1 | INTRODUCTION TO FOOD, FARMING, AND COMMUNITY

Summary

In this introductory session you will share, discuss and reflect on the role and meaning of food in your lives, communities and cultures. To get acquainted, you will discuss "food autobiographies" and share what you would include in your "Personal Food Museum™". Next, you will 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?

Activities

Welcome and introductions

1) Your Personal Food Museum/Food Autobiography (individual activity/group discussion)
2) Where Do You Stand? (group activity/discussion)
3) Community Food Systems Map (group activity)
4) Program Overview/Note to the Learner (presentation/reading)
5) Before the next session (to complete on your own): Examining Community Trends (informal research) and "What is a farm?" (supplemental reading)

Activity 1) Your Personal Food Museum

Introduction: People must eat to survive. But beyond its biological function, food is part of the fabric of our families, cultures and communities. This activity helps you explore the importance and role of food in your family life, culture and community.

Directions: Imagine that you are going to create your own personal "food museum." In it, you will display the foods and artifacts that are most significant to your identify, family, culture and community.

- What foods, tastes and smells would you include in the museum?
- What kitchen or dining implements would be on display?
- What people or community members would you include in your exhibit (e.g. through photos, stories, or other means)?

Using the questions above, discuss and share examples of the foods and traditions that are significant to you, your family, community, and/or culture. If possible, bring examples of foods, artifacts, recipes (oral, written, or cooked samples), etc. to share.

Discussion questions

- 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?

Extension: Autobiographical Food Poems

The poem below is written to express the foods significant to the writer. Note that each stanza begins with "I am from." After you read the poem, try to identify where the writer is from based on the tastes, smells, and other details provided. Then write your own poem. Begin each stanza with "I am from." Include words and phrases that evoke tastes, smells, and textures of the foods important to you.

Sample poem #1 (Bigelow et. al, 2001)

I am from awapuhi ginger
sweet fields of sugar cane
green bananas.

I am from warm rain cascading over
taro leaf umbrellas.
Crouching beneath the shield of kalo.

I am from poke, brie cheese, mango,
and raspberries, from Marguritte
and Aunty Noni.

Activity 2) Where Do You Stand?

Note: Your facilitator will lead this activity. There are no materials in this booklet for this activity.

Activity 3) Community Food Systems Map

Introduction

food system: a series of interdependent elements that provides food to a community

Growing, processing and consuming foods connect your community to the rest of the world. Foods come in from other regions, and foods grown in your region may be exported to other places. In addition, food wastes (from homes, restaurants, farms, stores, and processing facilities) go somewhere. Together, these connections form a **food system:** a series of interdependent elements that provides food to a community. This includes the growing, harvesting, processing, distributing, consuming and disposing of food. Note that 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. All these elements are related and interdependent, even if these connections are not always visible.

In this activity, you will learn more about the food system in your community through the creation of a community food system map.

Directions

1. In your group, review the following categories; note that some of the places may be off your map.
   - A. Places that grow or produce food (such as farms, gardens, pastures, apiaries)
   - B. Places that process foods (cider mills, bakeries, grain mills, meat packing plants)
   - C. Places that sell foods (grocery stores, co-ops, farm stands, convenience stores, restaurants)
   - D. Global or national sources of food imports
   - E. Places where food is sent or sold to (other states or countries?)
   - F. Places where agricultural wastes go (landfills, compost centers, farms)
   - G. Places where decisions about food-related policies are made (government offices, community organizations)

2. On the map(s) you are given (or on a map you draw), identify as many places as you can within your category. Use one or more of the following methods:
   - Draw on the map using specific colors for your category; create a key
   - Add sticky notes with place names written on them
   - Attach notes or references for places that may be off the map you are working from.

3. Post your work and be ready to explain highlights.

Questions for discussion

- Which aspects of the food system were the easiest aspects to identify? Which were most difficult?
- What are some of the key connections among the elements in your community's food system?
- What are the boundaries of your community's food system?
- If food is so important, why are certain aspects of the system hidden or difficult to identify?
- What other questions does this activity raise?

4) Program Overview

Introduction to the "Food, Farming, and Community" curriculum

"Food, Farming, and Community " is a six-session curriculum that will engage you in an exploration of food, agriculture and sustainability. The program examines food systems from environmental, economic, historic and cultural perspectives. Each session focuses on a different topic, and together, the program explores this vital question: *How can we create a food system that maintains health, sustains the environment, preserves our cultural fabric, and benefits the regional economy?*

The sessions are a mix of hands-on activities, group discussions, short reading selections, and personal reflections. You'll have opportunities to take your learning into the community, and make connections between personal actions and regional or global policies. Ideas for solutions and action steps are woven throughout, and are emphasized in the last session.

Session descriptions:

Session 1: Introduction to Food, Farming, and Community (this session)

Session 2: How Should We Grow? Approaches to Food Systems

This session introduces different approaches to organizing a food system, and provides a framework for defining and evaluating a "sustainable food system." Through the "life stories" of two strawberries, learners view a snapshot of different food systems, and generate traits of a system that nourishes people, the environment, and the economy (a "sustainable" system). Learners then review trends on food production, consumption, prices, health, and the environment, and assess the implications of the trends. By the end of the session, learners have a working framework for evaluating food systems that is applied throughout the rest of the curriculum.

Session 3: The Footprint of Agriculture

Where does our food come from, and why does this matter? This session examines materials and energy used in food production as well as the wastes produced. As learners explore the environmental impacts of these processes, they gain an understanding of the food "footprint." Hands-on activities and multiple diagrams help clarify the science behind the concepts.

Session 4: The High Cost of Cheap Food

Why are unhealthy foods often inexpensive? Why is organic often more expensive? This session addresses how policies impact the price and cost of food. Through a game-like simulation, learners examine the hidden environmental and social costs of producing food in different ways. A short reading selection introduces the U.S. Farm Bill and funded programs for farmers and consumers. Learners then reflect on what they value most in the food system, and back their choices by allocating a fictional Farm Bill budget to programs they select.

Session 5: How Did We Get Here? The Development of the "Modern" Food System

What are the origins of today's agricultural system? Learners map the geographic origins of commons foods and evaluate how changes in food-related technologies impact their eating habits. Then, learners read short selections about historic points in agriculture and create a timeline of significant global "food events" such as Columbus' voyage, the introduction of synthetic fertilizers, and the "Green" revolution.

Session 6: Strategies for Supporting Sustainable Food Systems

How can we promote change? This session goes deeper into possible solutions, barriers, and strategies for working towards sustainable food systems. Learners review various strategies and develop a personal plan for advancing sustainable food systems through personal actions.

A note to the learner: Assumptions and context of this curriculum

Food systems are complex, and involve environmental, social, economic, and cultural factors. This curriculum does not claim to be comprehensive, but aims to provide an overview of some of the key trends and issues surrounding food production at the local, national and global levels. As of this writing (August 2008), food system issues are in the news with headlines about rising food prices, food poisoning, food insecurity, and food crops as biofuels. At the same time, there is also a growing interest in local food, farmers' markets, urban and community gardening, and providing children with healthier school lunch options. This curriculum attempts to place these issues in a broader context by providing a general overview of some environmental, social, economic, and historic aspects of the food system.

Covering complex issues in a condensed way for a general audience is a great challenge, as it becomes impossible to provide needed depth on every topic. To accommodate this, the lessons omit some complexities and issues because they are better addressed in a more detailed work. In lieu of this, the curriculum aims to frame the main questions surrounding the issues, and works to expose learners to a range of views. Learners are encouraged to examine topics in light of their own experiences, and extensive references are provided for further research.

Assumptions underlying this curriculum:

- The food system is complex, and can only begin to be explored in this work.
- Each person's experience with food is unique. These experiences are situated in and affected by individual, cultural, geographic and economic factors.
- Human actors in the food system include farmers, agricultural workers, business people, consumers, and institutions such as governments or community organizations.
- The need to eat is biological, but the food systems people create to meet this need is determined in part by culture.
- The ways in which humans meet their needs for food has environmental, economic, social and cultural implications. These implications matter, and should be examined and understood in order to craft a system that *maintains health, sustains the environment, preserves our cultural fabric, and benefits the regional economy.*
- While everyone is involved in the food system, power is not evenly distributed within it, and everyone does not benefit equally from current policies and practices.
- Farmers and farms are essential to the food system. Caring for the land and community is part of our agricultural heritage. Farmers have intimate knowledge of the land, and their contributions are essential for future stewardship. Many of the problems often associated with agriculture are beyond the control of individual farmers.
- Individuals can make a difference in the food system. The curriculum aims to encourage involvement and action throughout, and especially in Session 6.

Getting the most from your learning: setting group norms

Your experience with the curriculum will be enhanced if you are part of a group that is committed to learning from and listening to each other. Your facilitator will help you generate some "norms," or ground rules, to ensure a respectful learning environment. A few examples are below; use these to generate others.

- Seek first to understand others in this group
- Speak from your own experiences; use "I" statements.
- Ask for clarification when needed: Can you say more about . . . ?
- It is O.K. to be imperfect with regard to understanding people who are different from you
- It is O.K. to reveal ignorance or misunderstanding.
- Encourage others to participate in an open and honest way.
- Agree to respect the confidentiality of all the personal information shared in the group

5) Before the next session

Examining community trends

Session 2 will examine trends in the national and global food system. To prepare, write down several trends that you believe are most impacting your community's food system, either positively or negatively. You can draw from your own experiences and observations, examine local news stories, and/or talk with people involved in the food system. You will share your work in the following session.

You should also complete "What is a farm?", the reading selection that follows. This provides an overview of farm classifications and ownership statistics.

What is a farm? Overview of definitions, structures, and ownership

This selection provides an overview of definitions and classifications of farm size and type, organized as a series of questions and answers. Information is summarized from Structure and Finances of U.S. Farms: Family Farm Report, 2007. United States Department of Agriculture.

What is a farm?

The United States Department of Agriculture definition of a farm includes any operation that has or could have $1,000 annually in sales. There are other definitions, too; for example, the state of Michigan's laws define a farm as "the land, plants, animals, buildings, structures, including ponds used for agricultural or aquacultural activities, machinery, equipment and other appurtenances used in the commercial production of farm products." Here, too, the defining trait is commercial activity; this differentiates a "farm" from a home garden or orchard, which (by these definitions) produce food for home consumption, not sale.

How many farms are there in the US?

In 2006 there were 2.1 million farms nationwide. In 2006, the average size farm was 441 acres.

How are farms categorized?

Size

In the eyes of the USDA, the "size" of a farm refers to overall sale ("production value") rather than acres. The level of sales is used because it unambiguously measures economic activity in dollars. Acreage, on the other hand, is considered a less objective measure since there is no correlation between the size of the farm in acres and the value produced. Cattle operations, for example, may have a low volume of sales, but be very large in terms of acres.

The following categories are for farms whose operators report farming as their main occupation; sizes are classified by sales:

- Small (low sales): under $100,000
- Medium: $100,000- $249,999
- Large farms: $250,000-499,999 in sales
- Very large: over $500,000
- Limited resource farms: farms with sales less than $100,000, farm assets less than $150,000, and total operator income < $20,000
- Retirement farms: Small farms whose operators report they are retired. Residential/lifestyle farms are small farms whose operators report a major occupation other than farming.

Ownership structure

Farms may broadly be classified as individual operations (proprietorships), partnerships, or corporations; corporations can be family-operated or non-family operated.

- Individual operations are the most common type of farm organization.
- Large family farms are often organized as family corporations (with more than 50% of the stock held by people related by blood or marriage.)
- Most U.S. farms—98% in 2004—are family farms; this includes all sizes of family farms and family corporations.

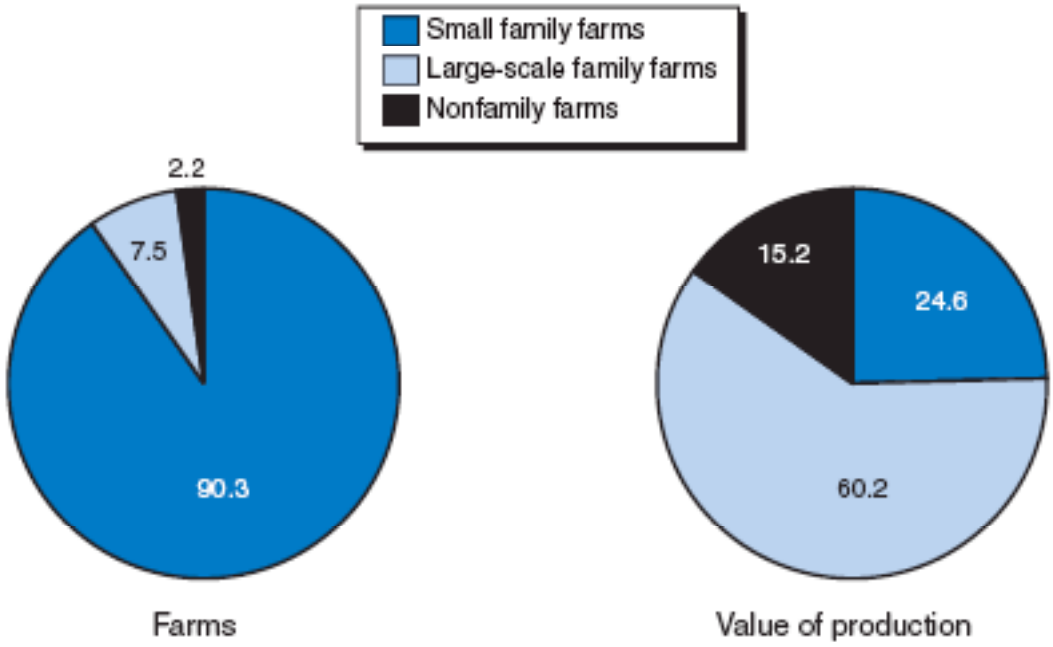
- Large scale family farms account for 8% of all farms but 60% of the production value. This comparison of farm size and production value is shown in the pie charts below.
- Partnerships and non-family corporations make up a very small share of farms. About 89% of farm corporations are family corporations.
- While most farms growing crops are still in the hands of family-based operations, the meat industry is more concentrated in the hands of large corporations. By 1997, three companies controlled almost 80% of fed-cattle slaughter and by 2004, four companies controlled 64% of pork packing (Molnar et al 1997; Hendrickson and W. Heffernan, 2005) companies such as Tyson, ConAgra, and Cargill have increased their market share since the 1990s (USDA; Wise, 2005).

(Note: "Value of Production" in the chart below is sales.)

Share of total farms and value of production, 2004

Large-scale family farms account for 60 percent of production

Percent of U.S. farms or production



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, 2004 Agricultural Resource Management Survey, Phase III.

ADDITIONAL STATISTICS AND DETAILS

What size farms are most common? How much do the different-sized farms produce?

Key figures on the breakdown of farms by size, and the correlation of production (in sales) appear in the pie graph. Key points:

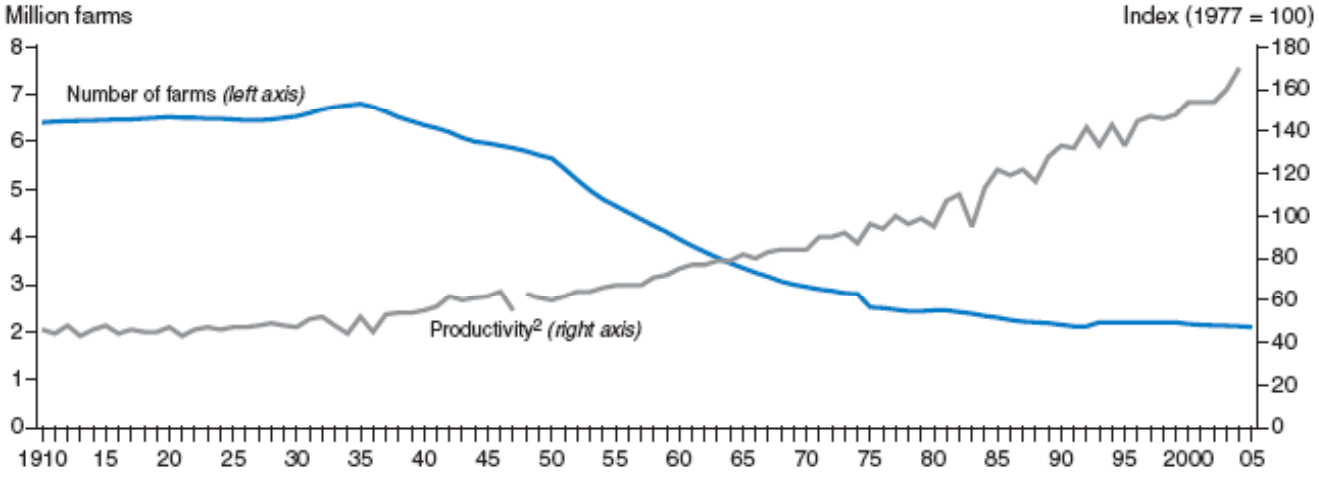
- Small and medium family farms (less than $250,000) make up 90% of farms. But about half of these are "hobby" or "residential" farms that produce little or no income from crops or livestock. Consequently, small farms produce about 25% of production value.
- Nonfamily corporations account for just over 2% of all farms but 15% of agricultural sales. Most of these nonfamily corporations are not large, publicly held companies.
- The share of total production by large farms is increasing. The total sales accounted for by farms with sales of $250,000 or more increased steadily from 47% in 1982 to 76% in 2002.
- Farms with sales of $1,000,000 to $4,999,999 and $5 million or more doubled their share of sales between 1982 and 2002. Corporate farms have the highest average farm sales.
- The two largest sales classes now account for nearly one-fourth of agricultural sales each, although the two groups together make up only 1% of farms.

Changes in farming over time

The number of farms, their size and productivity has changed dramatically over the twentieth century. The graph below shows that the number of farms has declined from 6.5 million in 1910 to just over 2 million in 2005. During the same period, farm productivity has more than tripled. (An index of 100 is used to measure productivity at 1977 levels; using this index, 1910 productivity levels were around 50, rising to 170 by 2005.)

Farm productivity[1] and number of farms, 1910 to 2005

The number of farms declined as productivity increased



[1]Farm output per unit of total factor input (total factor productivity), available through 2004.

[2]The break in the productivity line reflects the introduction of new methodology beginning with the 1948 estimate. The new methods had minor impacts on the estimates. For more information, see Ahearn et al. (1998, pp. 15-21).

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, compiled from National Agricultural Statistics Service annual estimates of the number of farms from the June Agricultural Survey and from ERS estimates of farm productivity. ERS productivity indices prior to 1948 came from Johnson (1990).

Changes in farming over time

Farm size has also increased as shown in the table below.

Farm number and size

Year	# of farms in US	Average size	Ave # of commodities
1946	5.9 million	195 acres	4.6
1975	2.9	376	2.7
2006	2.1	441	1.3

(Compiled from USDA Agricultural Census, multiple years)

References for this lesson

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.

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http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB24/