Graphic Novel Illustrates Food Crisis

Food security is a complex global problem with many causes and effects, but a new graphic novel by geography professor Evan Fraser attempts to help readers understand it and learn what they can do about it.

Fraser says he wrote #foodcrisis for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 because they’re making academic and employment decisions that will influence their future careers.

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CSAHS celebrates its faculty, students and alumni who share their knowledge as authors.
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“My goal is to communicate with that particular demographic because they’re facing major life choices, and I’m hoping that if I can bring the interesting, tough, complex issue of food security to them, more of them may start thinking about choosing a path in this area.”

The graphic novel is a fictional account of what could happen to society if a drought-induced food crisis struck North America. Although the story is speculative fiction, says Fraser, it’s based on previous food crises, such as the potato famine in Ireland in the mid-1800s and the wheat crop failure in the Midwestern United States in the 1930s.

He says food shortages are rarely the result of insufficient food production and are more often caused by government corruption and corporate greed. “It’s almost always about politics and economics.”

Fraser stresses that his book is not intended to predict the future, but to extrapolate historical events. The book is accompanied by a series of essays and online content. High school lesson plans are also in the works.

Writing his first work of fiction was a fun exercise, he says, and so was working with Scott Mooney, the book’s illustrator and a U of G fine arts grad. Fraser is also encouraged by the positive reviews he has received, including those from several university professors who have expressed interest in including the graphic novel as part of their course readings.

“It’s having the effect of creating the conversation that I hope it would,” he says.

FOOD CRISIS
BY THE NUMBERS

In the graphic novel #foodcrisis, geography professor Evan Fraser dispels some of the misconceptions surrounding food shortages. Here are some highlights by the numbers:

• 2,800: According to the United Nations, there are about 2,800 kcal available per person per day globally, but about 870 million people are hungry while about 1.5 billion are overweight or obese.

• One-third: This much of the world’s food is wasted before it is consumed. In the developed world, most of the waste happens in grocery stores or in refrigerators. Most of the waste in the developing world happens on farms due to inefficient storage and processing facilities.

• 40 per cent: About 40 per cent of the corn grown in the United States is converted into biofuels such as ethanol. The protein-rich byproduct of ethanol production is fed to livestock.

• 75 per cent: Agriculture is responsible for 75 per cent of deforestation worldwide and is the largest contributor of non-CO2 greenhouse gas emissions.

• 2 per cent: Recently published scientific work suggests that climate change may reduce crop yields by 2 per cent per decade over the next 100 years. The poorest regions of the world are expected to be the worst hit. These crop reductions depend largely on whether farmers have access to the tools they need to adapt.

An excerpt from #foodcrisis
College Authors Get Pages Turning

Below is a partial list of CSAHS authors whose books have been published in the past two years.

- Chiara Camponeschi (student), *Enabling City: Enhancing Creative Community Resilience*, Geography, 2013
- Prof. Satsuki Kawano, *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty*, Sociology and Anthropology, 2014
- Prof. David MacDonald, *Introduction to Politics*, Political Science, 2013
- Ryan Toxopeus (staff), *A Noble’s Quest*, Psychology, 2014
- Prof. Anthony Winson, *The Industrial Diet*, Sociology and Anthropology, 2013

Digital Storytelling Sheds Light on Eating Disorders

Andrea LaMarre

“I don’t like most of the stories that are told about people with eating disorders,” says PhD student Andrea LaMarre, Family Relations and Applied Nutrition. She’s using digital storytelling to help those recovering from eating disorders tell their own stories and dispel the stereotypes that surround these conditions.

As a master’s student, LaMarre began working with Prof. Carla Rice, Canada Research Chair in Care, Gender and Relationships, on Project Revision in which women with disabilities or differences were invited to share their personal experiences on video.

After attending a workshop on digital story production, LaMarre created her own using a combination of audio, video and still images. “I really saw the value in doing that,” she says. “Finding a moment in your life story that you can capture in two to three minutes is really challenging, but I think it’s a really interesting exercise because I had to think about what really speaks to my experience, and how can I say it in a way that’s showing and not telling my whole story.”

LaMarre decided to use digital storytelling for her research on women recovering from eating disorders. Since most research literature is written about — not by — people with eating disorders, she says, it often fails to accurately reflect their perspectives. “I decided that I would hold a digital storytelling workshop for people in recovery to see what they had to say, and if that was any different from the stereotypical descriptions of eating disorders that we get on a daily basis.”

The digital storytelling process allowed her to get to know her participants better than more traditional forms of research, which typically involve a one-hour interview that is later transcribed and converted into data. Spending three days with participants and helping them tell their story through digital art was more intimate, she says, because it required both the researcher and the participants to open up to each other.

“There’s something very appealing about a story told from someone’s point of view,” says LaMarre. “You can really connect with someone in a different way because they’re letting you in. They’re making parts of themselves visible to you that you might not otherwise know.”
Can orchids help solve murders? That's the premise behind Michelle Wan's series of mystery novels that use orchids as clues.

While visiting her sister's farmhouse in the Dordogne, France, Wan and her horticulturalist husband discovered wild orchids growing along a wooded trail. They took photos of the flowers and tried to identify them when they returned to Canada using a book on European orchids. But without photos of the orchids' surrounding habitat, identifying the flowers proved to be much like solving a mystery.

"Some of these orchids look alike," says Wan, MA '75, adding that their habitats are often their most distinguishing features. Piecing together each orchid's identity inspired her to use the flowers as the focus of her novels. “This could actually be the plot of a rather interesting botanical murder mystery,” she says.

The main characters in her novels don't work in law enforcement: one is an English botanist named Julian Wood; the other is a French-Canadian interior designer named Mara Dunn. Both characters live in the Dordogne.

In *Deadly Slipper*, the first novel in Wan's "orchid quartet" series, Dunn asks Wood to help find her sister, who disappeared in the Dordogne 19 years ago. The only clue her sister left behind was a roll of film containing photos of orchids she took on her last walk before she disappeared.

To solve the mystery, Dunn needs to find out where the photographs were taken.

Wan has visited the Dordogne every spring for the past 15 years and she often weaves her travel experiences into her novels. “Some of my favourite restaurants appear under different names,” she says. “Some of my favourite people or amalgamations of people appear as characters.”

What makes a good story? Wan says a strong narrative gets readers hooked and keeps them interested. Regardless of a writer's topic, she says, “Write what you love. If you love something enough, there is an authenticity that will emerge in your writing.”