



PHOTOS BY CYNTHIA VAGNETTI

1 | INTRODUCTION TO FOOD, FARMING, AND COMMUNITY

Summary

In this introductory session, learners share, discuss and reflect on the role and meaning of food in their lives, communities and cultures. To get acquainted, learners discuss their “food autobiographies” and share what they would include in their “Personal Food Museum.” Learners then explore the elements in a food system by generating a community food systems map. The session ends with an overview of the program and a general reading selection outlining basic facts about farm size and ownership structure in the U.S.

Guiding Questions

- What foods and food related traditions are significant to each of us?
- In what ways does food help define identities, cultures and communities?
- What is “good food”? What does it nourish?
- What is a food system?

Big Ideas: As a result of this session, learners will understand that:

- Food is a core part of identities, cultures and communities.
- Eating is a biological need, but food can also nourish families, spirits, cultures and communities.
- A **food system** is a series of interdependent elements that provides food to a community. This includes the growing, harvesting, processing, distributing, consuming and disposing of food.
- Food systems are comprised of people (farmers, gardeners, business people, and consumers), businesses and institutions (stores, processing facilities, governments), non-human elements of the natural world (soil, water, air, animals, etc.), and the actions of these participants.

Sequence and timing:

Activity	Overview	Minutes
Welcome and introductions	Participants to share why they came to the session.	5
1. Your Personal Food Museum	Learners share what they would include in a personal museum devoted to the foods central to their family life and cultural identity. Reflection questions explore basic issues about the role of food in nourishing body, spirit and community.	25
2. Where Do You Stand?	Learners stand in a line and listen to a series of statements about their food choices, the factors affecting them, and their knowledge of how the food got from farm to table. Learners step forward to show agreement, backwards to show disagreement, and stay in the line to show they are undecided/neutral.	5-10
3. Community Food Systems Map	Using maps, learners identify major places related to the community's food needs: local farmland; places that produce, sell, or process foods; global or national sources of food imports; and places where food exports and agricultural wastes go.	30
4. Program overview; setting norms	Facilitator provides a summary of the program's sessions. Learners review the assumptions underlying the curriculum, then generate "norms" (guidelines) for creating a productive and respectful learning environment within the group.	15
5. Before the next session	Take-away assignment: Learners will assess trends in their community's food system in order to prepare for the next session. Learners should also read "What is a farm?", a selection provided at the end of their document.	5

Materials

- For learners, the Session 1 handout packet
- One or more wall maps of the community and sticky notes. Optional: A national and world map.
- Accompanying slides for Session 1

Preparation

- If possible, contact program participants ahead of time and ask them to bring in examples of foods, kitchen implements, recipes, books, photos, and other artifacts that reflect significant personal or cultural connections to food. Tell participants that they should bring items they would display in their own personal "food museum." Read the Activity 1 directions for more details.
- Before the first session, copy and prepare learner packets.
- On the day of the first session, post wall maps for Activity 3 before the participants arrive.

Procedure

Welcome and introductions

- Welcome participants to the session, introduce yourself and describe your role. Invite each person to introduce themselves and to share why they came to the program.
- Distribute packets if needed. State that the goal of this first session is to get acquainted and to explore personal connections to food. Point out that you will provide a full program overview after the opening activities.

Activity 1) Your Personal Food Museum

Overview: Learners share what they would include in a personal museum devoted to the foods central to their family life and cultural identity. Reflection questions explore basic issues about the role of food in nourishing body, spirit and community.

- Direct participants to the handout packets.
- Have someone read the Activity 1. Using the prompts provided, give participants time to come up with the items for their food museums. Participants can draw or take notes, and then share responses.
- If participants brought actual items, run the activity as a “show and tell.”

Lead a full-group discussion with the following questions (provided in learner’s packet):

- Based on your responses, how would you define “good food”?
- What does the activity tell us about the role of food in our lives and communities?
- We often think of food as nourishment for our bodies. In what other ways can food serve as nourishment?

Optional: Continue with the extension activity (autobiographic food poems)

- Explain that this activity uses short poems to express one’s food “autobiography.”
- Have a participant read the sample poem, then ask participants to generate a list of significant images and metaphors in the poem. These can include tastes and smells of significant foods, sensory images, family sayings or phrases, names of relatives, etc.
- Ask participants to generate their own poems as noted.
- Have participants share in pairs, small groups, or as a full group. Invite others to comment on what they like about the piece, and similar/different themes from their own work.

Activity 2) Where Do You Stand?

Overview: This interactive activity has participants respond to statements about knowledge of and interest in food systems and food choices. Tell learners that there are no right or wrong answers, and that the activity is designed to help participants see the diverse views and values within the group. (The activity also helps the facilitator learn what participants know and think as they enter the program.)

Directions:

- Have the participants form a line across the room with everyone facing the same way.
- Tell participants that you will read a series of statements (below). Explain that for each statement, participants should take a step forward if they agree, step backwards if they disagree, and stay in the line if they are undecided/neutral. Tell learners they should be ready to explain and justify their answers.
- After participants have moved, have a few people share their responses.

Note: Statements are meant to be broad “food for thought”; choose up to ten statement or add others. If participants ask further questions or try to interpret the statements before responding, tell them to answer based on what first popped into their heads. Participants can then provide further qualification as they explain their response.

- Food is important to my family and me.
- Freshness and quality are important factors when I select foods.
- Price is an important factor when I select foods.
- I usually buy what’s easiest to prepare.
- I tend to buy what’s available and easy to get nearby.
- I know at least one of the people who made or grew something I ate in the last week. (This can include yourself!)
- I know what state or country where the main ingredient from my last meal was grown or produced.
- I have a garden, or participate in a community garden.
- I work, or have worked, in farming or food production.
- I work, or have worked, in food distribution or sales.
- I work, or have worked in a restaurant.
- I can easily get to a store or market where I can buy healthy food.
- I am interested in learning more about where my food comes from and the steps it takes from the farm where it was grown to my house.
- I know where there are farms and/or greenhouses that produce food in my community or region.
- I know some of the people involved in producing some of my food.
- I am concerned about where my food comes from and the steps it takes from farm to table.
- I understand the national policies that shape food and agriculture.
- I understand the global policies that shape food and agriculture.
- I believe access to food is a human rights issue.

Activity 3) Community Food System Map

Overview: In this activity, participants attempt to identify some basic elements of the food system (farms, stores, distributions, etc.) within a community context. Participants may not know all the answers; this is expected. The goal is to provide a hands-on way to engage participants in generating what they already know, and to assess gaps in knowledge. If learners struggle with the activity, explain that the goal is to surface existing knowledge, and that the rest of the curriculum will engage them in further learning about food systems. Support slides are provided for further clarification. Note: If internet access is available, allow participants to conduct research as part of the activity.

Directions

- Pose the question, “What is a food system?” to the full group. Write the responses on the board. Review any common themes or elements. Explain that this activity will examine this question more thoroughly.
- Have someone read the introduction. Clarify points as needed, and explain the program as a whole will further explore this.
- Break people into groups of 4-5. Have participants review the directions as you pass out maps, sticky notes and markers. Suggest that within groups, each person can take the lead on identifying one of the categories provided. Point out that people can use stickies, write on the map, add notes, or use any other method to identify the places noted.
- Tell participants they will have about ten minutes to work.
- Have participants post their maps and allow participants to view all maps in a “gallery walk.” Ask groups to share at least one highlight of their map.
- When participants return to their seats, lead a group discussion using the questions provided in the learners’ guide. Reassure participants that they were not expected to know every answer; the goal was to identify what they already know and don’t know. Explain that participants can continue their research and add to their maps throughout the program, and that the following sessions will provide additional opportunities to discover more about the food system.
- If desired, summarize key points about the food system using the accompanying slides for Session 1.

Activity 4) Program overview and setting norms

- Review the ideas raised so far, explaining that the program is designed to address these and other aspects of food.
- Using the accompanying slides, present the program overview and session descriptions as participants follow in their booklets.
- Emphasize the program’s central question: *How can we create a food system that maintains health, sustains the environment, preserves our cultural fabric, and benefits the regional economy?*
- Allow participants to review the “Note to the Learner” page in their booklet. This reading clarifies the scope and assumptions underlying the curriculum.
- Setting norms: Explain that everyone will get the most out of the program if group members respect one another, work together, and are willing to listen and learn from each other.
- Direct learners to the “Getting the most from your learning” page (following the “Note to the Learner”). Review the sample norms, and ask participants to add or remove norms they want the group to observe. When you have a working list, ask if everyone can agree to abide by them. Continue until you reach a consensus.

5) Before the next session (5 min)

- Review the assignment provided in the learners' part. (Learners are to reflect on their own experiences and observations, and examine local news stories, and bring in 3-4 trends that are impacting the community's food system. Trends can be positive, negative, or mixed.)
- Learners should also review "What is a farm?", the selection provided at the end of their document.

References

Poem is excerpted from "Where I'm From: Inviting Students' Lives Into the Classroom." In *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice, Volume 2*. Edited by Bill Bigelow, Brenda Harvey, Stan Karp, and Larry Miller. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools. 2001.

United States Department of Agriculture. (2007). Structure and Finances of U.S. Farms: Family Farm Report.