

Seasonal is sexy

Time: 1 ½ hours (first ½ hour research, then full 1 hour lesson for practical)

Group

Purpose

To realise that using seasonal ingredients can lead to better meals and less environmental damage.

Background to the task

We have grown used to the idea that any food should be available at any time of the year. So in the supermarkets we can find strawberries in December, apples in March, celery in June and so on. 'Spring' lamb can be bought at all times.

Partly this is because we can freeze certain foods. Often it is because it is grown far away where it is a different season or simply hotter and then shipped or even flown to Britain. Supermarkets buy food from around the world. But transporting food around the world damages the environment and makes it cost more.

On top of this larger farmers have turned to large-scale, energy intensive farming. Pesticides and fertilizers are widely used. The amount of food packaging has increased enormously. These also have a major effect on the environment. See the unit of work called 'Less is more' for more information on packaging.

Many people believe that eating seasonal food is healthier – healthier for you personally as it is fresher (it has not travelled so far), and healthier for the global environment.

Carrying out the task

You are invited to produce a mouth-watering dish of your own, based on seasonal foods.

Either you can adapt a recipe by substituting a seasonal ingredient for one that is out of season.

Or find a seasonal recipe from a book or on the web – try these sites

http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/in_season/

<http://www.foodlinks.info/buying/seasonal.php>

<http://www.foodlinks.info/buying/VegSeasons.php>

<http://www.rivercottage.net/index.jsp> (click onto 'seasonal recipes')

<http://www.farmersmarkets.net/>

Recording results

In the first lesson (½ hour) look through recipes and decide what you want to do. Copy or print out the recipe and make a note on how you will adapt it.

In the second lesson you will make and eat your dish. Write an evaluation saying

- How successful it was
- How it might be improved
- Why you have used seasonal ingredients.

Teachers' notes

Materials needed

Seasonal foods, recipes that do not use these foods. Use the downloadable student booklet from this unit to work through a similar Design and Make activity.

Timing

The suggestion is half an hour of research and an hour for making. This can be varied.

Possible extension activities

Visit a supermarket and list the fruit and vegetables that are not local. Identify which are not seasonal in UK. Try a taste test on them if possible. (There may be occasions when there are both imported and local varieties of the same produce e.g. strawberries. Comparing the taste of these could be really instructive!)

Visit a supermarket and find organic foods. Make a list of the prices of organic foods and their non-organic equivalents. (You may have to do a little maths with them on unit pricing! Or get your maths colleagues to take it on as a maths investigation?) If visiting a supermarket from school is unrealistic this can be set as homework, or done on the web. Either way the aim is to see how organic produce compares in price with non-organic. Findings can be pooled and discussed in class.

More able students could be asked to develop a food product that will encourage people to eat foods that are in season, organic, or both. They need to think about how it would be promoted in shop.

Focus on food miles

Another extension for research is to look at food miles. For background information see <http://www.mcspotlight.org/media/reports/foodmiles.html>

Working in groups the students can

- Choose a typical meal that one of them might eat at home
- Identify all the ingredients needed
- Research in the supermarket where these come from
- Make a visual display showing for each ingredient what it is, where it comes from, how it is transported, and how many miles it has travelled.

The Alliance for Better Farming also has an interesting site which promotes food that is local and seasonal http://www.sustainweb.org/chain_help.asp. This site has excellent links that will help you find out how to reduce the food miles and boost sustainable food economies. It also has useful links.

Did you know that

- Britons spend about £89 billion pounds a year on food
- Each person makes on average 221 shopping trips per year, covering an average distance of 4 miles (6.4km – up 4 km since 1985)
- About 12.2 million tons of food is imported each year and 7.4 millions tons exported
- The environmental cost of food transport is about £2.1 billion each year
- 28% of road freight is food or produce
- 1.6 billion tons are carried are carried 149 billion ton-kilometres
- 23% more food is on the roads and it is travelling 65% further than in 1985
- £2.1 billion pounds could be saved if all food was sourced locally
- The air mile cost of importing food is trivial compared to the huge costs of transporting home-produced food around the country.

According to Professor Tim Lang of the City University, London, “Supermarkets have invested billions in a hyper-efficient, just-in-time system of food distribution and actually, it’s cuckoo. This is an area where customers are suffering from an information deficit.”

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