Somehow, the more than eight million people who live in New York City are fed, every day. Food is produced, processed and brought to the City and finds its way to consumers through eateries of all sorts, through four star restaurants and soup kitchens, coffee shops and school cafeterias, vending machines and prison rations. Then there are the grocery retailers: supermarkets and greengrocers, farmers markets and fish markets, bodegas and bakeries, health food stores and pharmacies. Behind these retail outlets are the wholesalers—the terminal markets, distributors, and chain store warehouses. Although New York is no longer the food processing center that it once was, food manufacturing still exists in New York, as do smaller scale food processing operations like bakeries. And all of this food, whether flown in from Chile or trucked in from Fresno or baked in Queens, needs transportation to get from wholesale market or manufacturer to retail outlet and household. Most of us know little about where our food comes from or how it is kept safe (if it is) and healthy or how a reliable supply is assured. Unlike some large cities, New York City has no “Office of Food Policy” or “Food Policy Council,” although the Mayor has promised to appoint a food policy coordinator very soon. As of now, there is no central source of information about where our food comes from, or how it reaches us, or what happens to it along the way.

This is an experimental course. It will function as a research collective. How much can we learn about the food system of New York City by pooling our efforts over the course of a single semester? What approaches will prove most productive and revealing? What resources already exist for finding out about our food, and what new kinds of information are needed? What are the major problems in our food system, and who is trying to do something about them?

Course requirements include a major term paper and oral presentation on an aspect of the New York City Food System of your own choosing, and several brief data-gathering and reporting exercises. There are no text books, but a bibliography will be provided and wide reading is encouraged.