

The Life of a Tomato Lesson

Topics: Just and sustainable food system, local and nonlocal food systems

Grade Level: upper elementary to high school

Time: 30-45 minutes

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- define a food system
- describe a just and sustainable food system
- identify one difference between local and nonlocal food systems

Materials

- Ten dimes
- Cards labeled *farmer, trucker, tomato, consumer, grocer, factory worker, and packager*
- 8+ participants
- A real or plastic tomato
- White board
- Dry erase marker

Procedure

Brainstorm about the PFP purpose: What is a just and sustainable food system?

Write words on board/flip chart, have students brainstorm the meanings

- **Food System:** the system in which our food is produced, processed, distributed, and purchased; the steps and people involved with growing, transporting, selling, and obtaining food; includes farmers, farm workers, distributors, packers, truckers, sellers, and eaters
- **Just:** access for all regardless of income level, race, location; safe working conditions, healthy and fair working conditions
- **Sustainable:** healthy for people and the planet now and in the future, healthy for workers and eaters and the environment

Part One

1. Choose volunteers to be a tomato, a farmer, and a consumer. Give each the card with their roles on it.
2. Line them up and tell them that the consumer is buying tomatoes at the downtown farmers market.
3. The consumer gives the farmer 10 dimes for the “direct market transaction.”
4. The tomato does two jumping jacks to represent the energy it takes for the farmer to grow the food and bring it to the farmers market.

Part Two

1. Now explain it is the middle of winter and the consumer wants to buy tomatoes.
2. He/she goes to the grocery store to buy them.
3. The farmer now becomes a farmer from South America.
4. Ask for more volunteers to be a trucker and a grocer.
5. Have them get in a line of the order that the food travels.

6. Consumer gives grocer 10 dimes, tomato does 5 jumping jacks.
7. Grocer gives trucker 50 cents, tomato does 25 jumping jacks to get South America to here.
8. Trucker gives farmer 30 cents, tomato does 2 jumping jacks.
9. Have each person tell the group how much money they have.

Part Three

1. Now the consumer wants ketchup and goes to the grocery store to buy it.
2. Get more volunteers to be packager, factory worker, and second trucker.
3. Ask students to once again line up in the order the tomato would travel.
4. Consumer gives grocer ten dimes, tomato does 5 jumping jacks.
5. Grocer gives trucker 60 cents, 10 jumping jacks.
6. Trucker gives packager 40 cents, 15 jumping jacks.
7. Packager gives factory 30 cents, 20 jumping jacks.
8. Factory gives other trucker 20 cents, 15 jumping jacks.
9. Trucker gives farmer 10 cents, 2 jumping jacks.
10. Have each person tell the group how much money they have.

Discussion

Start a discussion with students about the food system and the different scenarios presented.

1. How did it feel to be the farmer in each situation?
2. What was the difference between buying the local versus buying the South American tomato for the consumer, the farmer, the tomato?
3. Which scenario was more sustainable? Which was more just?
4. What does this say about eating from a local food source/local food system?
5. What about a global food system?
6. What does this say about eating seasonally?
7. Describe the difference in energy use between the first and last scenarios.
8. What are other issues to consider in local vs. global?

Evaluation:

Have each participant respond to at least one question based on one of the objectives. Record the number of participants who were able to respond accurately and the number of participants who were not able to respond accurately.

*Adapted from Vermont FEED workshop at
National Farm to Cafeteria Conference, May 2010*

Farmer

Trucker

Trucker

Tomato

Grocer

Consumer

Factory
Worker

Packager