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Carbon Foodprint Study at the Santa Fe Farmers' Market

In the fall of 2009, the students in the 5th/6th grade class at Santa Fe School for the Arts and Sciences were asked the following questions: "Where does our food come from?"; and "How do we get our food?"



These questions were intentionally broad and open-ended in hopes that we would discover a wide range of answers during our explorations.

The student's first responses basically stated that "our food comes from the store."

Our expedition then began at the Santa Fe Farmers Market. The students were encouraged to find out what was being offered at the market, where does it come from, and who are the people that provide these resources? We spent several visits getting to know the market, the vendors, and what the market has to offer.

We also made visits to many of our local supermarkets. From these explorations, we began to realize that we have lots of choices in our town and that many factors are involved in determining how and where we



obtain our food. The students created a list of the factors that can affect our choices:



proximity to a store or market, amount of free time available, economic factors, local and non-local options, organic and conventional foods, and personal values. We also discovered that many of our stores offered a wide variety of foods that embodied many complex choices and that most of our local grocery stores offer a range of 'organic' and 'conventionally' grown foods.

One striking observation was that the food in our grocery stores comes from all over the world. In the produce aisles alone we found foods from Costa Rica, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, France, Taiwan, Canada, Belize, El Salvador, Uruguay, Spain, South Africa and from different regions of the United States. After conducting some research, we found that most of the foods originating in other countries are flown to the United States, and then shipped to Santa Fe via truck.

The students then selected produce items they were interested in, and - using fuel efficiency figures for a 737 airplane, a big-rig truck, and a regular pick-up truck, and 'best guess' estimates of travel routes - the students calculated the amount of fuel required to ship a plane, truck, or pick-up truck full of produce from its point of origin to Santa Fe. They also calculated the kilograms of CO₂ produced using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol tools. Once they had assembled all of the data and performed their calculations, the students created Carbon 'Foodprint' Maps showing the travel routes and displaying their research and graphs. The results are quite astounding.



After interviewing more than 70 vendors at the Farmers Market, and visiting several of our local grocery stores, the students made the following observations. When asked, "Where does our food come from", the consensus is that each of us can choose where our food comes from and that, as consumers, we have a voice and are fortunate to have a wide variety of options. We can grow our own food; we can shop for local produce at the Farmers Market; and we have a wide array of grocery

stores. Our food comes from all over the world because we truly live in a global economy.



Another conclusion the students came to was that most of them feel that it is important to support our local famers and our local stores when they can, and that 'Buying Local' helps our community. They also now realize that it is important, when faced with multiple options, to weigh all of the factors

that are important to you and then make the best decision you can. Be an informed consumer!

The students presented their findings and their work to our entire school community. They also presented it to the Farmers Market and their interview data is considered useful information to be added in the future to the Farmers Market website.



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