

Owen Cortner

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ocortner.github.io/

SUMMARY: Environmental social scientist, program manager, and educator with over ten years of experience in practice and policy in sustainable agriculture, forestry, and economics.

RECENT ROLES

2024-Present: **Research Fellow, Environmental Economics**, Niu Nature & SecondMuse

- Provide strategic scientific guidance to operationalize nature-based economies, driving measurable impact on biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and community livelihoods in Papua New Guinea
- Facilitate partnerships among academic, government, and private actors to advance business cases for ecological conservation

2023-2024: **Postdoctoral Associate**, Yale School of the Environment, New Haven, CT

- Leveraged GIS and integrated socioeconomic-environmental data to inform land use strategies in Bahia, Brazil, enhancing natural carbon capture; developed new partnership with Brazilian agroecology research team
- Co-established a comprehensive database of Jurisdictional REDD+ policies, improving understanding of policy mechanisms across governance contexts
- Mentored 4 doctoral students, supporting new leaders in the field

EDUCATION

2018-2023 **Ph.D., Environmental Systems Science**, Environmental Policy Lab
ETH Zürich, Switzerland

Dissertation: "Collectives to capital: Institutional, forest, and farm transitions in Georgia"

2013-2016 **M.S., International Agricultural Development**, Specialization in
Sustainable Livestock Production
University of California, Davis, CA

2006-2011 **B.S., Environmental Science**, Emphasis in Water Resources, Minor in
Mathematics, *Distinction in University Honors*
New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM

RESEARCH & PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

2018 **Pre-doctoral Fellow**, Boston University, Boston, MA
Global Development Policy Center

- Researched the potential impact of blockchain technology on agricultural supply chains traceability and sustainability
- Organized the Center's first land use and livelihoods workshop, including invitations to participants from 10 institutions including Harvard, the World Bank, and the Environmental Defense Fund

2017 **Research Analyst, Food & Agriculture**, Datu Research, Durham, NC

- Analyzed cover crop economics, identifying pathways to increase adoption and improve soil health while aligning business needs with scientific evidence
- Co-authored technical memo on sustainable agriculture in Cuba, providing actionable recommendations for land-based conservation strategies
- Established a \$1,000 scholarship for graduate students in environmental data science to attend Soil and Water Conservation Society meeting
- Analyzed the proposal capture process and expedited the deployment of a novel network visualization tool to prepare the firm to gain new clients
- Helped win a successful \$150K grant from a global NGO to scale up their successful projects in health, education, conflict, and development

2014-2017 **Program Analyst, Graduate Student Assistant** USAID Horticulture Innovation Lab, Davis, CA

- Managed a \$45k/year grant program for fruit & vegetable research to improve crop yields and nutritional outcomes in developing countries
- Led students in conducting trainings and co-developing technologies and practices for better horticultural production in developing countries
- Spearheaded \$750k proposal call for analysis of livestock-horticulture systems, influencing research to increase economic, environmental, and nutritional performance of resource-constrained agriculture
- Reviewed over 50 global horticultural research proposals

2013-2015 **Co-investigator**, University of California, Davis

- Completed a rapid survey of dairy production problems in a rural northern municipality in Nicaragua
- Co-facilitated a workshop in Spanish focused on silage and cattle nutrition to the municipality's top dairy farmers and agricultural extension specialist

2013 **Assistant Coordinator**, Fulbright Commission, Malaysia

- Coached and supervised 75 Fulbright grantees in coordination with the U.S. State Department and the Malaysian Ministry of Education
- Mediated disputes, planned professional development workshops, and conducted site visits to support grantees, leading to stronger partnerships across program actors, grantee retention and success, and improved program outcomes

2010 **Attached Researcher**, World Agroforestry Center, Kigali, Rwanda

- Collaborated with a team of Kenyan and Rwandan scientists to analyze biophysical and socio-economic characteristics of runoff water harvesting ponds for small-scale irrigation of horticultural crops
- Surveyed 15 farms across three provinces
- Produced rapid assessment report to inform Rwanda Irrigation Master Plan

2007-2009 **Research Assistant**, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM

- Supported a multi-year chile pepper yield and soil nutrient project
- Designed field sampling approach, collected and processed soil and plant samples, conducted pH and electrical conductivity analyses
- Maintained laboratory operations and standards

LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

2025 **Quivira Coalition**

- Member of the Board for collaborative conservation coalition working with ranchers, farmers, government agencies, and land stewards in the Southwest to implement regenerative agriculture
- Member of search committee for new Executive Director'

2024 **Yale University**

- Co-authored strategic report on AI & sustainability for the Yale provost's task force, shaping institution-wide AI policy
- Presented findings to provost's Yale Task Force on Artificial Intelligence

2019-2023 **ETH Zurich**

- Co-organized IDANE+ Swiss Science-Policy Dialogue on "Forests, trees, and partnerships – from knowledge to policy." 27 October 2022
- Co-led regular series of interdisciplinary talks on food systems at ETH Zürich, increasing institutional knowledge sharing, 2020-2022

2015 **University of California, Davis**

- Judy Irwin community award for outstanding graduate program service

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Environmental Leadership and Mentoring course, Yale School of the Environment, September 2023-April 2024
- 8th Annual Duck Family Graduate Workshop on Environmental Politics and Governance, University of Washington, May 2022
- Geospatial Data Analysis Short Course, National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center at University of Maryland, 2019

FOOD SYSTEMS

- Boston Area Gleaners, volunteer, 2023-present
- UC Cooperative Extension Multi-Species Grazing Academy, Auburn, CA, 2016
- Practicum at UC Davis Meat Lab; kill floor and retail butchering, Davis, CA, January-March 2015
- Dairy goat cooperative; Davis, CA; August 2014-December 2016

LANGUAGES: Portuguese (Conversational), Spanish (Basic)

BLOG POST: Cortner, O. February 27, 2025. "Landman": Hollywood Meets the Growth Dilemma. *Steady State Herald*. <https://steadystate.org/landman-hollywood-meets-the-oil-industry-and-the-growth-dilemma/>.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION

Cortner, O., Wuepper, D., Gollnow, F., Stigler, M., Torchinava, P., Garrett, R. D. "Effects of varied political institutions and armed conflict on forest degradation in the Caucasus." In review at [*Forest Policy and Economics*](#).

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

- 1) Gollnow, F., Cortner, O., Chen, S., Olofsson, P., Garrett, R. D. 2024. "Georgia's potentials for sustainable intensification, increasing food security and rural incomes." *Environmental Research: Food Systems*. 2(1): 015005. <https://doi.org/10.1088/2976-601X/ad8bc8>
- 2) Stritih, A., Senf, C., Kuemmerle, T., Munteanu, C., Dzadzamia, L., Stritih, J., Matijašić, D., Cortner, O., Seidl, R. 2024. "Same, but different: similar states of forest structure in temperate mountain regions of Europe despite different social-ecological forest disturbance regimes." *Landscape Ecology*, 39, 114. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10980-024-01908-x>
- 3) Cortner, O., Chen, S., Olofsson, P., Gollnow, F., Torchinava, P., Garrett, R.D. 2024. "Exploring natural and social drivers of forest degradation in post-Soviet Georgia." *Global Environmental Change*, 84: 102775. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102775>
- 4) Garrett, R.D., Ryschawy, J., Bell, L.W., Cortner, O., Ferreira, J., Garik, A.V.N., Gil, J.D.B., Klerkx, L., Moraine, M., Peterson, C.A., dos Reis, J.C., and Valentim, J.F. 2020. "Drivers of decoupling and recoupling of crop and livestock systems at farm and territorial scales." *Ecology and Society* 25(1): 24. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-11412-250124>

- 5) **Cortner, O.**, Garrett, R.D., Valentim, J.F., Ferreira, J., Niles, M.T, Reis, J., and Gil, J. 2019. "Perceptions of integrated crop-livestock systems for sustainable intensification in the Brazilian Amazon." *Land Use Policy*, 82: 841-853.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.01.006>
- 6) Garrett, R.D., Niles, M.T., Gil, J.D.B., Gaudin, A., Chaplin-Kramer, R., Assmann, A., Assmann, T., Brewer, K., de Faccio Carvalho, P. C., **Cortner, O.**, Dynes, R., Garbach, K., Kebreab, E., Mueller, N., Peterson, C., Reis, J. C., Snow, V., and Valentim, J. 2017. "Social and ecological analysis of integrated crop livestock systems: Current knowledge and remaining uncertainty." *Agricultural Systems*, 155: 136–146.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2017.05.003>

PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS

- 1) "Effects of shifting political institutions and armed conflict on forest degradation in the Caucasus." Full oral presentation at Global Land Programme's 5th Open Science Meeting, Oaxaca, Mexico. November 4-8, 2024
- 2) "Institutions and their effects on land cover and land use change in Georgia." Political Economy of Climate & Environment conference. Los Angeles, CA. August 30, 2023
- 3) "Forest degradation drivers in post-Soviet Georgian mountain landscapes." International Mountain Conference. Focus Session: Science-based pathways to sustainability in mountains. Innsbruck, Austria. September 13, 2022
- 4) "Forest degradation in Georgia: Social and biophysical drivers." Bratislava Conference on Earth System Governance. Panel on conservation governance and institutions. Virtual. September 7, 2021
- 5) "Collectives to capital: Forest, farm, and finance transitions in Georgia." ETH for Development Ph.D. Seminar: Research for Development. Virtual. November 27, 2020
- 6) "What role can blockchain play in improving environmental governance in agricultural supply chains?" Global Land Programme 4th Open Science Meeting. Bern, Switzerland. April 25, 2019
- 7) "Perceptions of integrated crop-livestock systems for sustainable intensification in the Brazilian Amazon". Land Use and Livelihoods Initiative workshop at the Global Development Policy Center at Boston University. December 7, 2018
- 8) "Producer perceptions of farm-level crop-livestock integration". Embrapa workshop: "Understanding barriers to the wide-scale adoption of integrated agricultural systems and potential impacts". Belém, PA, Brazil. August 17, 2017

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- 9) "Thinking small: Adaptive local management of diverse dairy cattle systems". Poster with Richardson, B. and Short, J. Society for Range Management Annual Meeting. Sacramento, CA. February 2, 2015

TEACHING

- 2019 **Guest lecturer**, IR 500: Rural Development in the Global South
"Scale and supporting institutions in rural development" – upper division international relations course. Invited by Instructor Barry Shelley, Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University. March 25, 2019
- 2016 **Student Docent**, Garden and Farm-Based Experiential Education Methods, University of California, Davis, Davis, CA
- Organized weekly tours for 20-100 K-12 students focused on experiential outdoor education. Wrote "The 5 Senses Song"
- 2014 **Graduate Student Instructor**, International Programs, UC Davis
- Led 16 students from Iwate Agricultural Junior College in Japan through a rigorous one-week program to better understand the livestock value chain in Northern California
- 2014 **Teaching Assistant**, Dept. of Sociology, UC Davis
"Sexual Stratification & Politics" – upper division course
- 2014 **Teaching Assistant**, Dept. of Environmental Science & Policy, UC Davis
"Environmental Impact Assessment" – upper division course
- 2013 **Teaching Assistant**, Student Academic Success Center, UC Davis
"American Culture and the University Experience" – introductory course for international students beginning their studies
- 2012 **English Teaching Assistant**, U.S. Fulbright Program, Malaysia
- Implemented English language co-curricular and enrichment activities for 150 rural primary school students

SOFTWARE: R, Python, GitHub, Google Earth Engine, QGIS, NVivo