

BIO

Keri Brandt Off, PhD is a Professor of Sociology and Gender & Sexuality Studies at Fort Lewis College. Her curiosities on and off campus center around how humans, animals, and landscapes co-create shared worlds together, and how all these worlds intersect in the context of agriculture and food. Once a student at Fort Lewis College, she returned in 2005 as faculty and has a deep passion for teaching and working with students. She lives on the Off Family Ranch in the San Luis Valley with her husband David and their son Ryder.

Zombie Agriculture is a collaborative research project in partnership with Janine Fitzgerald, PhD, also a professor at Fort Lewis College, and will be presented by Keri Brandt Off.

Presentation synopsis

Zombie Agriculture: Debt, Death, and the Radical Center

Industrial agriculture has resulted in dead soils and animals living in torturous conditions. This requires a continual process of reanimation – what we call zombie agriculture - through the constant supply of synthetic inputs to reanimate dead soil and the enlivening of animals with imagery of happy cows and happy chickens in advertising. This process hurts farmers and ranchers' relationships with their land and animals and allows consumers to eat without having to confront death.

Today many farmers and ranchers struggle under the weight of debt and the complexities of food production, while consumers are conflicted over the harsh realities of industrial agriculture and want to believe that they can eat “humanely” or be free of death. This puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the producer to do emotional labor that protects consumers from their contradictory feelings and the reality of death.

Where once humans had an intimate connection with food production, zombie agriculture has removed us from the moral struggle of what it means to eat and to be human. The imperative is to engage in eating and producing food as a sacred activity and being in relationship with all living beings. It is also about understanding that part of the human legacy is to be aware of the complexity of eating and its sacred relationship to death. This, we hold, brings us back to the radical center, a place where we can stand and see our diverse entanglements with people, place, and animals.