



Sustainable Dining



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Grade Level: 7-10

Subject Correlation: Economics, Home Economics, General Education

Objective: Students will learn how and why to purchase sustainable foods and consumer goods.

1. Students will be able to define and identify sustainable foods and consumer products.
2. Students will be able to calculate the difference in prices between sustainable products and everyday products and apply the differences to the cost of a meal.
3. Students will be able to explain and evaluate the benefits of buying sustainable products.

Future Use: This exercise will encourage students to evaluate their choices when they and their families purchase groceries. In the future, students will make knowledgeable decisions about the effects of their everyday purchases.

Teacher preparation: Visit both a conventional grocery store and a grocery store that carries or specializes in sustainable or organic products. Take information, advertisements, coupons, etc. with information regarding the prices of various foods and goods. To find a specialty grocery store in your community, visit The Sustainable Table's Eat Well Guide at www.eatwellguide.org/index.cfm. You may be able to find all the coupons you need in the Sunday edition of the newspaper.

- If students do not have access to the Internet in class, visit The Sustainable Table at www.sustainabletable.org/ and print and copy the following pages for your class: "[Why Buy Sustainable](#)," "[What is Sustainable Agriculture](#)," and "[The Issues: Factory Farming](#)."

Length: One class period

Outline (with times)

10 minute introduction exercise

To prepare your students, allow them to visit www.sustainabletable.org/ or print and copy for your class: "[Why Buy Sustainable](#)," "[What is Sustainable Agriculture](#)," and "[The Issues: Factory Farming](#)." Read together or in groups.

15 minutes

Questions for class or small group discussion:

1. What is sustainable agriculture? Give three characteristics of sustainable agriculture. (See "What Is Sustainable Agriculture?" at www.sustainabletable.org/intro/whatis/)
2. Describe three reasons why a consumer would prefer to buy sustainable agriculture products. (See "Why Buy Sustainable?" at www.sustainabletable.org/intro/why/)
3. Describe what happens to animals raised on a factory farm. (See "The Issues: Factory Farming" at www.sustainabletable.org/issues/factoryfarming/)
4. Why might a consumer not buy sustainable agriculture products?

5. Author Michael Pollan writes that “every time we purchase food we are voting with our dollar.” How does your purchasing power (what you buy) impact and determine what is available for consumption in the future? (See “Why Buy Sustainable” at www.sustainabletable.org/intro/why/)
6. What do you think? Would you go the extra mile to buy sustainable agricultural products? Why/why not? Be sure to consider the “hidden” costs as well.

15 minutes

Class discussion or essays:

1. What are the advantages/disadvantages of buying sustainable agriculture?
2. Do consumers pay more for sustainable foods? Consider the hidden costs described in the literature.
3. Is the difference in price meaningful enough to affect your purchasing choices? Why/why not?
4. Should government require producers to provide more information about their products to allow consumers to determine their sustainability?

Extension Activity #1 (Optional): Sustainable Dining (20 minutes)

Students will create a menu for a meal. They will then have the opportunity to “shop” for organic and conventional groceries. Students will work in small groups. In order to compare prices, students will need information from grocery stores or access to the Rodale Institute’s Organic Price Index at www.newfarm.org/opx/, which allows them to compare organic and conventional prices.

- Individually or in small groups, students will list the main ingredients of a meal they want to prepare.
- Students will list and compare prices for these items using the collected information and advertised prices from both the conventional grocery and from the specialized grocery store.
- Each group will tally the difference in price. As a class, compare your findings. What about the hidden costs to the environment, to our health?

Additional Extension Activities

- a) Research local grocers who carry sustainable agriculture products. (View Sustainable Table’s Eat Well Guide at www.eatwellguide.org/index.cfm) Students can write letters to local grocers thanking them for carrying sustainable and organic agriculture products or letters encouraging grocers to carry sustainable or organic agriculture products.
- b) Consider keeping a daily journal or class list of sustainable agriculture products purchased by students in different classes.
- c) Ask a school employee in the school cafeteria if they purchase sustainable agriculture products. Why/why not? Can this policy be changed?

Be sure to let your students know where the closest sustainable grocery stores and restaurants are in their neighborhoods using the Eat Well Guide at <http://www.eatwellguide.org/index.cfm>.