

Lesson 1:

# ORGANIC FOOD

*What is organic food? Why does it matter?*





“It is **ironic** to think  
that **man** might  
**determine** his own  
**future** by **something**  
so seemingly **trivial**  
as the choice of an  
**insect spray**”

*Rachel Carson*  
*Author, Silent Spring*

## GOALS

- Students are introduced to the concept of fresh, local, organic foods and engage more deeply with real-life farmers.
- Using meals as an opportunity to learn that healthy organic food is fuel for your body – makes you feel better both physically and mentally.
- Understanding the connections in a “food web” and the importance of organic food options for its impact on our food supply and on people, all species, and our planet.

## PREPARATION

- **Review Lesson 1**
- **Farmer visit:**
  - Read and share farmer biographical material with ambassadors. Ask for one or two ambassador volunteers to welcome the visiting farmer and introduce them to the group. The presenting ambassadors should write up a short intro and practice their presentation during the Meet & Greet session.
  - Prepare questions with the ambassadors during the Meet & Greet session so they are ready to ask the farmer for wisdom they want to know.
- **Activity: We are all connected.** A hands-on interactive activity to better understand the food web and how organic agriculture helps insects, animals and humans thrive.
- **Taste Test:** Prepare produce samples with seasonal bounty from visiting farmer and distribute with help from ambassadors

## LESSON MATERIALS (based on 30 students)

- 3 - 4 rolls of thick hemp string
- Pictures print outs for Food Web activity
  - Dolphin, worms, jellyfish, shark, rollie pollie, salamander, corn, rice, wheat, fox, rabbit
- Seasonal produce samples from farmer
- Hand sanitizing wipes
- Gloves for students and staff to serve produce
- 30 compostable bowls or plates for tasting
- Napkins

## 1. WELCOME (1-2 minutes)

- If you have worked with this group of students before, say hello, remind them of your name.
- If working with a new group, and there is time, please lead an icebreaker where you ask students to say their names and their favorite fruit or vegetable and if the first gathering of Ambassadors, why they joined.

## 2. SET THE SCENE (5 minutes)

- Tell students that we will be talking about food, eating food, enjoying the community that food creates, and learning about different ways people grow food and why that is important.
- Let them know that when you ask a question you always appreciate it when students raise their hands quietly so you can call on them, that way it's fair and people don't talk over each other.

## 3. FARMER TALK AND Q&A (20 minutes)

- Introduce the guest farmer visiting that day.
- Guest will share their story and experience as an organic farmer.
- After 10 -15 minutes, invite students to ask farmer questions for 5 - 10 minutes.
  - Have ambassadors prepare questions beforehand and be ready to raise their hands to ask them

## 4. PRODUCE TASTING (15 minutes)

Teacher explains how we are incorporating fresh, local, organic produce into many of the meals served in WCCUSD. We are hosting tastings with students to see what they most enjoy eating as we work to serve more organic meals with the help of Conscious Kitchen for breakfast, lunch, and snack.

- Ambassadors work with farmer and staff to help distribute produce to all ASP students
  - Make sure there are gloves for all who are serving and a napkin
  - Teacher shares with students that their opinions matter and welcome their honest and constructive feedback.
  - Ask students to raise their hands if they liked the food they ate.
  - For those who raised their hands, ask what they liked about it.
  - Have one of the leadership team take notes about responses and counts of hands raised

## 5. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF 'ORGANIC' AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT (5 minutes)

- Tell students you are going to ask a question and you want them to answer using their thumbs.
  - Explain using body language: thumbs up means: you would be happy, thumbs sideways: it would be ok, thumbs down: not so great.
  - Ask students: How would you feel if I said I was bringing burritos? How would you feel if I said it was an organic burrito? Ask students to show thumbs again.
- Ask students: What do you think **organic** means? Ask students to share their ideas with someone sitting next to them. Leadership team to walk around and take notes of what students are saying. If students are not easily making pairs, please assist separating people who may be inattentive and ensuring that no one is left out - or ask the ASP staff person to help with this. Then as time allows, ask students to share their ideas with the group.
  - Maybe prompt ambassadors to be ready to share and/or the leadership team shares a few examples of what they overheard. (ex: I heard people sharing that organic means: fresh, plant based, healthy, too healthy...)
- You can say: Many of you were very close, may I share the full definition? When we talk about organic food, we are talking about the way farmers grow their fruits, vegetables, grains, even milk and meat. (You may want to ask - what's a grain? If they don't know, explain it is things like: rice, wheat and corn)
- When farmers grow organic food it means they are prioritizing the health of water and soil, people and animals, and they are making a choice to support organic practices for current and future generations.
- How do they do that?
  - They do not put harmful chemicals on the farmland or the crops that we all eat that makes it hard for all living things to thrive.
  - They plant special crops called cover crops to help build healthy soils that can remove carbon from the atmosphere and retain more water.
  - Organic farms support more species, like beneficial pollinators, than conventional farms.



## *6. WE ARE ALL CONNECTED (30 minutes depending on number of students)*

- Introduce the insects and animals that will be part of the activity while the rest of the teaching team holds up photos for the students to see.
- With the help of the ambassadors, divide all of the participating students into groups with 8- 10 students per group (if there are enough students)
- Ask the students to stand in a circle with about 3 feet between each person. Start by saying, think about a farm or garden (if they have a school garden, have them in the garden).

## **Question 1: What kinds of insects or bugs live in a garden or farm?**

- If they have a school garden or a garden at home, they may say: ladybug, roly poly, ant, butterfly or worm etc. If they have little exposure to gardens you can ask: “has anyone ever dug in the dirt? Did you find anything living there?” Someone is likely to have seen worms and you can start there. Or ask another leading question to help get them started.
- Give the end of the string to the student who raised their hand and said the first small garden animal: ladybug, roly poly, ant, butterfly or worm...
- Say: hold the string and remember what animal or insect you are!

## **Question 2: What other insects or bugs live in a farm or garden?**

- Once the next student raises their hand and answers: ladybugs, roly polys, worms... unroll the string a little and hand it to them to hold, and ask them to keep it taut (If they don't know what taut means, demonstrate it with two ambassadors holding a string at both ends, taut; pulled tight)
- If you have a group with over 8 students, let 4 or 5 students name and hold the string for small garden animals.

## **Question 3: What animals are really small, beat their wings really fast and eat the nectar from the flowers?**

- Help students get to hummingbirds. In Spanish: picaflor or colibri

## **Question 4: Ask students what eats: (ladybugs, roly pollys, worms - whichever bugs or insects were named)**

- When a student raises their hand and answers: birds, snakes, spiders, gophers, skunks, frogs, or salamanders... unroll the string a little and hand it to them to hold.
- If a larger group you can ask: what other animals eat ladybugs, roly polys, ants, butterflies or worms...?

## **Question 5: What do birds/snakes/spiders/gophers/skunks/fox/-frogs, or salamanders... need?**

- Students may answer: trees/sun/shelter - you can say yes, yes, what else do they need? It's fine if a student holds the string for sun, or plants, but, try to get them to water and give someone the string to hold for water. (The teacher can mimic drinking water from a glass to help them get there.)

### Question 6: What lives in the water?

– Students may answer: fish, jellyfish, whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, crabs...  
Unroll the string a little more and give it to them to hold.

### Question 7: What else lives in the water?

– Students may answer: fish, jellyfish, whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, crabs...  
Unroll the string a little more and give it to them to hold.

### Question 8: What else lives in the water?

– Students may answer: fish, jellyfish, whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, crabs...  
Unroll the string a little more and give it to them to hold.

### Question 9: What eats fish?

– Students may answer: seals, dolphins, otters.... Unroll the string a little more  
and give it to them to hold

### Question 10: What else eats fish? Or, what eats seals or dolphins or otters?

– Students may answer: sharks

### Question 11: Who else eats fish?

– Lead students to answer: humans (Teacher can ask: do any of you ever eat  
fish?)

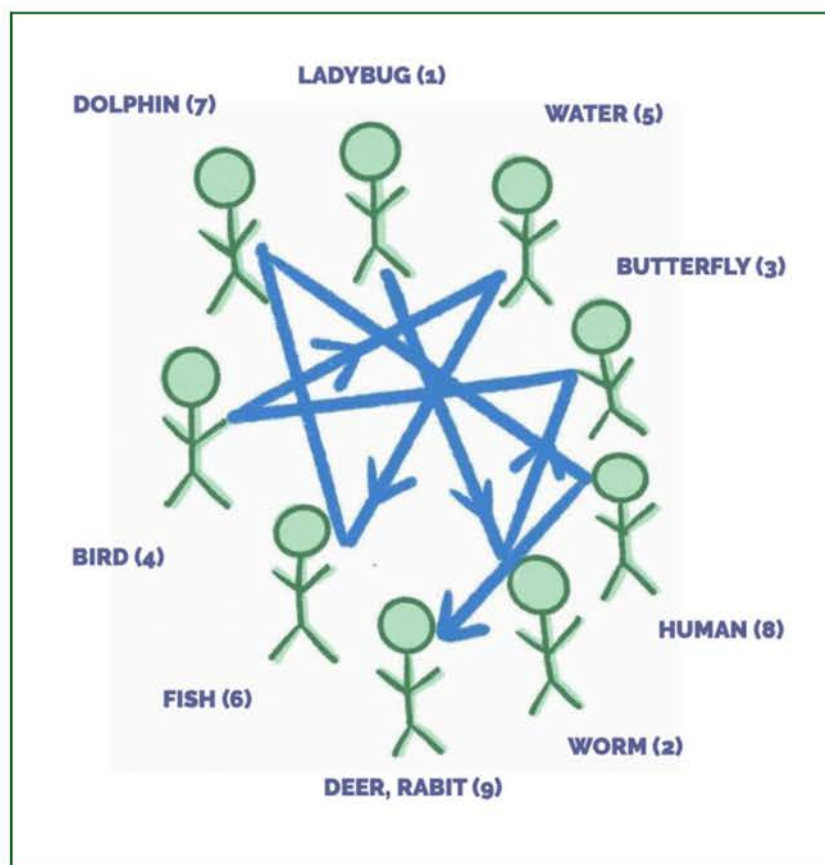
### Question 12: Who else needs water?

– Whales, birds, humans, coyotes, bobcats, foxes, rabbits... Unroll the string a  
little more and give it to them to hold.

• **Repeat the questions** or add your own to make sure all of the students are holding onto a part of the roll of string. By now there should be a taut and interesting web of string between the students. **The sequence of questions and answers does not need to be linear or circular, we're simply showing how everything is connected in some way.**



- **Next, tell a story:** There were some bugs eating the plants in the garden or on a farm and a farmer growing **non-organic** food sprayed some poison to get rid of the bugs eating the plants. SSSSS (sound effect to pretend you're spraying the poison) But, uh oh, the bug poison also killed the ladybugs who eat the bugs who eat the plants, and the other bugs and insects in the garden the bees, butterflies, rolie pollies, ants... Ask all the students holding the string for bees/ladybugs/rolly pollys/butterflies etc. to let go of the string.
- Ask students: Raise one hand if you felt it when they let go of the string?
- Next ask, who is a: bird/snake/spider/gopher/skunk/frog/fox or salamander... that eats the bees/ladybugs/roly polys/butterflies etc? Now all of you get sick from eating the poisoned bugs and insects. Ask this group to let go of the string.
- Now, explain that it rains, and the poison that was sprayed washes down into the creeks and rivers, the bay and the ocean.
- The fish get the poison and let go of the string.
- All the animals that eat the fish or crabs or jellyfish get the poison from them, or there is not enough fish/crabs/jellyfish, and the animals that eat them don't have food, and they let go of the string.
- Who else eats fish and crab etc? Humans, the humans get some of the poison too, and let go of the string.
- Then the water is left, but the water has pollution in it, so it lets go of the string.



*Students should be aligned in this fashion during the activity*

## 7. WRAP-UP (15 minutes)

Bring everyone back into one big group. Teachers tell students there are three important pieces we didn't talk about.

- Who works on the farm?
  - Farm workers, and many of them do not have a lot of resources or choices, do you think they get affected by the poisons being sprayed? They do.
- Who else works on the farm to pollinate the plants so they will grow food: fruit on the trees, and vegetables on the plants?
  - The bees, butterflies, hummingbirds. What happens if they are hurt or killed by the poison, can they still pollinate so the plants will grow food? No.
- What does this have to do with the cows and chickens and pigs that we eat?
  - They all eat plants, if the plants have poison, that affects us when we eat them.
- ***So what does organic have to do with this story again?*** Organic food is food grown without the use of poisons. Without: pesticides = plant poison, herbicides = insect poisons, or other things that can harm the earth and water and animals and all of us.

## WHAT DO WE WANT THEM TO DO WITH WHAT THEY LEARNED?

- Share with a partner what was the most surprising thing you learned today.
- Use their leadership skills to share in class with peers, as well with friends and families.

Thank the Farmer, the Ambassadors, the students in attendance and all who supported today.

## RESOURCES TO READ BEFORE THE LESSON

### **Action for Healthy Kids here**

Connect your lesson to what is being served in the cafeteria that day as a way to encourage kids to try new, healthy foods.

### **Organic foods, what you need to know here**

The term “organic” refers to the way agricultural products are grown and processed. In the U.S., organic crops must be grown without the use of synthetic herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers, or bioengineered genes (GMOs).

### **10 ways to teach kids about organic and healthy eating here**

Teaching kids about positive eating behaviors early in childhood sets them up for healthy eating habits throughout life. Don't just give them healthy food – tell them why you are giving it to them and what benefit it has on their body

### **Environmental Benefits of Organic here**

Organic farmers strive to preserve and protect natural habitats with the understanding that a diverse biological landscape helps to feed both people and the planet.