



your body matters



Teachers Notes D: Where does food come from?

Nourishing Body & Mind for a Healthy Life

A Primary Health and Wellbeing Curriculum Pack

Revised Version 2023



Teacher Notes D: Where does food come from?

Associated lesson plans		
Primary Stage	Lesson	Title
5	5.1(1)	Food on my Plate
Useful websites	www.fairtrade.org.uk <i>Fairtrade foundations website. Details about campaigns, producers, suppliers in the UK, and news about fairtrade. Contains a pack looking at raising the profile of fairtrade within the school.</i> https://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/7-11-years/where-food-comes-from-7-11-years/ <i>Provides activity ideas and resources to help consolidate learning of food around the world, food origins, and farming and processing</i>	

Where does the food we eat come from?

Many foods that are now commonly available in Britain were imported for growing at a point in history or are still to this day imported from countries all over the world. For example, potatoes came from the 'new world' and were first grown in Scotland around the 17th Century, squashes and marrows were originally from the 'new world' and came to Britain via Spain in the 16th Century, and pears were originally imported from European countries and are now also commonly grown in the UK. Many foods commonly found in our shops and supermarkets such as bananas, tea, potatoes, and chocolate are produced in the Caribbean, India, Egypt and Ghana, and then imported for consumption on the British market. Along with more traditional export crops, UK consumers can now buy items such as mangetout from Guatemala, mangos from South Africa, paw-paw from Ghana, tuna from Indonesia, fine beans from Kenya and star fruit from Malaysia. The following table shows where some of the most imported food produce is sourced from around the world:

Food Produce	Country grown in	Food Produce	Country Grown in
Bananas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mexico 2. Nicaragua 3. Uganda 4. Honduras 5. Guatemala 6. Columbia 7. Panama 	Coffee	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brazil 2. Columbia 3. Ghana 4. Vietnam 5. Mexico 6. Indonesia 7. Kenya
Orange Juice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brazil 2. Mexico 3. Spain 4. USA 	Sugar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. India 2. Brazil 3. China 4. Mexico 5. South Africa 6. Thailand 7. UK 8. France
Tea	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. China 2. India 3. Indonesia 4. Sri Lanka 5. Argentina 6. Kenya 7. Malawi 8. Tanzania 	Rice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. India 2. Thailand 3. Vietnam 4. Cambodia 5. Pakistan
Cocoa (Chocolate)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brazil 2. Indonesia 3. Nigeria 4. Cameroon 5. Ivory Coast 6. Ghana 	Honey	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chile 2. Mexico 3. United Kingdom 4. Nicaragua

No single food or food group contains all the essential nutrients the body needs. Our food and meals are part of global trade and can travel from countries as far away as New Zealand to reach our plate. This usually means that large numbers of people (farmers, production lines, packers, transporters, shippers and retailers) and countries are involved in producing the food we eat. This global trade has also opened our experience of food, recipes and dishes from all over the world. Traditionally, British food was bland and heavy in composition; there was very little variety available to create dishes. However, naval exploration and global trade have since expanded the possibilities and embedded many dishes from around the world into common use in the UK.

Farming

There are a wide variety of farming techniques associated with modern food production. In the westernised countries, most of our food is already produced intensively on large and highly mechanised farms. Factory-style production of meat, eggs and dairy products is now the norm and chemicals and pesticides are widely used in the production of all kinds of crop and plant foods. This type of farming ensures that foodstuffs are produced at a lower price for the consumer, enabling many people to eat a varied diet i.e. provides access to a greater variety of foods. However, the effect that these farming methods have on food quality and animal welfare is a hotly contested issue. There is now more focus on free-range (animals are given more freedom to naturally roam outdoor spaces) and organic farming (farming without the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides).

Food Retail in the UK

Before the 1960's, most of the food retail in the UK was through small to medium sized local and independent businesses. The introduction of supermarkets and multiple retail units in the early 1950s and their development and expansion in the 1960's dramatically changed the landscape of food production and retail in the UK.

Supermarkets and superstores were a revolution in the food retail industry as they began to sell a wide variety of products under one roof. Traditional food retail outlets were smaller with less variety of produce or were specialist shops that sold one type of product, usually fresh from local farms or made on the premises (e.g. bakers, greengrocers, butchers). Since the 1960's, these more traditional retailers have lost a large percentage of their business to the superstores of supermarket chains. Throughout the 21st century supermarkets have come to account for much of the food retail market in the UK.

While specialist shops and smaller retail outlets were traditionally at the heart of local communities and towns, a place where people would come together to buy their fresh produce from local producers, now out-of-town retail units and supermarket stores attract people to a less community focused form of shopping. Now supermarket chains account for most of our food retail. This is partly a result

of people choosing to purchase food and other items in an 'all-under-one-roof' experience but also because of the large buying power that the supermarkets command which means that they can offer lower prices and out-sell smaller retailers.

As smaller, independent retailers lose increasing numbers of their consumers, they are forced to either increase their prices in order to survive (but then risk alienating customers who would no longer afford to purchase their goods), or alternatively, to attempt to compete with the low prices that the supermarkets offer in a bid to attract their customers away from the supermarkets, but in doing so risk the future of their business.

The closure of smaller, specialist food retailers has had a devastating effect upon many aspects of communities. Obviously, the impact will be greatly felt by the owners of the businesses that are being drained of their consumers to the large out-of-town stores, but the loss of local business within communities also reduces the competition that supermarkets have for the produce that they sell. With the loss of local independent or small business retail outlets and the market competition to provide an incentive for the supermarkets to maintain high quality, variety and low prices for consumers, supermarkets may then begin to move towards low quality, limited produce, and escalating prices to realise the constant need for increased profit margins.

Food Mileage and Sustainable Development

Traditionally, most food produced in an area was transported only a short distance for sale within the local area (i.e., local businesses or farm shops). However, with the development and expansion of supermarket chains and the changes and liberalisation of trade to increasingly include food, our food now travels a substantial distance 'from plough to plate'. The distance that food travels from 'plough to plate' is termed 'food miles' and contributes to the overall sustainability of the food industry. The extra transport and travel that food industry is now associated with, as well as the travel that is required of consumers to reach the retail outlets, incurs costs to society and the environment. These are often not accounted for and are unsustainable in terms of the future of food production and the growth of the food retail industry in the UK.

Before the 1970's food production was viewed as a domestic objective for the British Government. The farming and food industry in the UK accounted for much of the produce that was consumed in UK households (including that produce sold through supermarket retail), topped up with seasonal supplements from imported sources. The increased inclusion of food in liberalised global trade and the expansion of large supermarket chains have brought modern food industry to operate in an increasingly globalised market.

The domination of supermarkets on the UK food market, has allowed them to develop efficient, competitive buying and distributing techniques (which also serve to maintain profit margins) and to manipulate the farming and farmers that produce for them. Buying produce from the smallest number of farmers and producers as possible enables the supermarkets to reduce their costs. It has also meant that farmers and producers have limited the produce that they grow to accommodate the high bulk demands of the supermarkets and that specific produce is sourced from certain areas in the UK and overseas. This approach of farming has a dramatically limiting effect on the variety and range of produce that can be found in local regions and will, in the long-term, limit the ability of local areas to sustain themselves on the produce that is farmed in the area.

Food Transportation

Changes in trade legislation, supermarket purchasing, and operating systems, as well as advancements in travel have coincided with an increase in the distance that our food travels 'from plough to plate' and an increase in the road-haulage volume in the UK. Since the 1970's the quantity of food transported by road-haulage Heavy Goods Vehicles across the UK has doubled.

An increase in the road haulage of food cannot simply be attributed to the sourcing of foods from further away and import but to the additional journey that food makes within the sourcing and distribution process i.e. from the source/producer to the distribution centre and from the distribution centre out to the retail outlets. All food sourced by supermarkets passes through a distribution centre on its way from the producer to the consumer, no matter how close or far away from the distribution centre the source of the produce may be. This additional link in the chain increases the transportation costs of food retail.

The increase of road transport associated with the complex transportation systems used by the supermarket chains and food transportation in general is not only associated with increased pollutants in the environment but is contributing to changing the environmental and social landscape altogether. Increased road haulage has caused strain on UK and European roads, not only promoting the construction of new road systems but the alteration of cities, towns and villages to accommodate them.

Additional environmental pollutants are associated with the travel that consumers must do to reach supermarket superstores, many of which are situated out of traditional town parameters, resulting in a greater dependence on cars and motorised transport to access food retail outlets.

