

SESSION 5

Food miles: Where does our food come from?

BACKGROUNDER FOR EDUCATORS

The average distance food travels from farm to store (known as food miles) has increased significantly over the last few decades—now 8,000km!^{xiv} While there are some benefits to importing food, such as greater access to produce throughout the year, there are many hidden costs to this approach. Foods that travel long distances are often harvested before they are fully ripe and lose nutritional value over time.^{xv} Purchasing imported foods requires a longer supply chain, with the producers of imported products often receiving less compensation than if they sold their products more directly to consumers. The long distance transportation of food contributes to climate change and certain farming and fishing methods have negative environmental impacts. Purchasing food locally supports local and regional economies. There are also social benefits of purchasing local food, such as fostering relationships between farmers and consumers, maintaining farming communities, and transferring agriculture knowledge to the next generation.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Kids will gain a better understanding of our current food system and what a more local food system looks like.



SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED

- World map and stickers
- Foods with labels originating from a variety of places
- Crayons and paper
- Props for roles: bandana, “pilot” and “truck driver” hats, tie, apron, play money and coins.



SAMPLE TIMING AND FLOW

- 10 min My Food Map
- 15 min Where is our Food Coming From?
- 15 min The Story of Tommy the Tomato
- 40 min Meal Preparation
- 25 min Garden Activity
- 15 min Meal Sharing
- 5 min Clean-up

ACTIVITIES

MY FOOD MAP

Get kids to draw a picture of where they think food comes from.

Ask: Who produces it? Where? How does it get here? Who brings it?

WHERE IS OUR FOOD COMING FROM?

Start by asking kids if they know what we might mean when food is “local”. What are some foods that are produced locally in your region? Allow this question to flow into a deeper discussion about where food comes from.

Using a world map, explore where items in a sample bag of groceries comes from. Get kids to reach into the bag and read the label to find where the food item comes from. Then find that place on the map (mark with a sticker). Point out where your home is in relation. Be aware that many processed foods have labelling indicating where it was packaged but not the original source of ingredients. Point out the difference between these types of labels to those on whole foods.

Some example food for your grocery bag (information comes from **Food Miles Report**, using Nova Scotia data.) Not in Nova Scotia? Adapt the details below to your local context.

FOOD ITEM	DETAILS
Imported apple	Nova Scotia produces roughly 4 times the amount of apples then we eat. Yet, we import about 50% of the apples we eat. The imported apples travel an average of 7,443 km to reach us.
Banana	Besides apples, the most commonly eaten fruits are bananas, melons and oranges. While Nova Scotia doesn't produce many (or any) of these fruits, we are world leaders in blueberry production, which aren't among one of our most commonly eaten fruits.
Flour	This comes from wheat and other grains that are most often grown on the Prairies.
Veggies	A surprisingly small proportion of the vegetables we eat in Nova Scotia are actually grown here. We produce roughly enough (or more) cabbage, carrots, onions, potatoes and turnips to supply our needs, but many are still imported. Depending on the time of year, they may be locally sourced.
Sugar	What's an example of a local alternative? Honey? Maple syrup?
Pepperoni	Presently, most of the beef you find in the grocery stores is imported.
Milk	Produced on farms around Nova Scotia.

SESSION 5

Discussion

- In Nova Scotia, 16 % (in 2013)^{xvi} of the food dollars we spend are going back to our farmers. Explain to kids that, on average, if you have 10 items in a grocery bag, then just one item would be from Nova Scotia. How do you think this has changed from when your grandparents were kids?
- Ask kids if they know common fruits and vegetables grown in Nova Scotia?

Ask: Why do we get food from all over the world?

Encourage discussion and consider the following:

- Season dependent; so we have fruits and vegetables during the winter.
- Cultural preferences for familiar foods from home.
- Dependent on the success of the harvest.
- Trade economics! (Break this one down with the following activity)

HOW DOES OUR FOOD GET HERE?

Introduce Tommy, the traveling tomato from California (depending on the season, Tommy can be Abby the apple from Argentina). Explain that Tommy has to travel very far to get here and that many people have helped him along the way. Encourage kids to brainstorm all the different people and jobs that were needed to get Tommy here from California: farmer, company owner (distributor), pilot, truck driver, warehouse owner (who owns the space where the tomato ripens and turns red), grocery store owner, consumer. Then, bring the story to life. Choose kids to play the different roles in the chain. Give them a prop to represent their role (e.g., straw hat for farmer). Once you've assigned the roles, arrange them in the correct order.

Hand the consumer a paper dollar and have extra coins on hand. "If the consumer pays a dollar for the tomato, then how much gets back to the farmer?" Get kids to pass the dollar down the line. Each time it gets passed, the person gets to keep a little (e.g., pilot gets to keep a quarter dollar, business man another quarter). By the time it gets to the farmer, there's usually only 5 cents left.

Ask the farmer how they feel. Do they feel the amount they received is a fair exchange for their time to grow this tomato? Ask participants if they can think of a way to make this process fairer. What about if this tomato were grown in Nova Scotia; would that change the number of people in the chain? What if the farmer drives his/her tomatoes to market themselves, then how much of the dollar does he receive? You can get the consumer to pay their dollar to the farmers, so the kids can see the difference.

Ask: What are the differences between these two food chains or food systems. Which one takes more energy? What effects does each system have on the people and environment? What are the health benefits of knowing how your food was grown?



EXTRA RESOURCES

- The Ecology Action Centre's **Food Miles Report** is packed with well-researched information on the effects of a more local food economy.
- The **Adventures in Local Food** blog has lots of recipes and information on eating seasonally and preserving foods.
- The **Falls Brook Centre** has more activities (appropriate for older children and youth) that encourage deeper thought on where food comes from.



RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Try making recipes with local ingredients. Local availability will change throughout the seasons. Point out to your group where the ingredients are being produced. *Ideas: Pizza, Salad, Squash soup.*



SUGGESTED GARDEN ACTIVITY

Compost is a fundamental part of fertile soil and productive gardens. Introduce the basics by doing a composting activity.



FOOD FUN FOR ALL!

Canned peas vs. fresh snap peas? Local or not local? Organic or affordable? There are so many options when choosing food it can be overwhelming. What we want to strive for is to consider how far food travels, whether it's healthy, who grew or caught it, whether it's also good for the planet and whether this food is accessible to participants in their daily lives. Admittedly, it's hard to check off all these criteria and it becomes a balancing act. When tasting new foods that may be not available or affordable for group participants, explain that this might be an occasional food or special treat.