

Section 2:

Discovering the Food System Project

This section provides a guide for conducting a Discovering The Food System project. You are provided with tools for exploring your food system. What you choose to focus on and the methods you use are flexible and should be guided by your own individual interests, or the interests of the class, club, or group with whom you are working. It is this flexibility that will insure a high level of engagement on your part. The food system discovery is accomplished through a search of existing food system facts, food product or meal analyses, and interviews with people who represent the food system, as well as a public survey about some aspect of the food system that interests you the most. The program does not end with discovery, however.

Step 1: Finding Food System Facts provides tools and guidelines to locating and understanding data that has already been collected on the food system, and is therefore available for use and interpretation. This is similar to the processes being used across the country to conduct community food assessments. Also, food systems stories are frequently in the news. You will learn about the breadth of issues related to the food system that you might read about in any daily newspaper.

Step 2: Learning from People in the Food System will help you gain a better understanding of your food system by helping you interview some of the people that you will identify as being part of the food system. This step in the food system project builds on the previous step by guiding you in a process of clarifying the aspects of the food system that most interest you, identifying who is directly involved in those aspects, and formulating questions about issues for those most likely to have interesting insights. This step in the Discovering The Food System project provides an opportunity to gain experience with a qualitative social science methodology: the open-ended in-person interview. You will practice basic interviewing techniques in a role play, contact community members who are part of the food system, arrange to meet them, and finally, actually conduct in-person interviews.

Step 3: Community Survey – Getting Ready provides you with an opportunity to gain experience with a classic quantitative social science methodology: the survey. By now you will have learned a lot about the food system, how it has changed over time, how it works (and does not work), who makes decisions that help shape it, and how people can make change in the food system. In the in-person interviews and gathering of food system facts, several interests, questions and concerns undoubtedly will have surfaced. Here, you will get a chance to learn how some segment of the broader community feels about these issues. You will learn how to design a questionnaire, and chose a population sample before distributing the survey and compiling the results.

Step 4: Conducting a Community Survey will help you to move from preparing the survey to actually conducting it. You will learn how to prepare a survey for distribution, deciding what method of distribution is best for your needs, as well as how to collect and compile the results mathematically.

Step 5: Sharing Food System Stories with Your Community introduces you to the tools for you need to share your newly obtained food system understandings with the community with an eye for creating community change. You will learn about the potential impact information can have on policies in a school, or in the broader community. (Story telling, Newspaper articles, Reporters, Community Action and Change, PowerPoint projects.)