

How Many Miles from Farm to Table?

Food service personnel, a health or classroom teacher, or community volunteers can teach these engaging lessons that promote student awareness of the benefits of eating local food.

*Developed by Seeds of Solidarity (www.seedsofsolidarity.org). Featured in the *Fresh from the Farm: The Massachusetts Farm to School Cookbook**

Each of these three mini- lessons takes about 30 minutes; they can stand-alone, or be done in sequence on one day, or over a period of days. Geared towards upper- elementary students, they are adaptable for lower or higher grades and foster math, writing, communication, and critical thinking skills.

1,500 Miles to Breakfast has students compare a typical breakfast with one that is sourced from locally produced foods.

Taste, Texture, and Travel engages students in comparing and contrasting salad mixes grown and bagged many miles away with those from a local farm.

Grow a Salad Garden encourages young farmers with an easy mini-garden.

Objectives of the Lessons:

Students explore the concept of “food miles,” the distance food travels from farm to table.

Students compare health and environmental benefits of local food with food that travels great distance.

Students learn about local farms and foods, and how they contribute to a healthy community.

Part 1) 1,500 Miles to Breakfast

Have one paper shopping bag ready with foods or identifying containers such as: orange juice, white and chocolate milk, cereal box, sugar, bananas, bacon, eggs, bread grown or produced in variety of states and countries (labels and containers should tell you where). Have another paper or canvas shopping bag ready that contains foods or identifying containers with items grown or produced in Massachusetts, such local apples or apple cider, milk, Massachusetts maple syrup, locally produced bacon or eggs. Ask students what the number 1,500 represents in this activity. Entertain guesses, and then explain that it is the average distance food travels from farm to table.

Starting with bag number 1, explain that you just went shopping for some breakfast items. Pull the items from the bag, one by one, and ask the students where it comes from (plant or animal, as well as state or country listed on the packaging). Then, make a chart on the board to list the food, the source (plant/animal and location), and approximate miles traveled by each item from farm to table (use a map or encourage guesses). Total all of the food miles required for this breakfast. Explain that when food travels a great distance it requires fossil fuels for transport (which we are depleting and cause pollution and global warming), can lose their freshness, and we do not get to know the farmer.

Ask the students which of these items they think might be able to be grown or produced locally, and if not, are there alternatives that could be included (such as apple instead of oranges or bananas, maple syrup instead of sugar on cereal). Pull the items from bag number two. Create a similar list of sources and miles traveled, encouraging students to name any local or regional farms they know of that produce any of these products. In addition to being delicious, buying foods grown or produced in Massachusetts reduces fuel consumption and pollution, maintains farmland and beautiful landscapes, and supports local jobs and economy.

It is important to stress that eating a healthy breakfast is great, no matter its source! This activity demonstrates how many nourishing breakfast foods can be grown right in our own state.

Part 2) Taste, Texture, and Travel

Most supermarkets now carry bagged salad mixes, often from the West Coast that contain a variety of colors and shapes of lettuces, herbs and greens. Also get a pound of salad mix from a local farmer, available during late spring and fall months (see www.nofamass.org for a list of farms and farmers markets by region). Place bowls of each of these in different stations in the classroom or cafeteria, but do not yet inform the students which is which. Place comment sheets and pencils at each sample. Have students visit each sample, first observing the various colors and textures then writing descriptive words or phrases on the comment sheet. Next put the samples in small tasting cups at each station, and have students add their comments regarding flavor to the comment sheets (you may choose to provide a salad dressing (see recipe below), or try plain.

Re-convene as a whole group. First, have students vote on their favorite, based on visual and flavor appeal. Then read aloud the comments for each sample, and tell students the source of each, distant or local. Brainstorm the pros and cons of each salad mix from an environmental and economic perspective. Here are some points to add if the students do not: **The “distant” salads** (whether organic or not) require fossil fuels for transport and for bags, which are petroleum based and create trash; they lose freshness in travel- you may not eat them until a week after harvest; most are produced by large corporations the farmer doesn't make as much as selling directly to a customer, The organic brands are grown without pesticides and herbicides, better for you and for the land, but still travel many food miles. **The local salad** may have been harvested within a day of you eating it, and was grown close by, using less energy. You can get to know the local farmer that grew it and buying directly from them gives them the best dollar for their efforts. Because we have a cold winter, you cannot get salad from local farms all year long, but some Massachusetts farmers grow salad 9 or 10 months of the year using greenhouses.

Buying from local farmers helps keep Massachusetts's agriculture strong. Eating any salad is great! But students can make choices to support local whenever possible.

Kids' Favorite Maple Salad Dressing: Put 1 cup of olive oil in a mason or other jar that has a lid. Add 1/4 cup of balsamic vinegar and 1 Tbs cider vinegar. Add 1 Tbs. Mustard and 2 Tbs. Real Maple Syrup. Add a sprinkle of salt and a dash of pepper. Put on lid, shake it up well, and dress your salad!

Part 3) Grow a Salad Garden:

A salad garden can be sown and harvested from early spring until late fall, and grows quickly, which coincides well with a school year schedule. Many seeds companies sell lettuce, mesclun and Asian green mixes that are great for salad gardens (try Johnnyseeds.com). Start with a bed of fertile soil or compost in an outside garden. Or, to make an indoor salad garden, poke holes in the bottom of a plastic fish flat from a restaurant, or make one 20' by 10' by 3' deep of wood (not pressure treated, and with slats on the bottom for drainage) then fill with fertile soil. Now you are ready to plant and soon harvest your outdoor or indoor salad garden.

- Sprinkle seeds like lettuces, Asian greens, spinach, kale and mustards in rows.
- If a mini bed, put in a sunny window or greenhouse. Keep soil moist
- In 2-3 weeks, cut your baby greens with a scissors and enjoy a salad.
- Do not pull them out. Keep moist. They will grow again.
- Cut and enjoy 2-3 times, then add more soil and replant.

More Ideas: Students create informational flyers or maps to bring home that identify regional farmstands, farmers' market locations, or CSA farms that sell shares of local produce. Decorate plain canvas shopping bags with fruits, vegetables and farm images, using permanent acrylic paint. Great to fill when visiting local farms and farmstands!