

**TITLE:** Food System Debate

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To review food system information learned in the Trace the French Fry workshop
2. To explore further the benefits and negative impacts associated with a sustainable, local food system and the global, industrial food system
3. To be able to articulate the pros and cons of different food systems to peers and non-program participants
4. To provide a forum for participants to consider their own food choices
5. To develop and practice critical thinking and public speaking skills

This workshop takes place in three sessions. In the first the facilitator meets with the group, introduces the debate, divides the group into two teams (one that supports the sustainable, local food system and one that supports the global, industrial food system), and helps them get started on the preparation. In the second, participants work with their leaders to finalize and practice their speeches for the debate. The final session is a debate in front of an impartial panel of judges. Judges decide a winning team in each crew based on the strength of their arguments.

**TIME REQUIRED:** 1 hour each for the preparations sessions, 45 minutes for each crew to debate

**MATERIALS:**

- Pens and paper
- Flip chart and markers
- A local and a conventional potato
- Background Information sheet
- Fact Sheet for the Food System Debate (p. 167 in “French Fries”)
- Food System Representative Roles

**DIRECTIONS:**

Session 1 - Preparation

1. Hold up the conventional and local potatoes that were introduced in Workshop #5, “Trace the French Fry”. Ask who remembers their significance. If needed, remind them of the two food systems that produced them – the global, industrial and the sustainable, local food systems.
2. Now tell them that people around the world are passionate about one or the other of these food systems and that as we speak there is a debate going on around the world about which food system can better feed the people of the world. Now that they have been introduced to the concept of a food system, they have an opportunity to think some more about which type of food system they would like to see in this county. As part of this process, they are going to participate in a debate about the food system.
3. Ask for a show of hands from anyone who has ever been in a debate before. Ask them to brainstorm a list of the techniques to use when debating. Write these up on a flip chart. They should range from preparing your arguments and



anticipating counter arguments, to speaking loudly and clearly, to dressing neatly and standing up tall. I have always been amazed at the number of ideas they come up with; feel free to add any that they omit.

4. Explain the procedure for preparing for and the format of the debate.
  - Participants will have this workshop time and an additional hour later in the week to prepare. Sometimes may choose to work on their remarks at home as well.
  - The debate will take place in front of an impartial panel of judges.
  - The group will be split in half. Half will try to convince the judges to purchase food for a meal produced by the global, industrial food system, and the other half will argue that the judges should purchase their food from a sustainable, local food system.
  - Each participant will have the opportunity to present his/her argument. These arguments should last no more than three minutes.
  - In addition each team will prepare and present a two-minute opening argument that introduces their position and a two-minute rebuttal at the end. The rebuttal should reiterate the highlights and refute any contradictory statements given by the opposing team.
  - The judges will make their decisions based on which team has the most persuasive arguments and the best presentation.
5. Once everyone understands the format and what is expected, split the group into two teams: global/ industrial and sustainable/ local. Allow them to self select into sides, but try to balance the groups by skill and interest level. Remind them that it is sometimes more illuminating to argue for the side that they are least comfortable with if the sides are unevenly split.
6. Tell the group that they will be working as a team to prepare for the debate. They will be developing their arguments together and will need to support each other to make sure that they present a persuasive case for the judges.
7. Hand out the background materials (Background Information Sheet and Fact Sheet for the Food System Debate). Read aloud the Background Information sheet. These are some of the benefits associated with the two food systems. Can the team think of any other benefits of the food system that they are representing? Remind them to consider benefits to the environment, farmers, consumers and the economy. Add these ideas to the Background Information sheet.
8. Now ask participants to think of the weaknesses of their food system that the other team might bring up in the debate. How will they address or downplay these?
9. Finally brainstorm a list of the weaknesses of the opposing food system. How does it negatively impact the environment, consumers, producers or the economy? These are points that the team may wish to make during their arguments.
10. Distribute copies of Food System Representative Roles. Let everyone select a role to play in the debate. Each person will develop their statement using



arguments appropriate to their role. For instance, the person who chooses to represent the farmer for the sustainable, local food system might argue that the judges should buy their food from the S/L food system because:

- It is better for the health of producers and their families (no pesticides), and
  - It keeps small farmers economically sustainable because the farmer gets the full purchase price of their produce when they sell at a farmers' market.
  - In contrast farmers in the G/I food system are exposed to hazard chemicals in the pesticides and herbicides they spray on their crops and they receive only \$.19 of every dollar spent on their produce.
11. When choosing roles, also decide which participants will give the opening statement and rebuttal. These should be youth who are more comfortable speaking in public and who have a firm grasp of the concepts. If the team is small (3-4 people), those workers giving the opening remarks and rebuttal should also give a statement during the main part of the debate. If the team is large (5-6 people), workers may choose to do only an opening or closing remark. It is important that at least three people make arguments for each team during the debate.
  12. The crew workers should work together to build a cohesive argument. They should decide who will say what so that they cover all the important points and don't repeat themselves. Use the "Questions to Consider" on the Fact Sheet for the Food System Debate to help craft the statements. By the end of the first session, crew workers should have a general idea of the points they will make in the debate.
  13. Make sure youth write down their opening statement and argument points. Encourage them to write or outline a speech if that is more helpful.

### Session 2 – Practice

1. Later in the week each team will have an opportunity to break into their debate teams again and spend another hour finalizing and practicing their speeches.
2. Once again it is important to stress the team approach. Those who finish their speeches early can assist those who are having more difficulty.
3. As the youth listen to each other practice their presentations, ask them to notice if any important arguments are missing or for duplication of points. Based on this the team may want to change some of the presentations to make the arguments stronger.
4. At the end of this session, team members should feel prepared for the debate. Encourage them to put the notes for their speeches in an easily accessible place.

### Session 3 – The Debate

Materials:

- Podium (three upside down and stacked harvest crates work well)
- Mock microphone (a zucchini or a trowel does fine)
- Paper and pens for the judges
- Two benches lined up on either side of the podium for the two teams to sit on



- Chairs or benches facing the podium for the judges

#### Recruiting Judges:

Two weeks before the debate, send an email to all staff asking for people to sign up to judge the debate. It is a great opportunity for other staff to interact with participants, and it means a lot to the youth to have staff there. One year when only a few people from the office participated, crew workers expressed anger and disappointment that the staff didn't appreciate how hard they had worked on the debate.

Encourage people to stay for at least two debates, although it is fine to sign them up for one if that is all they can do. Be creative – you can also ask Board members, program alums, etc. Ideally you should have four to six judges for each debate.

Each debate should last 45 minutes.

#### DIRECTIONS:

1. 15 minutes before their scheduled debate time, bring the teams together to check in. Make sure everyone has his/her notes, knows the order of speakers, and is prepared to speak. Review the tips on debating generated in the workshop the previous week.
2. While the team(s) are getting ready, the facilitator should prep the judges. At the end of the debate they will each have to decide how to spend their food dollars. They should remain impartial throughout the debate and make their decision based on the strength of the arguments they heard. Each judge will have \$20; they can split the money between the two food systems or allot it all to one. After stating his/her decision, each will have to explain the rationale behind his/her choice.
3. At the appointed time, each team sits on one of the benches flanking the podium and facing the judges. The Moderator stands at the podium and reads the opening remarks.

“Welcome. We are gathered here to discuss what could be the most serious debate of this century – the future of our food supply. All over the country and the world people are concerned about the future of agriculture. Will there be enough food to feed future generations? How and where will that food be produced? What will the distribution systems look like? Will food be affordable? What impacts will the food systems we choose have on the environment and our health? These are the questions we are asking you to consider today.

To quote the W. K. Kellogg Foundation: “During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, agricultural production systems in the United States have been phenomenally effective. U.S. farmers, representing less than two percent of the population, are able to raise enough food for about 12 percent of the entire world’s population. For most people in the U.S., food is low-priced and abundant, as a result of efficient food production, marketing, processing and distribution, and educational institutions that support the entire food system. Yet there is still much to be done.

Achieving a sustainable, healthful food supply will require a comprehensive approach and the collaboration of a broad set of food system participants.”



Today we are lucky to have with us some representatives from different parts of the food system. They will each present arguments about the way food should be produced and why consumers should choose to purchase food produced by the global, industrial food system or a sustainable, local food system. A distinguished panel of judges, who are all consumers and therefore an important and integral part of the food system, must listen closely to the arguments as they will have the challenge of deciding which system they will support with their food dollar.

4. Now the moderator should remind the youth of the order of the presentation and of the rules.
  - Each team will make their opening remarks. Then speakers from the two teams will alternate their presentations. The two rebuttals will be last.
  - Each speaker should introduce him/herself before speaking and state which part of the food system he/she represents.
  - Only one person may speak at a time. If you disagree with something that is said, you must wait until your turn to speak to reply. Each team will have an opportunity to respond during its rebuttal as well.
  - The judges will have an opportunity to ask questions at the end.
5. The moderator should act as timekeeper for the debate and limit the presentations should they go much over the two-minute (opening and rebuttal) or three-minute (arguments) guideline.
6. Begin the debate with opening statements from both sides. (You can toss a coin to see who goes first or alternate from one crew to the next.) Then hear from each role – first one farmer and then the other, then one retail person then the other, then one mayor and then the other. It may not be evenly distributed so do what makes the most sense.
7. When everyone has finished their remarks, give the teams a few minutes to collaborate on the rebuttal. They may want to add things to it based on the arguments that the other team has presented during the debate. Finally each team should have the opportunity to present their rebuttal.
8. Open it up to questions from the judges. Then ask for their decisions and the rationale behind them.
9. Thank everyone for a job well done.

At the end of the day, present the results of the debate to the group as a whole. Average the scores of the two sides and let them know what the combined outcome of the debate was (60% / 40%; 50% / 50%?). Give them feedback about how the day went and what the judges thought of their arguments. I like to say that currently less than 2% of the food system is part of the local/ sustainable system. I like to take the total percentage won by the local sustainable side (say 40%), and ask them to imagine with me what the world would look like if 40% of the food system was actually local and sustainable- a proliferation of small, local farms in our communities, food \$'s kept in our community, more local jobs, a closer connection to



farmers and farms, fresher food, etc. This would amount to a revolution in our food system. Elaborate as you feel comfortable.

Thank them for a great day and encourage them to keep asking questions and learning more about their food.

## Food System Representative Roles for the Food System Debate

### Global, Industrial Food System

Large-scale Farmer  
Consumer  
Produce Manager at a supermarket  
chain  
Worker at a fast food restaurant  
Environmental  
Town Mayor  
Worker at a soup kitchen

### Sustainable, Local Food System

Small-scale Family Farmer  
Consumer  
Farmers' Market Manger  
Worker at a small, local café  
Environmental  
Town Mayor  
Worker at a soup kitchen

## Background Information of the Food System Debate

Below are some basic arguments that can be used to support each of the two food systems.

### **Global, Industrial Food System**

Offers a cheap and consistent product to the consumer all year round.

Can produce a lot of food.

Employs a lot of people in each sector of the system in a range of jobs. Employs a lot of teenagers.

Uses new technologies for production and processing.

Encourages trade with other countries.

### **Sustainable, Local Food System**

Farming practices don't use pesticides or chemical fertilizers that can impact soil, air, water, wildlife and consumers.

Supports local farmers and preserves local landscape.

Tries to support local processors, distributors and retailers, thereby supporting local economies.

Adds to diversity of ecosystem by attracting beneficial insects, birds and animals.

Works to preserve character of rural communities.

