



Classroom Activities

Food is a fundamental building block of life. It provides our bodies with the energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, healthy fats, and dietary fiber that are essential to our health and well-being, supporting growth and fending off disease. Eating provides daily pleasure, and mealtimes are great for socializing with family and friends. Our food choices also have an important impact on our environment. Rating one's diet with the [Food Impact Meter](#) is an effective way to kick off discussions of diet, health, and the environment.

Questions to Discuss

- What foods do you generally eat? And where do those foods you eat come from? What kind of resources are needed to grow or sustain the various foods you eat?
- When between farms, factories, and your mouth does food require the use of energy?
- In what ways might food production affect the environment?
- Which foods need more water to produce than others?
- Do you eat meat, seafood, milk, or other animal products? Or do you prefer a vegetarian or vegan diet?
- Do you know what ingredients your processed foods are made of...and what their levels of key nutrients are? Scrutinize and then discuss labels on several food packages.

Use the Food Impact Meter to see how your food choices might impact you and the environment.

Understanding Your Scores

- How did you do with the Food Impact Meter? Did you get high, medium, or low scores? Higher scores indicate healthier diets and lower environmental impact.
- What changes might help your diet score higher on Health or the Environment?
- What happens if you don't eat *any* foods—how might that impact the environment?

Take a few minutes to redo the quiz, using food choices that might improve your scores.

Analysis

Why is it important to know how your food choices impact your own health and the health of the environment?

Do you think it might be helpful to change your daily diet in certain ways based on what you have learned from the Food Impact Meter?

What influences you to eat the kind of foods that you eat?

Background Information

- About one-fourth of America's greenhouse gas emissions are tied to the food system.
- Huge amounts of energy are required to produce fertilizer to increase crop yields, especially the grains (corn, soy, wheat, etc.) that are fed to cattle, pigs, and poultry. More energy is needed to transport and refrigerate feed and food. And all that generates greenhouse gases that promote global warming.
- Pesticides used on farms to control insects, weeds, or fungi and increase crop yields might also harm insects, birds, and small mammals. And pesticides might harm the farm workers who spray the crops or tend the fields.
- Overuse of fertilizer may pollute rivers and streams and cause algal growth that leads to dead zones in estuaries (e.g., the mouth of the Mississippi River and Chesapeake Bay).
- Cropland that replaces forests cannot absorb as much carbon dioxide.
- Roughly one-third of all food grown is wasted on farm fields, during processing, at supermarkets, and by consumers. That represents a huge waste of cropland, unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions, and unnecessary production of fertilizer and pesticides.
- Vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, and whole grains, which are high in micronutrients and dietary fiber, are great for you and the world. Plant-forward, vegetarian, or vegan diets tend to improve health and are friendlier to the environment.
- Frequent consumption of sugar drinks and ultra-processed foods increases the risk of such serious health problems as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.
- Being more mindful of how your dietary choices impact the world can be a big benefit—and example—to everyone.
- The Food Impact Meter's modest number of questions does not include a number of considerations, such as sodium content, animal welfare, and organic farming methods.