

BC At The Table



Introductory Discussion and Activity

What is a food system?

Where is food grown? Who produces it? How does it get to our plates? The many steps that food goes through from farm, land or sea to table constitute the food system:

- Production: how food is grown, raised, harvested or caught
- Processing: how food is processed to make it ready for distribution
- Distribution: includes packaging, marketing, transportation, storage and retailing of food
- Access: how food is acquired, whether from a store, restaurant, food bank, farmers' market, foraging, or other setting
- Consumption: how food is prepared and eaten

Each step requires **inputs** (such as soil, water, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, compost, labour, technology, transportation systems, energy) and generates **outputs** (such as food, waste, pollution, packaging, and compost). Each step also involves a number of people in various occupations and businesses.

Indigenous food systems

The first human food systems in British Columbia were primarily based on traditional harvesting strategies, including hunting, gathering and cultivating root crops. The ancestors of First Nations peoples often practised periodic migration to take advantage of seasonal resources, including the abundant salmon runs and a number of native seasonal fruits.¹

Indigenous food systems include all of the land, air, water, soil and culturally important plant, animal and fungi species that have sustained Indigenous peoples over thousands of years. All parts of Indigenous food systems are inseparable and ideally function in healthy, interdependent relationships.²

Learn more about Indigenous food systems here:

1. The Indigenous Food Systems Network indigenousfoodsystems.org
2. Food Systems in British Columbia <https://opentextbc.ca/geography/chapter/6-4-food-systems-in-british-columbia/#:~:text=The%20first%20human%20food%20systems%20in%20British%20Columbia,runs%20and%20a%20number%20of%20native%20seasonal%20fruits>

[columbia/#:~:text=The%20first%20human%20food%20systems%20in%20British%20Columbia,runs%20and%20a%20number%20of%20native%20seasonal%20fruits](https://opentextbc.ca/geography/chapter/6-4-food-systems-in-british-columbia/#:~:text=The%20first%20human%20food%20systems%20in%20British%20Columbia,runs%20and%20a%20number%20of%20native%20seasonal%20fruits)

Why buy BC foods?

The food choices we make don't simply affect our health. They also affect the health of our food system.

Buying BC foods supports our economy

When we buy BC foods, we are providing a very strong, direct support to our economy.

- The agrifood and seafood* industry in BC generates a significant \$14.2 billion dollars a year in combined gross revenues. (2017)
- In 2017, BC produced over 200 agrifood commodities (worth \$3.2 billion annually in sales) and over 100 species of fish, shellfish and marine plants (worth \$1.2 billion annually in sales).
- About 24,000 people earn their income directly from a farm. (2017)
- The food industry in our province employs over 300,000 people. (2017)
- Spending on food that is entirely local (i.e., from farm to fork within a single province) will have a greater impact on the provincial economy than spending on food that is imported from out of province or food that is sent outside the province for processing before being brought back for sale. In 2008, 16% of the value of unprocessed foods produced in British Columbia was consumed in the province, and 37% of the value of total food spending remained in this province (Edge, 2013).

* The agrifood and seafood industry includes food produced from agriculture, aquaculture and commercial fishing, as well as food and beverage processing.

Buying BC foods protects the environment

When we choose BC foods, we are buying environmental care by supporting farmers who are on the leading edge of producing food in an environmentally responsible manner.

- BC farmers use fertilizers and herbicides at a much lower rate than the rest of Canada. Instead, they are relying on natural methods such as planting a diversity of crops. In the Peace region,

for example, where most of our grains are grown, farmers raise wheat, oats, barley, rye, canola, cattle, and recently, dried beans. By raising these crops in rotation, the Peace grain farmers are able to nourish their soil without the use of fertilizers. Apple farmers in the Okanagan are replanting their orchards to include many apple varieties. Maintaining this diversity is important for a healthy, stable crop. It is also important for controlling pests.

- BC is a world leader in developing and using Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is a system that uses biological and cultural methods to manage pest problems. More recent knowledge allows farmers to use beneficial insects to control pests. Many BC crops, such as the hothouse crops, have made such successful use of IPM that chemical controls are rarely, if ever, used.
- BC is the first province in Canada to have a province-wide certified organic program. BC has the highest percentage of all provinces reporting organic production.

Buying BC foods supports our community

98% of BC farms are still family-owned. This means that agriculture in our province is very much a community affair. Our farms are not controlled by large corporations with interests outside our communities—as is the case in other farming regions of North America.

Buying BC foods maintains food security at home and around the world

Food security is having access to a healthy, sustainable food system. It is not just about feeding hungry people. It is about continuing to be able to feed everyone with safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable foods while maintaining healthy communities.

We can all play a role in achieving and maintaining food security by making food choices that create a healthy economy, a healthy environment, a healthy community and a healthy world. When we buy BC foods, we are taking responsibility for feeding ourselves rather than relying on other countries to feed us. If we depend on other countries for food, not only do we lose control over how our food is produced, but we deprive other countries of the land they could use to feed their own population. While this doesn't mean we need to lose all trade

connections, many advocates suggest we aim for becoming 75% self-reliant for our food.

Sustainable agriculture is...

- Dynamic in its ability to respond rapidly to changing economic, environmental and other conditions
- Responsible to places and communities, with the goal of meeting society's food and textile needs in the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
- Using practices that support a healthy environment, including conserving soil, water, energy and biodiversity

Take action

The more we buy BC foods, the more we improve the control we have over how our food is produced, the more we protect our environment for future food production, and the more we provide economic and social stability for our communities.

We are fortunate in BC to be able to raise a bountiful variety of food. Enjoy what each season brings:

- Buy local food whenever possible:
 - at school,
 - at work,
 - at meetings,
 - at home.
- Set a food policy at home, at school, at work, or for your municipality.
- Support policies that support the local agrifoods industry.
- Make connections with farmers:
 - go to the farmers' market,
 - buy a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share,
 - visit a farm.
- When seasonal foods are limited, choose frozen, canned or dried BC food products.
- Grow your own vegetable garden, or start a school garden at your school or a community garden in your neighbourhood.

Links:

BC Agrifood and Seafood Domestic Consumption Study. 2018. BC Stats.
www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/farm-management/market-development/4496_bcstats_locafoodconsumption_finalreport_mar_22.pdf

Cultivating Opportunities: Canada's Growing Appetite for Local Food. 2013. Jessica Edge, Conference Board of Canada's Centre for Food in Canada
www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=5674

Local Food Futures for British Columbia: Findings from Regional Dialogues. 2015. Real Estate Foundation of BC.
kpu.ca/sites/default/files/ISFS/Local%20Food%20Futures%20for%20British%20Columbia.pdf

Sector Snapshot 2017: B.C. Agrifood & Seafood. 2017. Ministry of Agriculture.
www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/statistics/industry-and-sector-profiles/sector-snapshots/bc_agriculture_seafood_and_agrifood_sector_snapshot_2017.pdf?bcgovtm=CSMLS

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank Eric D. Wong for reviewing the Introductory Discussion and Activity Guide and providing activity suggestions.

QUIZ: Are You A Regional Eater?

1. When purchasing produce, how frequently do you look for information that tells you where it is from?
a. seldom/never b. sometimes c. always
2. In the winter, how does your consumption of dried, canned and frozen produce compare to fresh?
a. decreases b. stays the same c. increases
3. During the growing season, how much of your produce comes from farm stands, farmers' markets, directly from farmers, from a CSA, from your own garden or from produce labelled as "local" at the supermarket?
a. none b. some c. all or most
4. During the year, how often do you eat bananas?
a. regularly b. sometimes c. hardly ever
5. Which of the following winter vegetables do you eat regularly during the winter months?

<input type="checkbox"/> potatoes	<input type="checkbox"/> cabbage
<input type="checkbox"/> turnips	<input type="checkbox"/> carrots
<input type="checkbox"/> parsnips	<input type="checkbox"/> rutabagas
<input type="checkbox"/> winter squash	<input type="checkbox"/> Jerusalem artichokes
<input type="checkbox"/> beets	<input type="checkbox"/> onions

How many did you check?

a. 1-3 b. 4-7 c. 8-10

Score: For each letter, give yourself:

- a: 1 point
- b: 2 points
- c: 3 points

If your total score is:

- 12-15:** You are a seasonal expert and a real champion of local foods. Keep up the good work!
- 9-11:** You rely mostly on local foods. Why not look for more local foods to include in your diet?
- 5-8:** Your diet probably changes little throughout the year. Why not make some changes? Eating foods produced in our region has many benefits.

Adapted from *Are You A Regional and Seasonal Eater?* by Jennifer Wilkins

Optional Activity: Student Worksheet

Part A. What is a food system?

What is a food system?

The many steps that food goes through from farm, land or sea to table constitutes the food system. Where is food grown? Who produces it? How does it get to our plates?

a. Match the correct definition to the food system step by drawing a line:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| A. Processing | 1. How people get food, whether from a store, restaurant, food bank, farmers' market, foraging, or other setting |
| B. Access | 2. How food is grown, raised, harvested or caught |
| C. Distribution | 3. How food is handled or manufactured to make it ready for distribution |
| D. Consumption | 4. How food is marketed, transported and stored, as well as the retailing of food |
| E. Production | 5. How food is prepared and eaten |

b. Correctly order the 5 steps of a food system from above and identify which photo aligns with each step:

- 1. _____ photo: _____
- 2. _____ photo: _____
- 3. _____ photo: _____
- 4. _____ photo: _____
- 5. _____ photo: _____



c. Each step within a food system requires inputs and generates outputs. Place an 'I' beside the inputs and an 'O' beside the outputs:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| _____ Soil | _____ Packaging |
| _____ Transportation systems | _____ Water |
| _____ Food | _____ Seeds |
| _____ Fertilizers | _____ Technology |
| _____ Pesticides | _____ Energy |
| _____ Pollution | _____ Oxygen |
| _____ Labour | _____ Waste |
| _____ Greenhouse gases | _____ Knowledge |

Part B. Draw your own food system

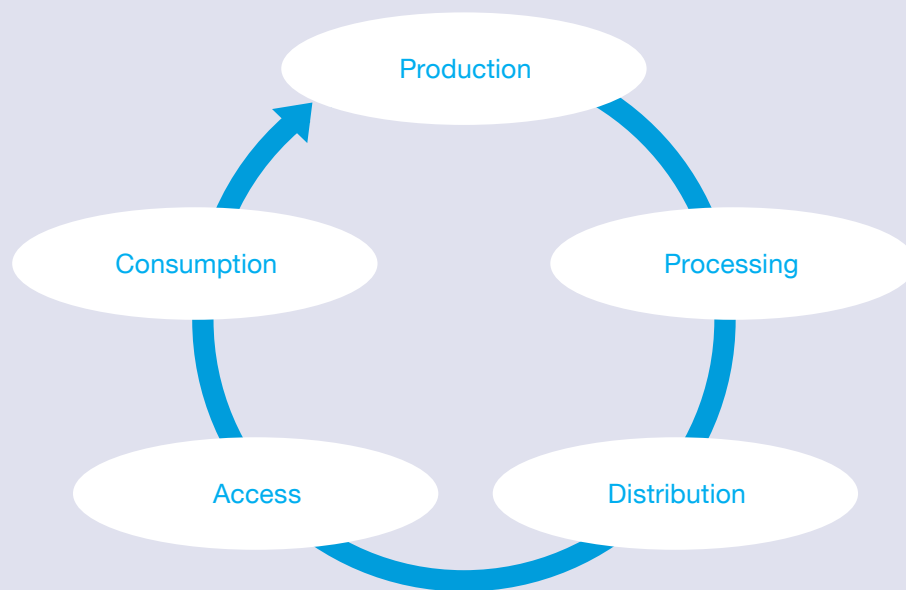


Photos provided by Eric D. Wong

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Draw your own food system. Think about what you ate for breakfast, lunch or dinner yesterday and choose one of these food items. Find out how that food item was produced, processed, distributed and accessed before you ate it.



Answers

Part A.

- a) A3, B1, C4, D5, E2
- b)
1. Production (photo b)
 2. Processing (photo d)
 3. Distribution (photo e)
 4. Access (photo a)
 5. Consumption (photo c)
- c)
- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| I - Soil | I - Packaging |
| I - Transportation systems | I - Water |
| ○ - Food | I - Seeds |
| I - Fertilizers | I - Technology |
| I - Pesticides | I - Energy |
| ○ - Pollution | ○ - Oxygen |
| I - Labour | ○ - Waste |
| ○ - Greenhouse gases | I - Knowledge |