

Lesson 2.5: My Community: Food Access

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Time Frame: Multiple class periods

Materials:

- My Community: Food Access Exploration [Google Slides](#) Activity
- Healthy Food Access [interactive map](#)
- My Community: Making Improvements [Worksheet](#)
- California Native Foods List (Slide 19)
- Personal computers

In this lesson, students explore the concept of **food insecurity**, and analyze the health and food accessibility in their own communities. Students practice designing a community that provides healthy, affordable food options, places to exercise, and access to health centers.

Teacher Background:

Food insecurity is a significant barrier to health in Native communities across the United States. According to the **National Institute of Food and Agriculture**, Native Americans as a group have the highest rates of food insecurity, poverty, and diet-related diseases. In the Klamath basin, in Northern California, a staggering **92%** of Native people suffer from food insecurity. Research consistently suggests that increasing access to culturally relevant foods in Native communities is necessary for restoring healthy lifestyles across Indian Country.

As students will see in this lesson, nearly every reservation in the United States can be defined as a **food desert**. This is due to the removal and forcing of Native peoples onto land that was not always their traditional land, and that often lacks the infrastructure to farm and produce food. In addition, overhunting, overfishing, extraction of natural resources, and colonist-led changes to the natural environment have greatly decreased plant and animal species populations that Native peoples rely on for food. This loss of traditional food access results in Native communities often relying on government food rations or relying on one of few grocery/corner stores within reach of their homes.

To counter this problem, Tribal communities are working hard to increase access to traditional foods through community-based programs. For example, the **California Indian Museum and Cultural Center** in Santa Rosa, CA organizes community youth to teach them how to process and cook with traditional ingredients. The museum also conducts research and outreach to learn more about community access to Tribal foods. Recently, the museum installed an **acorn mill** to encourage community members to consume more acorn flour, a traditional staple food to the Pomo people and many other Native California tribes. Tribes in the Klamath region have developed the **Klamath Tribes Food Security Program**, which also works to connect Native communities with traditional foods, and emphasizes the relationship between food and physical, mental, and spiritual health.

While many communities are developing food sovereignty programs such as those described above, it is important to remember that each Native community has its own individual values and traditions surrounding indigenous foods, and so every program looks different. The range of programs are as diverse as California's Native community, incorporating varying levels of tradition.

NOTE: Discussing disease and lack of food access can be triggering for students who have lost loved ones to diet-related diseases. Be prepared to offer students counseling options, space for students to step away, etc.

ENGAGE

As a class, make a list of places where students know they can buy healthy food. Circle the places that students think are affordable for the average family in their community.

Explain to students that if they have access to multiple sources of healthy, affordable food, then they have a higher chance of eating healthy.

Explain to students that if their community has one or no options for healthy, affordable food, then they might live in what is known as a **food desert**. Families that live in food deserts have a higher chance of eating unhealthy foods, because there may not be healthy, affordable options.

Ask students to consider the following question:

1. What are some places that people can access healthy foods?

EXPLORE

Project **Slide 3** of the map **Locations of Food Deserts and Reservations** for students to see.

Explain to students that when the American government seized Native traditional lands, they signed agreements/treaties with Tribal groups that promised them specific areas of land where tribes could live and govern themselves without intervention from the US government. Ideally, tribes would be able to completely support themselves. In most cases, the government broke those treaties, reducing the amount of land given to tribes, or taking the land away entirely. While the government claimed to support Native independence, it did, and still does, little to actually support Tribes in building economies and infrastructure needed to be successful.

Explain to students that the **orange parts** on the map represent **Native American reservations**. The **blue** represents **food deserts**, meaning places where there are little to no stores or food sources.

Ask students the following questions:

1. **What do you notice about the relationship between food deserts and Native American reservations?**
2. **How do you think communities that live in food deserts are impacted?**
3. **Why are Native reservations often also food deserts?**

Explain that making healthy eating decisions depends greatly on the accessibility of foods that are healthy for our bodies and environment.

Note: If you used the [ecosystem/food web health lessons](#), this may be a good time to introduce the concept of making healthy food choices for the Oak Woodlands ecosystem as well as for one's body.

Explain to students that not having enough food can lead to many health problems, including stress.

Project **Slide 4** of the **Food Insecurity Demographic Data** for students to see. Walk students through each piece of data, asking them who experiences the worst rates of food insecurity in the United States.

Students should notice that adults and many children experience food insecurity, as well as single mothers, people living below the poverty line, and many non-white groups.

EXPLAIN

Explain to students that having little access to nutritious, affordable food can lead to many deadly diseases.

The activity in this lesson refers to three major diseases related to poor nutrition and little healthy food access.

The three diseases mentioned are (**Slides 5, 6 & 7**):

- **Type 2 Diabetes:** Occurs when a person eats too many sugary foods for a long time, and their body can no longer digest the sugar. The sugar they eat then builds up in their blood. High levels of sugar in a person's blood can damage their kidneys, liver, and other important organs.
- **High Cholesterol:** When a person eats too many fatty foods, plaque can build up in their arteries and veins, stopping blood from getting where it needs to go.
- **Coronary Heart Disease:** When the arteries in your heart become clogged and full of plaque. This is due to a diet high in calories and cholesterol. It can lead to heart attacks and can require major surgery to alleviate.

When communities have little access to healthy food options and do not have spaces to exercise, rates of these three diseases rise.

ELABORATE

Instruct students to “Make A Copy” of the **My Community: Food Access Exploration Activity** Slide Deck, so that they can type their answers directly onto the slides.

Read **Slide 8** together as a class. Introduce the map linked on **Slide 9**, and give students time to answer questions on the following slides about their community and food accessibility.

Come back together as a class and explain to students that communities that experience food insecurity continue to find ways to combat the problem. Many Native

communities combine traditional ways of growing food with modern technology in order to develop **Food Sovereignty**. Food Sovereignty is when communities are self-reliant and are able to grow and provide food to their communities without the support of the federal or state governments, or major corporations.

Choose one of the following short videos highlighting ways Native peoples use traditional methods to provide healthy food options to their communities:

- [Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project](#)
- [PBS Airs Documentary on Food Insecurity & Tribal Solutions with PWNA Support](#)
- [Indigenous Seed Keepers Network](#)

Examples of non-Native communities working to promote food security:

- [Soul Fire Farm - Ending Racism and Injustice in the Food System](#)
- [Ron Finley: Urban Gangsta Gardener in South Central LA | Game Changers](#)
(*mature content*)

EVALUATE

Hand out the **My Community: Making Improvements worksheet**; ask students to draw out a community that has multiple healthy food sources (restaurants, gardens, and stores) as well as at least two places for community members to exercise, and any other elements they think support health (ie. a hospital, recreational spaces, parks, etc.)

When students are finished, have them share with a partner.

To wrap up the lesson, as a class, explore the questions below. Encourage students to refer to data and information from the lesson.

1. **What are some challenges that people have when it comes to accessing healthy food?**
2. **When designing a community, what elements should be included to support people's health?**
3. **What are some ways that Native and non-Native peoples work to promote healthy eating in their communities?**

VOCABULARY

Indigenous: Produced, growing, living, or occurring Natively or naturally in a particular region or environment

Food Sovereignty: To achieve independence in terms of the production and provision of food. Communities who achieve food sovereignty grow, distribute, and consume their own food from their own food sources

Nutrition: Related to eating foods that provide the nutrients needed to live. Nutrients found in food and drink help provide energy to the body.

Indigenous Foods: Locally grown food that is originally from the area and has been eaten by Native people for thousands of years. Food is grown with no chemicals or pesticides; food is grown in just the right amount.

Settler/introduced Foods: Foods that come from other countries or from outside the local ecosystem. Foods are sometimes healthy and sometimes damaging to health. Sometimes these plants can harm the local ecosystem.

Processed Foods: Foods that have been altered or changed from their original form. They often have added flavors, or artificial substances added, and might taste different than their original form

Whole Foods: Foods that have very little, or no processing/have not been changed from their original form. Foods do not have additives, or any artificial substances added.

Affordable: Reasonably priced, so that people have enough money to purchase something comfortably.

Food Desert: An urban area or well-occupied area in which it is difficult to buy affordable food, or where food is not easily available.

Food Insecurity: Having an unreliable source of food or inconsistent ability to get food due to income or other factors.

Poverty: Being extremely poor.

STANDARDS

CA Health Standards:

1.1.N Describe the short- and long-term impact of nutritional choices on health.

1.10.N Identify the impact of nutrition on chronic disease.

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.7

Integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a flowchart, diagram, model, graph, or table).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.9

Compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic.

CA Indian Essential Understandings:

Essential Understanding 4: California Indian peoples' histories and cultures have been and continue to be impacted by foreign, state, and federal policies.

Essential Understanding 5: Land and place are unique and inextricably tied to Tribal cultures.

RESOURCES

- [What are the Connections Between Food Insecurity and Health?](#) Feeding America: Health and Hunger.
- [USDA FoodData Central Nutritional Breakdown](#)

- [*Increasing Access to Food in California's Hoopa Valley.*](#) CA FreshWorks.
- [*Mapping Food Deserts in the U.S.*](#) USDA.
- [Oxford Dictionary](#)
- [Dictionary.com](#)