## FOOD FOOTPRINTS THROUGH TIME



### **OVERVIEW**

This activity is designed to have students think about significant moments in American and world history that have affected today's food system. They will use their knowledge of different time periods and cultures to determine which foods people ate in the past. Then they will analyze how their food got to the tables, identify all the people involved in the process, and assess the size of the corresponding footprints. Students will see how the world's increasing interconnectedness resulted in increased footprint size. Events such as colonialism, the establishment of trade routes, the industrial revolution, and the green revolution shaped the food system and distribution of food as we know it today.

### **OBJECTIVES**

Students will

- 1) identify food from certain time periods based on what they have learned in class and through readings
- 2) map foods from sources to sinks
- 3) compare and contrast Footprint sizes between time periods and nations
- 4) think about their own food Footprints and evaluate their sizes
- 5) discuss individual as well as large scale steps they can take to reduce food Footprints

### **MATERIALS**

- Roll of butcher paper or enough chalkboard space for each group
- Readings on food during different time periods (some examples are included here)

### **PART I**

Divide students into groups. Assign each group of students a reading that pertains to the culture of a specific time period and/or encourage them to use what they have already learned in class. Allow them time to research what food was eaten at the time and have them list at least 3 food items- main dishes and beverages. After they decide on which food comes from that time and culture, they must think of what resources were required to produce those foods and transport them to the dining area at that time. Have them map the paths that their food took from origination to the table on butcher paper or on the board. Have students draw diagrams, citing resources and sinks at each step. Put a box around the end products of each step (air pollution, contaminated river, etc.)

How many people do you think are involved in bringing you your food? Which country and time period has the largest footprint? Why?

\*\*\* Refer to Handout 13- Sample EF Activities, pg. 5 for readings to use at this step\*\*\*



### **PART II**

Have students present their food to the class by first just describing the dishes. Then have them describe the Footprints of some of the items using their diagrams. Have students vote on which meals they would like to eat. Why did they choose certain ones over others?

### **DISCUSSION**

Ouestions to ask students:

- Do you ever think about where your food comes from before you eat it?
- Do you ever think about how many people and resources it takes to get food to your table?
- How hard would it be if you had to milk a cow when you wanted milk for your cereal?

The largest contributor to the United States' footprint size is the fossil fuels sector. The largest contributor to low-income countries' footprint size is the agricultural sector. (Show footprint of nations charts) How would changing our eating habits and raising awareness on food systems help to reduce both of these footprints?

What are some steps individuals can take to reduce their own food footprint size?

- Buy organic food (the more we show support/demand, the cheaper organic food will become).
- Support local farmers by shopping at farmer's markets.
- Try to eat vegetarian meals when possible.
- Avoid purchasing processed and packaged foods.
- Compost kitchen waste and/or reduce the amount of food thrown away.

What are some steps governments and policy makers can take to reduce national food footprint size?

- Provide incentives for using organic farming methods.
- Use renewable energy sources in food production and transportation (solar power, horsepower, wind power).
- Stay away from intensive mono-cropping; instead encourage biodiversity.

### **EXTENSION**

Read aloud to students or have them read on their own "Hamburger, Fries, and a Cola" or the excerpt from "Stuff- The Secret Lives of Everyday Things." One group should have already mapped the resources, but you may want to add anything they may have missed. This time have all students write down the origin of each product through history and how they got to America. Discuss significant events throughout history that allowed us to have a meal like this now (trade routes, steam engine, etc.) Are any of these products still made in other countries and transported to the US? How have these processes changed from then to now?



### OTHER FOOD RELATED LESSON PLANS

# Sustainability: Then, Now, Later- *Project WILD K-12 Curriculum & Activity Guide* 2000 (pp. 436-442).

Compares resource use and distribution for the United States in 1900, 2000, and 2100. Students present skits from each time period in groups and realize how wants and needs have changed and will probably continue to change over time. They can act out the same event (such as Thanksgiving) in different time periods.

# No Tomato Sauce 'Til 1492- French Fries and the Food System, The Food Project (pp.113-115).

Students physically move vegetables from one country to another to represent trade routes beginning with Columbus' voyages. Students discuss what factors caused these foods to move and where they are grown currently.

# productive soil fertilizers manure petroleum rivers absorb run-off workers productive soil fertilizers energy coal trees absorb carbon emissions

