptures, and installations from five artists: Laurie Simmons, Denise A. Aubertin, Scott Hyde, Laura Letinsky, and Judy Chicago. The essay discusses how these works, though varied in their representations of food and dining, draw on common themes of desolation, disconcertion, and empowerment. The artworks discussed reflect the complexity of emotions that are evoked by art of food. This research demonstrates the value of art as an interpretive lens for understanding our relationships with food and dining spaces.



Elea Hewitt

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
(B.A., ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE)

**Land and People in the Willamette Valley, Oregon:
An exploration of community, agriculture, and land
management strategy**
Advisor: Michael Dove

This project seeks to provide a look into the history and evolution of the relationship between people and the land of the Willamette Valley, Oregon. Through historical and anthropological research, methods of land management are described. Specifically, questions of agriculture and food production are the focus, with special attention given to ideas of community cohesion and resiliency. Information gleaned through interviews provides stakeholder perspective on concepts of agriculture, local and wider community, responsibility, and education. These ideas are essential in discussion and planning for building community, food, and climate resiliency. A case study is brought forth in Rock’N’Wool Ranch, a family-owned operation committed to implementing sustainable and restorative agriculture. Through historical review, interview process, and personal experience, this study proposes the goal of regional transition of agricultural practice from current industry standards towards diversified systems of production as an aspect of a solution to bring about greater health of humans and land, increased community cohesion, and restorative and resilient systems of food production better suited to weather the encroaching climate-related disaster events of our future.





Sophie Lieberman

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

(B.A., ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES)

The role of farmers associations in international forest restoration efforts: A case study in Panama's Azuero Peninsula

Advisor: Michael Dove

Approaches to tropical forest restoration are an ongoing conversation between actors on a global and local scale, bringing together networks of funding, knowledge, and power to spark land use change with crucial implications for protecting biodiversity, renewing ecosystem health, mitigating climate change, and supporting resilient livelihoods. In this study, focus was directed toward farmers associations – one component of this vast project – and the way in which they act as conduits for international restoration efforts on agricultural land in the tropics. A case study of the Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative at Yale University took account of their work with a cattle ranchers association in the Azuero Peninsula of Panama through institutional ethnography. Insight revealed that a farmers association implementing land interventions through agroforestry is touched by the motivations and assumptions of its institutional partners on collaboration, knowledge production, and social dynamics, leading to an arrangement that offers small farmers access to significant amounts of funding and farther-reaching networks of knowledge, but open to influence from and dependent on outside interests.



Catherine Rutherford

HISTORY (B.A.)

Designing Working-Class Diets: Women, Nutrition, and Public Housing in New York City in the 20th Century

Advisor: Gabriel Lee

Since the turn of the 20th century, New York City has exemplified some of the best and worst cases of housing for low-income people. The city's efforts to replace crowded, unsanitary tenements with cleaner, safer, and more spacious homes for the poor led to the construction of over 200,000 units of government-subsidized public housing across the five boroughs. Residents of these developments no longer suffered from diseases caused by inadequate sanitation nor were they forced to go hungry in order to pay the rent. Beginning in the 1980s, however, low-income New Yorkers began to suffer from obesity and its related disease more frequently than their affluent neighbors. Many factors influenced the rise of obesity amongst the city's poor, but a less frequently recognized factor is how the design of public housing affected the diets and habits of its residents. The designs of public housing, especially its kitchens, were initially central to the ideas of its early advocates, who were predominantly women. Despite the importance of women's demands in the public housing reforms of the 1930s, women's ideas about how housing could support families were pushed aside in favor of standardization and cost-cutting during the heyday of New York City's public housing construction in the decades after the war. The only contribution of women that remained in public housing was their kitchen designs, which architects and manufacturers standardized and relied upon for decades without considering the changing needs of public housing residents. In effect, the disappearance of women's influence in public housing in New York City produced homes that did not support the lifestyles of modern residents, which intensified the ways that poverty so often led to obesity.

