

FOOD PRODUCTION



PRE-READING TASKS

1. Analyse the picture on page 1. What does it tell you about food production? How does it make you feel?
2. Look at the following pictures. What do they tell you about our current food culture?



OUR BIG FAT CONTRADICTION

Today, when we produce more food than ever before, more than one in ten people on Earth are hungry. The hunger of 800 million happens at the same time as another historical first : that they are outnumbered by the one billion people on this planet who are overweight.

Global hunger and obesity are symptoms of the same problem and, what's more, the route to eradicating world hunger is also the way to prevent global epidemics of diabetes and heart disease, and to address a host of environmental and social ills. Overweight and hungry people are linked through the chains of production that bring food from fields to our plate. Guided by the profit motive, the corporations that sell our food shape and constrain how we eat, and how we think about food. The limitations are clearest at the fast food outlet when the spectrum of choice runs from McMuffin to McNugget. But there are hidden and systemic constraints even when we feel we're beyond the purview of Ronald McDonald.

Even when we want to buy something healthy, something to keep the doctor away, we're trapped in the very same system that has created our 'Fast Food Nations'. Try for example, shopping for apples. At supermarkets in North America and Europe, the choice is restricted to half a dozen varieties: Fuji, Braeburn, Granny Smith, Golden Delicious and perhaps a couple of others. Why these? Because they're pretty: we like the polished and

unblemished skin. Because their taste is largely unobjectionable to the majority. But also they can stand transportation over long distances. Their skin won't tear or blemish if they're knocked about in the miles from orchard to aisle. They take well to the waxing technologies and compounds that make this transportation possible and keep the apples pretty on the shelves. They are easy to harvest. They respond well to pesticides and industrial production. These are reasons why we won't find Calville Blanc, Black Oxford, Zabergau Reinette, Kandil Sinap or the ancient and venerable Rambo on the shelves. Our choices are not entirely our own because, even in a supermarket, the menu is crafted not by our choices, nor by the seasons, nor where we find ourselves, nor by the full range of apples available, nor by the full spectrum of available nutrition and tastes, but by the power of food corporations.

The concerns of food production companies have ramifications far beyond what appears on supermarket shelves. Their concerns are the rot at the core of the modern food system. To show the systemic ability of a few to impact the health of the many (...) is an enquiry that uncovers the real reasons for famine in Asia and Africa, why there is a worldwide epidemic of farmer suicides, why we don't know what's in our food any more, why black people in the United States are more likely to be overweight than white, why there are cowboys in South Central Los Angeles, and how the world's largest social movement is discovering ways, large and small, for us to think about, and live differently with, food.

The alternative to eating the way we do today promises to solve hunger and diet-related disease, by offering a way of eating and growing food that is environmentally sustainable and socially just. Understanding the ills of the way food is grown and eaten also offers the key to greater freedom, and a way of reclaiming the joy of eating. The task is as urgent as the prize is great.

From *Stuffed & Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* by Raj Patel (born 1972)

COMPREHENSION

1. Analyse the title of this extract.
2. What is "our big fat contradiction"?

3. What is the cause of this contradiction?
4. Who decides what we buy at the supermarket? How are these decisions made?
5. What do these decision makers have an influence on besides the food we buy?
6. What could we achieve by changing this current situation?
7. Look up the following: What is the story behind the cowboys in LA, overweight black people and farmer suicides?
8. Explain the final statement of the extract.

ESSAY TOPICS

1. "Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are." (Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin) What does our food system say about us?
2. "One of the great successes of the twentieth century was a rate of growth in food output that considerably surpassed the unprecedented rate of population growth. . . . We have the capacity to produce enough food for everyone on the planet to be adequately fed." (Jacques Diouf, former director general of the FAO) Discuss.

PROJECT

In groups present different activist groups and international organisations concerned with the production and consumption of food. Here are some suggestions:



PETA

IFOAM



Slow Food®

**Jamie Oliver
Foundation**



You may choose one of these organisations, or any other organisation you might see fit.

What you need to do:

1. Present the aims of the organisation? What are they about? What do they oppose? How do they seek to improve things?
2. What are some of the problems they face? Are their aims accepted and supported by society, by businesses?
3. How do you feel about their aims? Are they important to our society? Do you think that their methods are good? What would you do to increase their support in society?

PRE-READING TASKS

1. Look at the title of the following essay. Explain the reference.
2. Describe the following pictures. What connection do they have?



HUNGER GAMES

I don't blame Mo Farah, Pele and Haile Gebrselassie, who lined up, all hugs and smiles, outside Downing Street for a photocall at the prime minister's hunger summit. Perhaps they were unaware of the way in which they were being used to promote his corporate and paternalistic approach to overseas aid. Perhaps they were also unaware of the crime against humanity over which he presides. Perhaps Cameron himself is unaware of it.

You should by now have heard about the famine developing in the Sahel region of West Africa. Poor harvests and high food prices threaten the lives of some 18 million people. The global price of food is likely to rise still further, as a result of low crop yields in the United States, caused by the worst drought in 50 years. World cereal prices, in response to this disaster, climbed 17% last month.

We have been cautious about attributing such events to climate change: perhaps too cautious. A new paper by James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, shows that there has been a sharp increase in the frequency of extremely hot summers. Between 1951 and 1980 these events affected between 0.1 and 0.2% of the world's land surface each year. Now, on average, they affect 10%. Hansen explains that "the odds that natural variability created these extremes are minuscule,

vanishingly small". Both the droughts in the Sahel and the US crop failures are likely to be the result of climate change.

But this is not the only sense in which the rich world's use of fuel is causing the poor to starve. In the United Kingdom, in the rest of the European Union and in the United States, governments have chosen to deploy a cure as bad as the disease. Despite overwhelming evidence of the harm their policy is causing, none of them will change course.

Biofuels are the means by which governments in the rich world avoid hard choices. Rather than raise fuel economy standards as far as technology allows, rather than promoting a shift from driving to public transport, walking and cycling, rather than insisting on better town planning to reduce the need to travel, they have chosen to exchange our wild overconsumption of petroleum for the wild overconsumption of fuel made from crops. No one has to drive less or make a better car: everything remains the same except the source of fuel. The result is a competition between the world's richest and poorest consumers, a contest between overconsumption and survival. There was never any doubt about which side would win.

I've been banging on about this since 2004, and everything I warned of then has happened. The US and the European Union have both set targets and created generous financial incentives for the use of biofuels. The results have been a disaster for people and the planet.

Already, 40% of US corn (maize) production is used to feed cars. The proportion will rise this year as a result of the smaller harvest. Though the market for biodiesel is largely confined to the European Union, it has already captured seven per cent of the world's output of vegetable oil. The European Commission admits that its target (10% of transport fuels by 2020) will raise world cereal prices by between 3 and 6%. Oxfam estimates that with every 1% increase in the price of food, another 16 million people go hungry.

By 2021, the OECD says, 14% of the world's maize and other coarse grains, 16% of its vegetable oil and 34% of its sugarcane will be used to make people in the gas guzzling nations feel better about themselves. The demand for biofuel will be met, it reports, partly through an increase in production; partly through a "reduction in human consumption." The poor will starve so that the rich can drive.

The rich world's demand for biofuels is already causing a global land grab. ActionAid estimates that European companies have now seized five million hectares of farmland – an area the size of Denmark – in developing countries for industrial biofuel production. Small farmers, growing food for themselves and local markets, have been thrown off their land and destituted. Tropical forests, savannahs and grasslands have been cleared to plant what the industry still calls “green fuels”.

When the impacts of land clearance and the use of nitrogen fertilisers are taken into account, biofuels produce more greenhouse gases than fossil fuels do. The UK, which claims that half the biofuel sold here meets its sustainability criteria, solves this problem by excluding the greenhouse gas emissions caused by changes in land use. Its sustainability criteria are, as a result, worthless.

Even second generation biofuels, made from crop wastes or wood, are an environmental disaster, either extending the cultivated area or removing the straw and stovers which protect the soil from erosion and keep carbon and nutrients in the ground. The combination of first and second generation biofuels – encouraging farmers to plough up grasslands and to leave the soil bare – and hot summers could create the perfect conditions for a new dust bowl.

Our government knows all this. One of its own studies shows that if the European Union stopped producing biofuels, the amount of vegetable oils it exported to world markets would rise by 20% and the amount of wheat by 33%, reducing world prices.

Preparing for the prime minister's hunger summit on Sunday, the international development department argued that, with a rising population, “the food production system will need to be radically overhauled, not just to produce more food but to produce it sustainably and fairly to ensure that the poorest people have the access to food that they need.” But another government department – transport – boasts on its website that, thanks to its policies, drivers in this country have now used 4.4 billion litres of biofuel. Of this 30% was produced from recycled cooking oil. The rest consists of 3 billion litres of refined energy snatched from the mouths of the people that David Cameron claims to be helping.

Some of those to whom the government is now extending its “nutrition interventions” may have been starved by its own policies. In this and other ways, David Cameron, with the unwitting support of various sporting heroes, is offering charity, not justice. And that is no basis for liberating the poor.

By George Monbiot, published in *The Guardian* on 14th August 2012

<http://www.monbiot.com/2012/08/13/hunger-games/>

COMPREHENSION

1. Why did athletes visit Downing Street?
2. What is happening in the Sahel region at the moment? What is going on in the United States?
3. What is the reason for these events?
4. What role do fuels play in these developments?
5. Why does Monbiot criticise governments over these situations?
6. How much of the world’s grain yield is used in the production of biofuels? Is this percentage likely to remain stable?
7. What are the consequences on farming methods?
8. Are biofuels really “green”?
9. What could be done if the European Union stopped producing biofuels?
10. Why is there no change in fuel production habits? Who is ultimately responsible for the problems caused by biofuels?

ESSAY TOPICS

1. “David Cameron, with the unwitting support of various sporting heroes, is offering charity, not justice. And that is no basis for liberating the poor.” Discuss the difference between charity and justice in relation to the production of food.
2. “Good government is known from bad government by this infallible test: that under the former the labouring people are well fed and well clothed, and under the latter, they are badly fed and badly clothed.” (William Cobbett, 19th century writer) Discuss the role of government in food production.

PROJECT

Imagine you are a world leader. There are famines in Africa and South East Asia, food and fuel prices are rising, climate change is now generally accepted, and you are up for re-election.

1. In groups, create a campaign focusing on one or more of the issues mentioned above.
2. Find as much information (statistics, quotes, etc.) as possible to back up your ideas, and formulate a plan to solve these crises.
3. Create a slogan, poster, logo, jingle, song... to support your campaign. Be creative!
4. Present your campaign to the class.

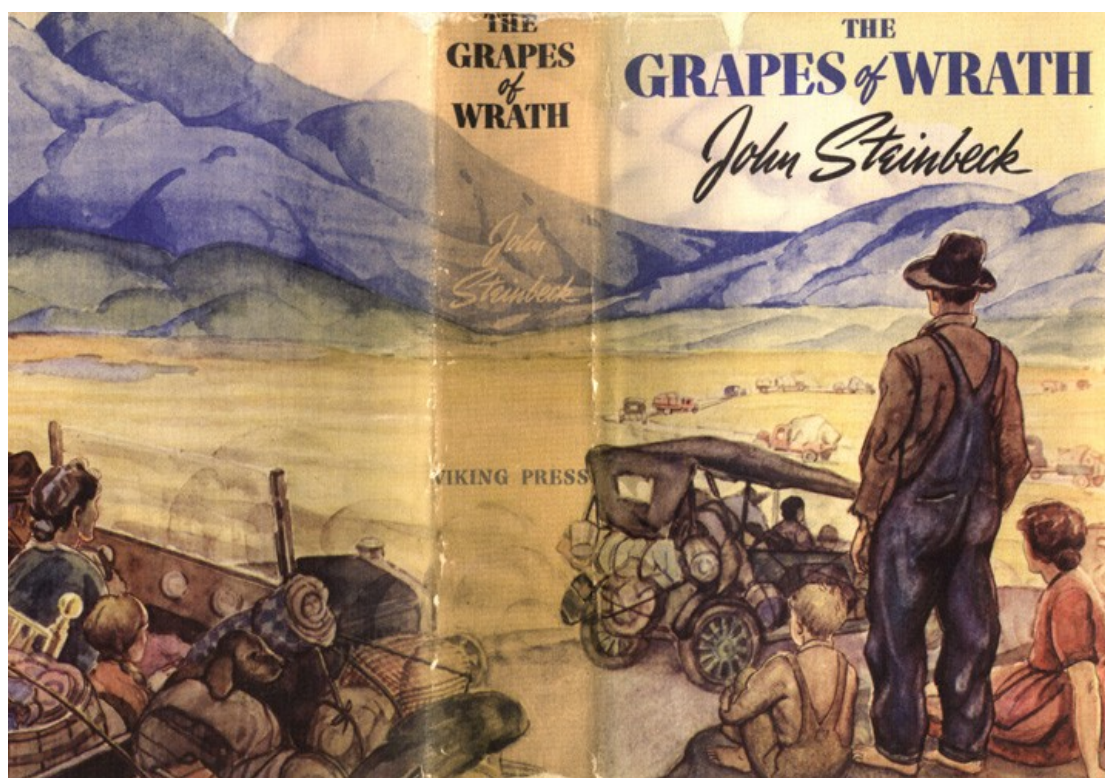
PRE-READING TASKS

1. Look at this extract from *Piers Plowman* (14th century), by William Langland.

“Bi Seynt Poule,” quod Perkyn, “for ye profre ye so lowe
I shal swynke and swete and sowe for us bothe,
And eke laboure for thi love al my lyf tyme”(…)
“By my power, Pieres, I plighte the my treuthe
To fulfille this forward though I fighte sholde.
Als longe as I lyve I shal the mayntene.”

Try to work out the meaning of this conversation between Piers, a humble ploughman, and a powerful knight. What is their relationship? What is the relationship between landowners and the workers today?

2. Analyse the cover of the first edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, from which the following extract is taken.



PICKING PEACHES

The men unloaded the truck silently. A fear had fallen on them. The great square of boxes was silent. A woman went by in the street, but she did not look at them. Her head was sunk and her dirty gingham dress was frayed at the bottom in little flags.

The pall had fallen on Ruthie and Winfield. They did not dash away to inspect the place. They stayed close to the truck, close to the family. They

looked forlornly up and down the dusty street. Winfield found a piece of baling wire and he bent it back and forth until it broke. He made a little crank of the shortest piece and turned it around and around in his hands.

Tom and Pa were carrying the mattresses into the house when a clerk appeared. He wore khaki trousers and a blue shirt and a black necktie. He wore silver bound eyeglasses, and his eyes, through the thick lenses, were weak and red, and the pupils were staring little bull's eyes. He leaned forward to look at Tom.

"I want to get you checked down," he said. "How many of you going to work?"

Tom said, "They's four men. Is this here hard work?"

"Picking peaches," the clerk said. "Piece work. Give five cents a box."

"Ain't no reason why the little fellas can't help?"

"Sure not, if they're careful."

Ma stood in the doorway. "Soon's I get settled down I'll come out an' help. We got nothin' to eat, mister. Do we get paid right off?"

"Well, no, not money right off. But you can get credit at the store for what you got coming."

"Come on, let's hurry," Tom said. "I want ta get some meat an' bread in me tonight. Where do we go, mister?"

"I'm going out there now. Come with me."

Tom and Pa and Al and Uncle John walked with him down the dusty street and into the orchard, in among the peach trees. The narrow leaves were begin- ning to turn a pale yellow. The peaches were little globes of gold and red on the branches. Among the trees were piles of empty boxes. The pickers scurried about, filling their buckets from the branches, putting the peaches in the boxes, carrying the boxes to the checking station; and at the stations, where the piles of filled boxes waited for the trucks, clerks waited to check against the names of the pickers.

"Here's four more," the guide said to a clerk.

"O.K. Ever picked before?"

"Never did," said Tom.

"Well, pick careful. No bruised fruit, no windfalls. Bruise your fruit an' we won't check em. There's some buckets."

Tom picked up a three-gallon bucket and looked at it. "Full a holes on the bottom."

"Sure," said the near-sighted clerk. "That keeps people from stealing them. All right, down in that section. Get going."

The four Joads took their buckets and went into the orchard. "They don't waste no time," Tom said.

"Christ Awmighty," Al said. "I ruther work in a garage."

Pa had followed docilely into the field. He turned suddenly on Al. "Now you jus' quit it," he said. "You been a-hankerin' an' a complainin' an' a-bullblowin', You get to work. You ain't so big I can't lick you yet."

Al's face turned red with anger. He started to bluster.

Tom moved near to him. "Come on, Al," he said quietly. "Bread an' meat. We got to get em."

They reached for the fruit and dropped them in the buckets. Tom ran at his work. One bucket full, two buckets. He dumped them in a box. Three buckets. The box was full. "I jus' made a nickel," he called. He picked up the box and walked hurriedly to the station. "Here's a nickel's worth," he said to the checker.

The man looked into the box, turned over a peach or two. "Put it over there. That's out," he said. "I told you not to bruise them. Dumped em outa the bucket, didn't you? Well, every damn peach is bruised. Can't check that one. Put em in easy or you're working for nothing."

"Why, goddamn it."

"Now go easy. I warned you before you started."

Tom's eyes drooped sullenly. "O.K." he said. "O.K." He went quickly back to the others. "Might's well dump what you got," he said. "Yours is the same as mine. Won't take em."

"Now, what the hell!" Al began.

"Got to pick easier. Can't drop em in the bucket. Got to lay em in."

They started again, and this time they handled the fruit gently. The boxes filled more slowly. "We could figger somepin out, I bet," Tom said. "If Ruthie an' Winfiel' or Rosasharn jus' put em in the boxes, we could work out a system." He carried his newest box to the station. "Is this here worth a nickel?"

The checker looked them over, dug down several layers. "That's better," he said. He checked the box in. "Just take it easy."

Tom hurried back. "I got a nickel," he called. "I got a nickel. On'y got to do that there twenty times for a dollar."

They worked on steadily through the afternoon. Ruthie and Winfield found them after a while. "You got to work," Pa told them. "You got to put the peaches careful in the box. Here, now, one at a time."

The children squatted down and picked the peaches out of the extra bucket, and a line of buckets stood ready for them. Tom carried the full boxes to the station. "That's seven," he said. "That's eight. Forty cents we got. Get a nice piece of meat for forty cents."

The afternoon passed. Ruthie tried to go away. "I'm tar'd," she whined. "I got to rest."

"You got to stay right where you're at," said Pa.

Uncle John picked slowly. He filled one bucket to two of Tom's. His pace didn't change.

In mid-afternoon Ma came trudging out. "I would a come before, but Rosasharn fainted," she said. "Jes' fainted away."

"You been eatin' peaches," she said to the children. "Well, they'll blast you out." Ma's stubby body moved quickly. She abandoned her bucket quickly and picked into her apron. When the sun went down they had picked twenty boxes.

Tom set the twentieth box down. "A buck," he said. "How long do we work?"

"Work till dark, long as you can see."

"Well, can we get credit now? Ma oughta go in an buy some stuff to eat."

"Sure. I'll give you a slip for a dollar now." He wrote on a strip of paper and handed it to Tom.

He took it to Ma. "Here you are. You can get a dollar's worth of stuff at the store."

Ma put down her bucket and straightened her shoulders. "Gets you, the first time, don't it?"

"Sure. We'll all get used to it right off. Roll on in an' get some food." Ma said, "What'll you like to eat?"

"Meat," said Tom. "Meat an' bread an' a big pot a coffee with sugar in. Great big piece a meat."

Ruthie wailed, "Ma, we're tar'd."

"Better come along in, then."

"They was tar'd when they started," Pa said. "Wild as rabbits they're a-gittin'. Ain't gonna be no good at all less we can pin em down."

"Soon's we get set down, they'll go to school," said Ma. She trudged away, and Ruthie and Winfield timidly followed her.

"We got to work ever' day?" Winfield asked.

Ma stopped and waited. She took his hand and walked along holding it. "It ain't hard work," she said. "an' a big pot meat." "Be good for you. An' you're helpin' us. If we all work, purty soon we'll live in a nice house. We all got to help."

From *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1902M1968)

COMPREHENSION

1. Describe the atmosphere at the beginning of this extract.
2. Who do you think these people are? What is their situation? What are they looking for?
3. Are they the only people in this situation? How much information does the clerk want to get from them?
4. Describe how they spend their day. Describe their work.
5. What do they do with bruised peaches? What does that say about their production system?
6. How many people have to work for how long to make how much money?

ESSAY TOPICS

1. "The farmer works the soil. The agriculturist works the farmer." Discuss.
2. "And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed." (John Steinbeck) Discuss.

PROJECT

Watch the chapter "In the Grass" of the film *Food, Inc.* (2009) by Robert Kenner. Write a comparison between the different kinds of work you have witnessed in *Piers Plowman*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Food, Inc.*

Which way of working do you believe is best for us socially and environmentally?

More information on *Food, Inc.* can be found on the website:

<http://www.takepart.com/foodinc>

TRANSLATION OF PIERS PLOWMAN PASSAGE

“By Saint Paul,” said Perkin, “since you proffer help so humbly,

I shall sweat and strain and sow for us both,

And also labour for your love all my lifetime”(…)

“By my power, Piers, I pledge you my word

To uphold this obligation though I have to fight.

As long as I live I shall look after you.” (Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI, 24-36)

PRE-READING TASKS

1. What did you have for breakfast? Do you know where the ingredients of your meal came from? Discuss.
2. What season is it? What food is typically grown during this season in Western Europe?
3. Are there any foods you eat regularly which cannot be grown in Western Europe?

MEALS AND MILES

Europe has been importing food and drink from far and wide for millennia – tea from China, spices from India, coffee from Ethiopia. But today's globalized food markets are on a scale without historical precedent. Today, we fly in fruit from the Southern Hemisphere when it's out of season in the north, and we ship in goods that we could grow in the UK, but which can be sourced more cheaply from elsewhere.

Though only a small proportion of the food produced in the world is traded internationally – probably around 90% is consumed in the country where it is grown – the figure is much higher in most developed countries. In the UK, the distance travelled by the food we eat is thought to have roughly doubled in the last two decades. Today, the contents of an average shopping basket of goods – including organic foods – can be the result of tens of thousands of miles' journeying, by road, sea and increasingly air.

For food grown within the UK, too, the distance from "farm to fork" is bigger than ever, not least because supermarket systems rely on everything being delivered to the shop via massive distribution centres. Since these are few and far between, long truck journeys are inevitable. One much-cited study traced vegetables on sale in a supermarket in Evesham: they were grown just up the road, but had arrived via a huge round trip taking in Hereford, Dyfed and Manchester. Some defenders of the supermarket-style system – such as Lord Haskins, appointed as "rural tsar" by Tony Blair – claim that supermarket distribution may actually be greener than millions of half-full smaller vans making shorter journeys to a larger number of local shops. Whether or not this is correct (a lack of evidence makes it difficult to say), it certainly seems true that more energy is currently used to transport our food than is necessary.

The most obvious problem with extra food transport is the carbon emissions. But environmental damage isn't the only criticism that local-food advocates make of our increasingly long-distance dining. In the case of shipping live animals, longer-than-necessary distances raise the likelihood not only of animal welfare abuses but also of the spreading of diseases such as foot and mouth. These can end up costing astronomical sums of money: the total bill for the UK's foot and mouth crisis of 2001–02, including lost tourism revenue, is estimated to have been around £10 billion.

In the case of fruit and vegetables, there's also the possibility of food losing nutrients en route. Studies by the Austrian Consumers Association, for example, found that "fresh" out-of-season fruit and vegetables that have undergone long-distance transport are often significantly lower in vitamins and higher in harmful nitrates than genuinely fresh ones (or, indeed, frozen ones, which are usually put in the freezer within hours of being picked.)

From *The Rough Guide to Green Living*, by Duncan Clark

COMPREHENSION

1. From where in the world is food exported to Britain?
2. How has the distance travelled by our food changed over the past decades?
3. How is the food transported? Retrace the different steps on its way to our dining table.
4. What is the "supermarket-style system" of distribution? What are its problems?
5. What alternative is there to this system? Why might this be problematic?
6. What are the negative consequences of food transport for:
 - a. the environment?
 - b. animals?
 - c. fruit and vegetables?

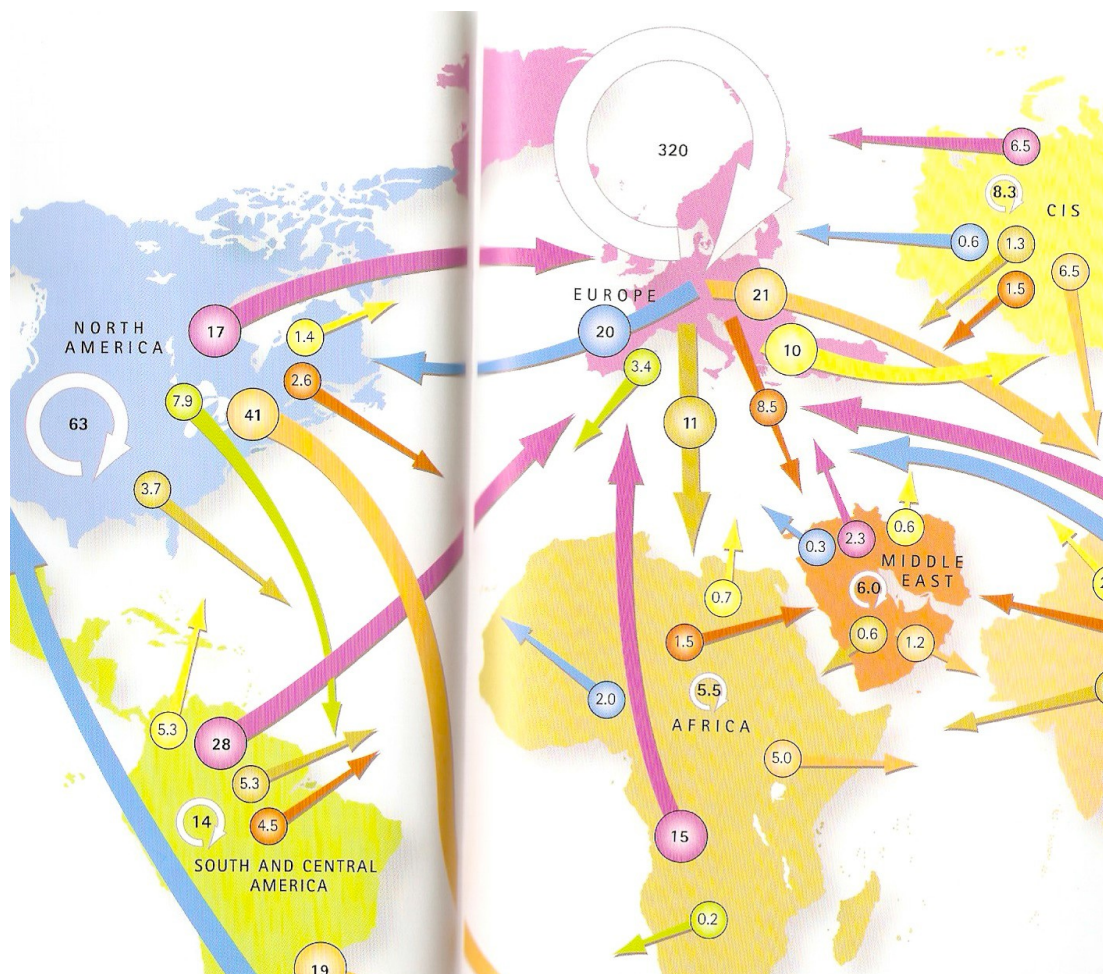
ESSAY TOPICS

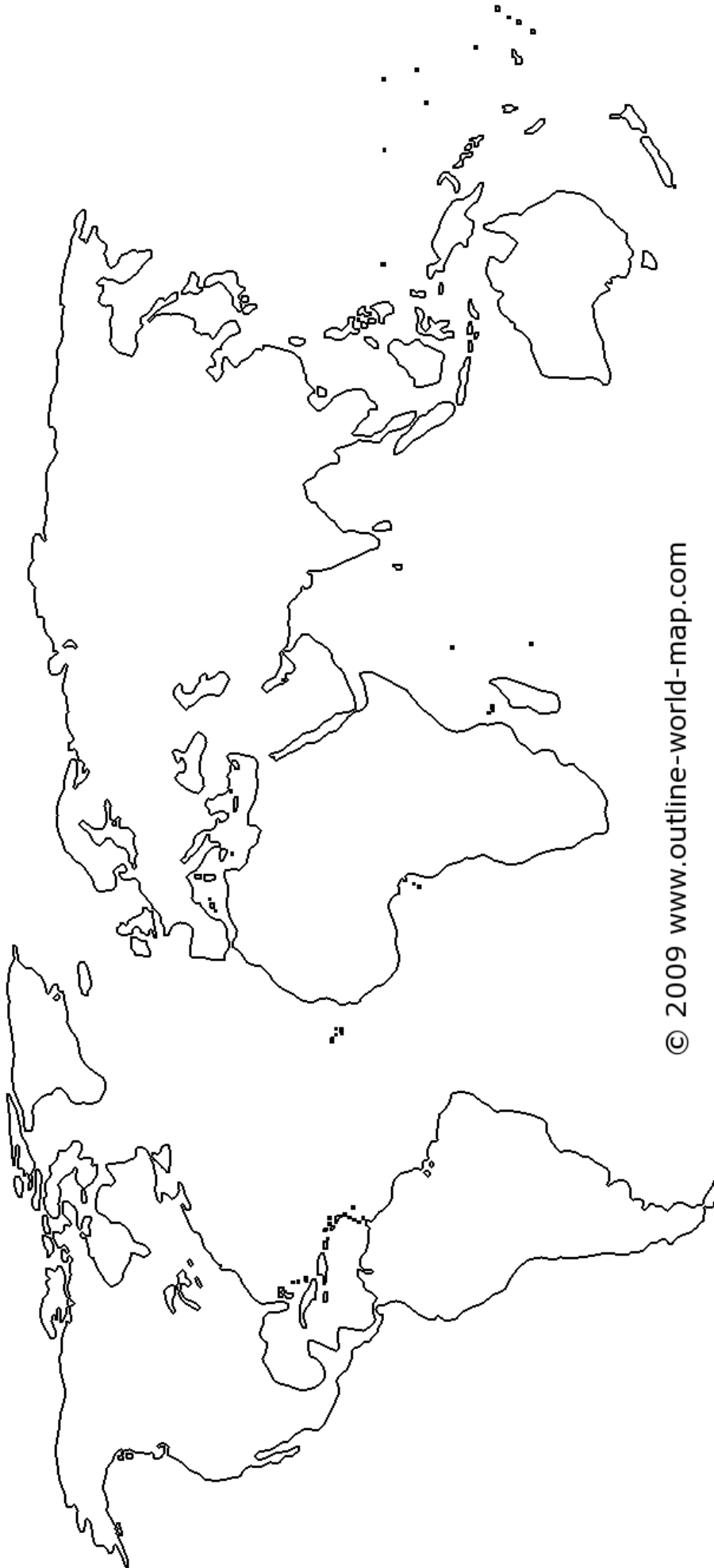
1. "Think globally, act locally." Discuss the merits of this statement in relation to food production.
2. "What's so super about supermarkets?" Discuss the value of supermarkets.

PROJECT

1. Choose a number of products you are interested in: rice, fruit, vegetable, meat, drinks, etc.
2. Go to a supermarket and look up where these products come from.
3. If the labelling is insufficient, use the internet to find out more.
4. Transfer the information found to the world map on the next page (you may want to copy it and print it in A3). Use different colours to mark the countries of origin of your chosen products. Use arrows to show the journey the food has been on to get to your supermarket.
5. Calculate the overall distance covered to transport these goods.

Here's an example from *The Atlas Of Food* by Erik Millstone and Tim Lang:

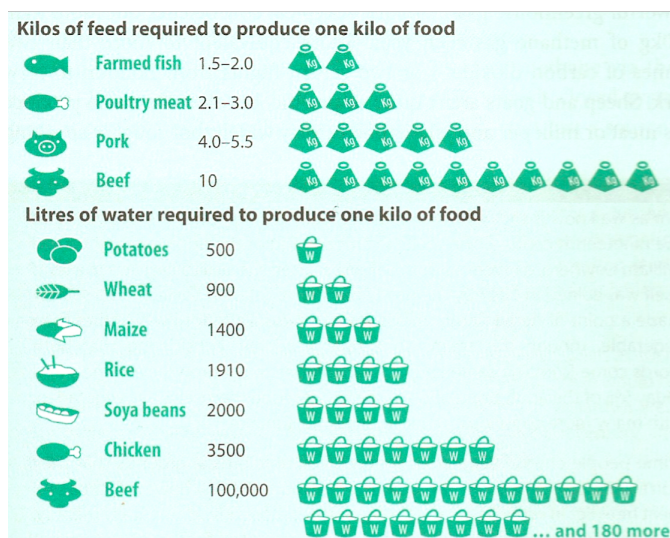




© 2009 www.outline-world-map.com

PRE-READING TASKS

1. Look at the two graphs below. What do they tell you about animal production?



2. What do you know about the process of making meat? Retrace the steps of meat production.
3. What do you call a person who eats meat? What alternative ways of eating are there?

A CASE FOR EATING DOGS

Despite the fact that it's perfectly legal in forty-four states, eating "man's best friend" is as taboo as a man eating his best friend. Even the most enthusiastic carnivores won't eat dogs. TV guy and sometimes cooker Gordon Ramsay can get pretty macho with baby animals when doing publicity for something he's selling, but you'll never see a puppy peeking out of one of his pots. And though he once said he'd electrocute his children if they become vegetarian, I wonder what his response would be if they poached the family pooch.

Dogs are wonderful, and in many ways unique. But they are remarkably unremarkable in their intellectual and experiential capacities. Pigs are every bit as intelligent and feeling, by any sensible definition of the words. They can't hop into the back of a Volvo, but they can fetch, run and play, be mischievous, and reciprocate affection. So why don't they get to curl up by the fire? Why can't they at least be spared being tossed on the fire?

Our taboo against dog eating says something about dogs and a great deal about us.

The French, who love their dogs, sometimes eat their horses.

The Spanish, who love their horses, sometimes eat their cows.

The Indians, who love their cows, sometimes eat their dogs.

While written in a much different context, George Orwell's words (from *Animal Farm*) apply here: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." The protective emphasis is not a law of nature; it comes from the stories we tell about nature.

So, who's right? What might be the reasons to exclude canine from the menu? The selective carnivore suggests:

Don't eat companion animals. But dogs aren't kept as companions in all of the places they are eaten. And what about our petless neighbours? Would we have any right to object if they had dog for dinner?

OK, then:

Don't eat animals with significant mental capacities. If by "significant mental capacities" we mean what dog has, then good for the dog. But such a definition would also include the pig, cow, chicken, and many species of sea animals. And it would exclude severely impaired humans.

Then:

It's for good reason that the eternal taboos – don't fiddle with your shit, kiss your sister, or eat your companions – are taboo. Evolutionarily speaking, those things are bad for us. But dog eating hasn't been and isn't a taboo in many places, and it isn't in any way bad for us. Properly cooked, dog meat poses no greater health risks than any other meat, nor does such a nutritious meal foster much objection from the physical component for our selfish genes. And dog eating has a proud pedigree. Fourth-century tombs contain depictions of dogs being slaughtered along with other food animals. It was a fundamental enough habit to have informed language itself: the Sino-Korean character for "fair and proper" (*yeon*) literally translates into "as cooked dog meat is delicious." Hippocrates praised dog meat as a source of strength. The Romans ate "suckling puppy," Dakota Indians enjoyed dog liver, and not so long ago Hawaiians ate dog brains and blood. The Mexican hairless dog was the *principal food species* of the Aztecs. Captain Cook ate dog. Roald Amundsen famously ate his sled dogs. (Granted, he was *really* hungry.) And dogs are still eaten to overcome bad luck in the Philippines; as medicine in

China and Korea; to enhance libido in Nigeria; and in numerous places, on every continent, because they taste good. For centuries, the Chinese have raised special breeds of dogs, like the black-tongued chow, for chow, and many European countries still have laws on the books regarding post-mortem examination of dogs intended for human consumption.

Of course, something having been done just about everywhere just about always is no kind of justification for doing it now. But unlike all farmed meat, which requires the creation and maintenance of animals, dogs are practically begging to be eaten. Three to four million dogs and cats are euthanized annually. This amounts to millions of pounds of meat now being thrown away every year. The simple disposal of these euthanized dogs is an enormous ecological and economic problem. It would be demented to yank pets from homes. But eating those strays, those runaways, those not-quite-cute-enough-to-take and not-quite-well-behaved-enough-to-keep dogs would be killing a flock of birds with one stone and eating it, too.

In a sense it's what we're doing already. Rendering – the conversion of animal protein unfit for human consumption into food for livestock and pets – allows processing plants to transform useless dead dogs into productive members of the food chain. In America, millions of dogs and cats euthanized in animal shelters every year become the food for our food. (Almost twice as many dogs and cats are euthanized as adopted.) So let's just eliminate this inefficient and bizarre middle step. (...)

Few people appreciate the colossal task of feeding a world of billions of omnivores who demand meat with their potatoes. The inefficient use of dogs – conveniently already in areas of high human population (take note, local-food advocates) – should make any good ecologist blush. One could argue that various “humane” groups are the worst hypocrites, spending enormous amounts of money and energy in a futile attempt to reduce the number of unwanted dogs while at the very same time propagating the irresponsible no-dog-for-dinner taboo. If we let dogs be dogs, and breed without interference, we would create a sustainable, local meat supply with low energy inputs that would put even the most efficient grass-based farming to shame. For the ecologically minded it's time to admit that dog is realistic food for realistic environmentalists.

From *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer (born 1977)

COMPREHENSION

1. Describe the tone of this text.
2. Why are people opposed to the idea of eating dogs? Why does it make little sense to the author of the text?
3. Look at the quote from George Orwell. Do you know the context in which Orwell used it? What does it mean here?
4. What is the historical background of eating dogs?
5. What arguments does the author give for eating dogs? How does he think it would improve our lives?
6. Explain the following expression from the text:
 - a. “curl up by the fire”
 - b. “selective carnivore”
 - c. “chow, for chow”
 - d. “dogs are practically begging to be eaten”
 - e. “killing a flock of birds with one stone and eating it, too”

ESSAY TOPICS

1. “I am not a *complete* vegetarian. I eat only animals that have died in their sleep.” (George Carlin, comedian) Is it ever okay to eat animals?
2. “A man can live and be healthy without killing animals for food; therefore, if he eats meat, he participates in taking animal life merely for the sake of his appetite. And to act so is immoral.” (Leo Tolstoy) Discuss.
3. “If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be a vegetarian.” (Paul McCartney) Do you think that if more people knew about the processes of animal production, they would abstain from eating meat?

PROJECT

Watch Philip Wollen’s contribution to the “Animals Should Be Off the Menu” debate. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQCe4qEexjc>)

Then:

1. Work on your own debate contribution. Write a speech of about 2 or 3 minutes arguing against OR in favour of animal consumption. Look at Wollen’s style of presentation and try to structure your speech in a similar way.
2. Among your class, choose three people to represent either side of the debate.
4. Hold the debate, by taking turns in presenting your arguments.
5. After that the floor is open to questions and comments about the debate by non-participants.
6. Finally take a vote!

PRE-READING TASKS

1. What crops do you know? What do you know about their countries of origin? Who are the people that farm them?
2. What different ways are they used in? Do we only use grains for food?

CAN VEGANS STOMACH THE UNPALATABLE TRUTH ABOUT QUINOA?

Not long ago, quinoa was just an obscure Peruvian grain you could only buy in wholefood shops. We struggled to pronounce it (it's keen-wa, not qui-no-a), yet it was celebrated by food lovers as a novel addition to the familiar ranks of couscous and rice. Dieticians clucked¹ over quinoa approvingly because it ticked the low-fat box and fitted in with government healthy eating advice to "base your meals on starchy foods".

Adventurous eaters liked its slightly bitter taste and the little white curls that formed around the grains. Vegans embraced quinoa as a credibly nutritious substitute for meat. Unusual among grains, quinoa has a high protein content (between 14%-18%), and it contains all those pesky, yet essential, amino acids needed for good health that can prove so elusive to vegetarians who prefer not to pop food supplements.

Sales took off. Quinoa was, in marketing speak, the "miracle grain of the Andes", a healthy, ethical addition to the meat avoider's plate (no dead animals, just a crop that doesn't feel pain). Consequently, the price shot up – it has tripled since 2006 – with rarer black, red and "royal" types being even more expensive.

But there is an unpalatable truth to face for those of us with a bag of quinoa in the cupboard. The appetite of countries such as ours for this grain has pushed up prices to such an extent that poorer people in Peru and Bolivia, for whom it was once a nourishing food, can no longer afford to eat it. Imported junk food is cheaper. In Lima, quinoa now costs more than chicken. Outside the cities, and fuelled by overseas demand, the pressure is on to turn land that once produced diverse crops into quinoa monoculture.

In fact, the quinoa trade is yet another troubling example of a damaging north-south exchange, with well-intentioned health and ethics-led consumers here unwittingly driving poverty there. It's beginning to look like a cautionary tale of how a focus on exporting premium foods can damage the producer country's food security. Feeding our apparently insatiable 365-day-a-year hunger for this luxury vegetable, Peru has also cornered the world market in asparagus. Result? In the Ica region where Peruvian asparagus production is concentrated, this thirsty export vegetable has almost used up the water resources on which local people depend. NGOs report that asparagus labourers toil in sub-standard conditions and cannot afford to feed their children while exporters and foreign supermarkets cream off the profits.

¹ to cluck: the sound chickens make

Soya, a foodstuff beloved of the vegan lobby as an alternative to dairy products, is another problematic import, one that drives environmental destruction. Embarrassingly, for those who portray it as a progressive alternative to planet-destroying meat, soya production is now one of the two main causes of deforestation in South America, along with cattle ranching, where vast expanses of forest and grassland have been felled to make way for huge plantations.

Three years ago, the pioneering Fife Diet, Europe's biggest local food-eating project, sowed an experimental crop of quinoa. It failed, and the experiment has not been repeated. But the attempt at least recognised the need to strengthen our own food security by lessening our reliance on imported foods, and looking first and foremost to what can be grown, or reared, on our doorstep.

In this respect, omnivores have it easy. Britain excels in producing meat and dairy foods for them to enjoy. However, a rummage through the shopping baskets of vegetarians and vegans swiftly clocks up the food miles, a consequence of their higher dependency on products imported from faraway places. From tofu to chickpeas, vegetarian shopping has a global flavour.

There are promising initiatives: one company, for instance, has just started marketing UK-grown fava beans as a protein-rich alternative to meat. But in the case of quinoa, there's a ghastly irony when the Andean peasant's staple grain becomes too expensive at home because it has acquired hero product status among foreigners preoccupied with personal health, animal welfare and reducing their carbon "foodprint". Viewed through a lens of food security, our current enthusiasm for quinoa looks increasingly misplaced.

Joanna Blythman on theguardian.com, on 16th January 2013

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did quinoa become so popular with people in the Western world?
2. What consequences have the quinoa producing countries had to face ever since it became popular?
3. What other examples does the author give of problems faced by crop producing countries?
4. What solutions to these problems does the author suggest?
5. What is ironic about some people's love of quinoa?

ESSAY TOPICS

1. "Think globally, eat locally." Do you agree with the idea that we should only eat local food?
2. "The farmer works the soil. The agriculturist works the farmer." Discuss the impact our eating habits have on farmers at home and abroad.

PROJECT

On its publication, this article sparked a lot of discussion online. Search the internet, and notably *The Guardian* website, for other articles discussing this topic. Make a list of the different arguments made. Discuss them in class. Is there an easy solution to these problems?

GLOSSARY

agriculture	
biofuel	
carnivore	
crop	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corn (maize) • rice • soybeans • sugarcane • wheat 	
diet	
distribution centre	
drought	
factory farm	
fair trade	
famine	
to feed	
fertiliser	
fodder (animal feed)	
food chain	
genetically modified crop	
(to) harvest	
livestock	
local food	
methane	
to nourish	
nutrition	
obesity	
orchard	
organic	
omnivore	
overconsumption	
overweight	
pesticide	
plantation	
to plough	
processing plant	
rural	
slaughterhouse	
staple food	
starve	
vegan	
vegetarian	