

THE DUTCH FOOD SYSTEM

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AMSTERDAM & NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam is the largest city in the Netherlands, a country well known for its canals, bikes, red light district, and liberal politics. The Netherlands is a very small country located in central Europe, as shown on the map. Surprisingly for such a small country, the Netherlands feeds the world. The Netherlands is the second largest exporter of agricultural products – second only to the United States, with over 250 times as large of a land mass.

A wealthy city in a wealthy country, most residents refuse to recognize that hunger and poverty still exist in this country. In fact, 1.2 million people in the Netherlands live in poverty, and of that, 135,000 people are served by the area's food bank. Even more dire, 1 in 8 kids in the Netherlands goes to school hungry where the majority of people say hunger does not exist.



DUTCH FOOD SYSTEM

I explored 5 guiding questions:

1. *How is food security defined?*
2. *What does poverty look like in the Netherlands?*
3. *Why do some cities have more food than others?*
4. *How have community organizations worked to improve food security for citizens in poverty?*
5. *What role does a community garden take on in a city like Amsterdam versus Detroit?*

I visited many sites and key informants including:

- **Amsterdam Food Policy Council**
- **inStock**, a food waste restaurant
- **Association of Dutch Food Banks**
- **Slow Food Youth Network**
- **Agromere**, a planned development with food at the center
- **Wageningen University**, the number one agricultural university and center of food research in the world
- **De KasKantine**, an off-the-grid living community
- **ADM**, the largest cultural free-haven in the Netherlands
- Followed a course titled **Urban Food Experience** at the University of Amsterdam
-and many more!

SKILLS

This experience helped me develop my skills, particularly:

- Further developing my professional identity and network
- Managing a large-scale project from start to finish
- Critical thinking and research skills
- Appreciation of the role and need for GSW

OUTCOMES

During the course of my global independent study, I met with a variety of organizations and faculty working on food-related issues in the Netherlands.

My major accomplishments include:

- Conducted informational interviews with leaders in the field
- Research on the Dutch food system and innovative food systems work
- A comparison of the social significance attached to community gardens in Amsterdam and Detroit
- Built a wood fired pizza oven and planted lots of vegetables and weeded a LOT

LESSONS LEARNED

- Social workers are needed everywhere, even in developed nations where “there is no hunger”
- It's important to do as much as you can, but also be realistic about what you can accomplish in such a short time frame
- The more people you meet, the more different perspectives you will hear on a space

ADVICE

1. *Network, network, network.* These connections may be a future internship or job!
2. *Be prepared for the worst.* My laptop died a few days before I left the Netherlands...All my hard work was gone sadly. Save your work and have money saved in case of emergency...
3. *Go with the flow.* In the Netherlands, essentially everyone is on vacation the month of August, and I mean everyone! I had to adjust my project according to contacts I could meet rather than my initial plan.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Field Placement – My field placement is at Food Gatherers, the food bank and food rescue program of Washtenaw County, with some time spent with the Washtenaw County Food Policy Council. Both to help shape my professional identity and for many insights I brought home, my field placement was a perfect match for my independent study.

FUTURE CAREER

Long term, I would like to work within the Dutch food system. This opportunity provided me a chance to learn about the Dutch food system, connected me with a professional network in the city of my dreams, and helped me find an internship for next summer with the Amsterdam Food Policy Council.



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