



## What Is Locally Grown?

*Map the sources of the food you eat*

**Recommended Grades: 3–6**

- ◆ Language Arts
- ◆ Geography
- ◆ Social Studies

### Goals

Discover where the produce we eat comes from by surveying the readily available goods in our own homes and communities. Surveying where produce comes from helps children become more thoughtful consumers.

### Key Points

- ◆ Most of our food travels a long way to reach us.
- ◆ Food from many places is available in supermarkets almost any time of the year. If we had

to eat only what was grown locally and seasonally, what would our meals be like?

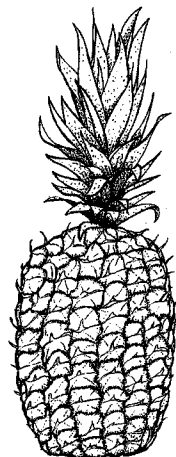
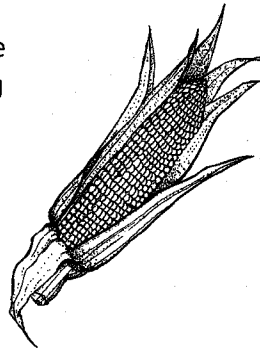
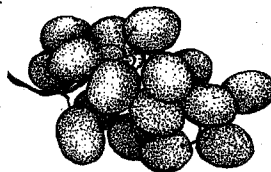
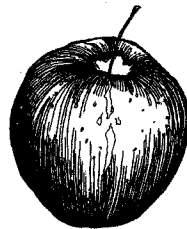
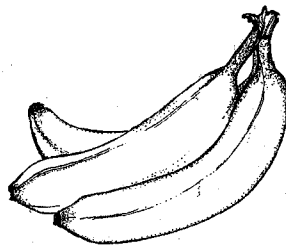
- ◆ We can make a difference in a local farmer's life by purchasing the food grown on his or her farm.

### Background

Many of us are aware of global environmental issues such as climate warming or rainforest destruction, but generally know less about what affects our own local food supply. Choosing to support and eat food produced in one's area means food is fresher and



likely more nutritious, has fewer “travel miles” on it, has less handling and processing, and there’s less time between harvest and consumption. Buying locally decreases transportation costs and keeps dollars in the local economy. It may help encourage local agricultural economies to produce food crops rather than non-edible crops that deplete soils or create a dependency on foreign trade.<sup>1</sup> As reported by Brian Halweil of the Worldwatch Institute, “One Iowa study found that the ingredients for a meal made from local sources traveled an average of 45 miles (74 kilometers) to reach their destination, compared with 1,550 miles (2,577 kilometers) if the same ingredients had been bought from the usual distant sources nationwide.”<sup>2</sup>



### How to Do It

**Begin** by asking, “What does local mean?” (The root of the word comes from Latin, meaning “place.” Thinking about local food would mean place-based food, then.) Have the class define “local” or “regional.” Ask students to think about what food is produced in their local area, region, or state—in particular think about any fresh produce—vegetables, fruits, etc. Pass around the samples you brought in and determine where these foods are from. Note that stores don’t always display a food’s source, but will provide it if asked. (Some produce boxes or stickers identify the place it was grown.) Use a map or globe to locate the food origins. Which would be considered local, according to their definitions; which would not?

**Next**, have students generate a collective list of the fruits and vegetables they commonly consume. Ask the class where these food items are grown. Do their homes contain any local produce? Does the nearest food store sell locally grown food? How might they find out?

**Then**, have students conduct a survey of their home kitchens to see if they can identify where the produce items come from. Are there any from local sources? (Older students can work in small teams to do this survey in a nearby grocery store as part of a field trip.)

### Classroom Conversations

- ◆ Discuss the results of their home surveys. Are there local growers in your area? If so, who buys the food produced by those growers? (Local restaurants, health food stores, farmers’ markets?) If not, if all of your food comes from outside the local area or region, what does this mean?
- ◆ What might be some reasons to eat locally grown food? (See Sidebar on page 29.)
- ◆ Are there any benefits to eating

### Teacher Tips

If you have an urban classroom, the borders for “local” may be farther afield than for rural classrooms. But the farmers on the outskirts of your city are probably providing produce for local wholesalers who stock supermarkets or small stores, or for a farmers’ market in the city. It will still be an adventure for your students to find out where the produce they eat comes from.

Availability of locally grown produce will vary depending on the growing season in your area. You could conduct the survey at different times of the year to make this point with your students.

### What You’ll Need

Fruit or vegetables whose place of origin can be identified (some local, some out-of-state and some foreign—your local supermarket should be able to provide you with “country of origin” lists for its produce); maps or globes; U.S. agriculture map (see [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)).

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with José García, Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture Program Coordinator, University of Missouri.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Halweil, *Home Grown: The Case for Local Food in a Global Market*. Worldwatch Institute, Paper 163, November 2002. ISBN 1-878071-66-1.



food from far away? (Diversity of diet, supports growers in other communities—do the farmers in distant countries benefit from the food we buy here?)

### Action

Check out your local market. If they sell produce, ask them to display place-of-origin information for consumers, if they don't already do this. Make up a regional food guide for your area, as Cornell has done for the Northeast. (See Resources.) Find out from your Cooperative Extension office if there are any CSA (community supported agriculture/subscription farms, see page 40) projects in your vicinity.



### Want to Do More?

- ◆ Organize a "Local Foods" party in your classroom. Research what foods are grown or processed locally or regionally.
- ◆ Create regional/local maps representing foods grown in your region. See [www.greenmap.com](http://www.greenmap.com)
- ◆ Invite a local farmer, rancher, or farmers' market grower into the classroom to speak to your students about their livelihood and where and how they sell their products.
- ◆ Find out if the cafeteria serves local food. Work with the school nutrition or food service employees and local farmers to plan a "Local Foods Day."
- ◆ Encourage students to compare labels of clothing as well as food labels. Fiber is an important agricultural commodity, and origins of clothing can be another way to determine "point of origin" information.

### Lesson Links

Pyramids Near You  
Farm to Table  
Figuring Out Our Food System  
Read the Small Print

### Literature Links

*Harvest Year* by Cris Peterson  
*Leah's Pony* by Elizabeth Friedrich  
*Supermarket* by Kathleen Krull

*The American Family Farm: A Photo Essay* by George Ancona, text by Joan Anderson  
*Farmers' Market* by Paul B. Johnson  
*Market!* by Ted Lewin  
*Portrait of a Farm Family* by Raymond Bial

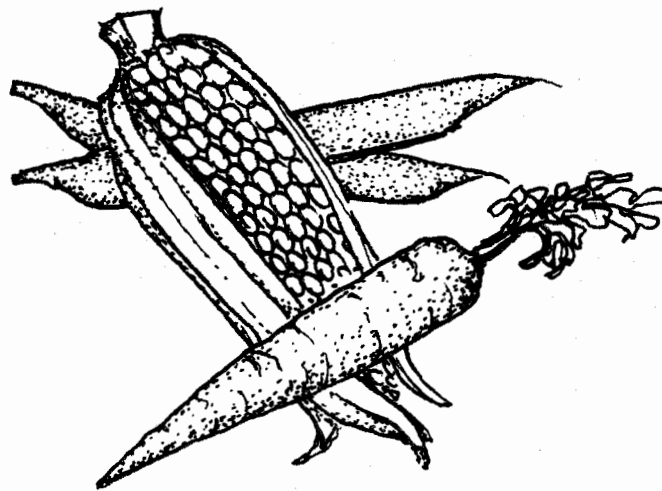
### Resources

- ◆ U.S. sources of most agricultural commodities, ranked by state, can be found at [www.usda.gov/nass/](http://www.usda.gov/nass/) From the site, find your state's department of agriculture for information on local growers, pick-your-own sites, Community Supported Agriculture farms, growing seasons chart for fruits and vegetables, public gardens, agriculture fairs, etc.
- ◆ Northeast Regional Food Guide Pyramid Poster and Fact Sheets—a color poster and educational handouts that promote regional, seasonal eating in one area. By Jennifer Wilkins and Jennifer Bokaer-Smith, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University Resource Center, 7 Business and Technical Park, Ithaca, NY 14850; [www.nutrition.cornell.edu/foodguide/](http://www.nutrition.cornell.edu/foodguide/)
- ◆ Your state Agriculture in the Classroom organization may have agricultural materials and contacts with local or regional farmers; [www.agclassroom.org](http://www.agclassroom.org)
- ◆ See the dietary guidelines for sustainability in the Appendix for the context in which student's food choices can be examined.
- ◆ The Wisconsin Foodshed Research Project provides tools and resources for activists and eaters who are changing the way we grow, process, market, and eat food; [www.foodshed.wisc.edu/](http://www.foodshed.wisc.edu/)
- ◆ Local Harvest connects consumers to local producers as well as small farms and products; [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)
- ◆ The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa, offers information and graphics that illustrate food issues, including the distance produce often must travel to reach the market. [www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubinfo/papers/speeches/ppp.intro.html](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubinfo/papers/speeches/ppp.intro.html)
- ◆ *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods* by Gary Nabhan, Norton, 2001, makes a case for eating locally.



## Supporting a Locally Grown Food System<sup>1</sup>

- ◆ Local agriculture can help make food affordable and accessible by providing a wide variety of fresh, high-quality produce and agricultural products sold at their peak of flavor and nutritional value.
- ◆ Buying locally grown food supports local jobs. Agriculture (along the coasts, that includes aquaculture) is a vital part of a state's economy. Thousands of people are employed by agriculture and farms and, in turn, economically support state and local businesses—keeping rural communities alive.
- ◆ Support for local agriculture keeps regional farms viable. By selling directly to consumers at the farm, farmers earn a greater share of the consumer dollar—better sustaining farm operations in the face of rising property values and encroaching development. The high cost of trucking and the wholesaler or “middleman” is largely eliminated from the picture.
- ◆ Farm fields and pastures enhance a region's quality of life, providing scenic vistas, and open space and wildlife habitat. These attract tourism, recreation, and outdoor sports, which contribute significantly to the economy of any region.
- ◆ Food that is shipped long distances is often coated with wax or sprayed with agents to prevent spoiling or discoloration during storage and transport; buying locally avoids this treatment.
- ◆ Locally grown foods require less energy to transport, thus reducing their cost to consumers and their environmental impact. Additionally, farming helps reduce potentially damaging greenhouse gases because crops act as a “sink,” consuming carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen.
- ◆ Taxation studies have shown repeatedly that agricultural land can provide more than residential land does in terms of revenue. Residential development often costs more in services than it yields in taxes. In fact, one study concluded that farms might be *subsidizing* sprawl because farms' excess contribution reduces the true cost of the services demanded by sprawl.
- ◆ As the number of local farms decrease, concerns grow about the ability of future generations to feed themselves in a healthy sustainable way. Stronger regional food systems create greater food security.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted with permission from *Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom Newsletter*, Spring 1999; [www.aginclassroom.org](http://www.aginclassroom.org). Information compiled from Kathy Ruhf of New England Small Farms Institute, Irene Winkler of the Pilgrim RC&D, Hilare Downey of the Heritage Farm Coast Trust, Barbara Ruhs of the Massachusetts Department of Education, and Joyce Benson of the Maine State Planning Office.



## Benchmarks

### ***Human Society: 7C—Global Interdependence, p. 176***

Grades 3-5

"Many of the things people eat . . . come from other countries. . . . Decisions made in one country about what is produced there may have an effect on other countries."

### ***The Designed World: 8A—Agriculture, p. 184***

Grades 3-5

"Places too cold or dry to grow certain crops can obtain food from places with more suitable climates. Much of the food eaten by Americans comes from other parts of the country and other places in the world."

"Heating, salting, smoking, drying, cooling, and airtight packaging are ways to slow down the spoiling of food by microscopic organisms. These methods make it possible for food to be stored for long intervals before being used."

Grades 6-8

"In agriculture, as in all technologies, there are

always trade-offs to be made. Getting food from many different places makes people less dependent on weather in any one place, yet more dependent on transportation and communication among far-flung markets. Specializing in one crop may risk disaster if changes in weather or increases in pest populations wipe out that crop. Also, the soil may be exhausted of some nutrients, which can be replenished by rotating the right crops."

"Many people work to bring food . . . to U.S. markets. With improved technology, only a small fraction of workers in the United States actually plant and harvest the products that people use. Most workers are engaged in processing, packaging, transporting, and selling what is produced."

### ***The Designed World: 8C—Energy Sources and Use, p. 193***

Grades 3-5

"People try to conserve energy in order to slow down the depletion of energy resources and/or to save money."