

*IU Department of Anthropology Presents:*

# **“American Farmers in the Brazilian Cerrado: Making Wasteland, Building Soil, and Becoming Model Farmers”**



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## ***Abstract:***

In the early 2000s, dozens of young farmers migrated from the U.S. Midwest to the Brazilian Cerrado in search of cheap fertile land, cheaply paid labor, and adventure. Seeking both a continuation and transformation of the Midwestern family farm, they courted investors, purchased massive tracts of land, and hired teams of local workers. In Brazil, they pursue a flexible farming livelihood in which they distance themselves from farmland, farm work, and crops. Yet, by looking at their encounters with land, landscape, and soil we see how they engage with the socio-material life of farming and generate new socio-material realities. These encounters shape farmers, workers, and the land.

This talk traces farmers' engagements with land, landscape, and soil through four parts: land inaccessibility in the United States, dreams of value and waste in the Brazilian Cerrado, “building” the soil to make it fertile for agriculture, and creating new farming models and model farmers. These encounters with land demonstrate how farmers construct the Cerrado socially through discourses of waste and value and physically by clearing Cerrado and modifying soil chemistry and biota. It also shows how the Cerrado constructs farmers as they adopt new farming practices suited to the climate, soils, and life of the region and create new values of good farming and good farmers. I also connect this work to past research with Bolivian quinoa farmers and future research on soy consumption in the U.S. and the intersection of farmland access and soil in Indiana.

In collaboration with IU Emerging Areas of Research - Sustainable Food System Science (SFSS) project