**Local Food in San Diego**

**Time:** 15 minutes

**Supplies**: PowerPoint, worksheets

**Background**:

San Diego County is home to more than 5,700 farms, and is the 19th largest farm economy in the nation, worth almost $1.8 billion. San Diego County is the number one producer of avocados in the country, and also produces large numbers of citrus and vine-ripe tomatoes. Other notable crops produced in San Diego are nursery plants and succulents. Farmers find this area to be a perfect place to grow crops because of the Mediterranean climate, though the high cost of water in the county poses a challenge to having an environmentally friendly and profitable farm. Considering these factors, farmers have become experts in optimizing their land area and activity.

The average local farmer in San Diego is over 50 years old, with around 20 years of farming experience. About 35% of the farms in the County are run by women, including large vineyards and ranches. When asked about what influences their farming decisions, many of the operators of local farms said environmental stewardship factored into their practices. San Diego is home to many organic farms, meaning they produce crops without using chemical or synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, among other environmentally friendly habits. There are many environmental benefits that come with growing and purchasing local food. Selecting locally grown produce has a much smaller carbon footprint than produce grown in other parts of the country (less vehicle miles traveled, less fuel burned, etc.). Small farms are also more likely to have diverse crops and protect soil health.

Supporting local farms helps San Diego’s economy, and helps ensure that consumers can continue to have access to fresh local food. You can purchase food from local farms at a farmers market, where you will often meet people who work on the farms themselves. At the grocery store, you can ask if any of the produce or meats are from local farms, and if not, let the store know you’d be interested in purchasing locally grown goods. By purchasing locally grown food, you are supporting local families and helping the environment.

**Sources:**

<https://www.sdfarmbureau.org/san-diego-agriculture/>

<https://www.sdfarmbureau.org/top-crops/>

<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/lueg/docs/State-of-the-Food-System-for-the-San-Diego-Region-November-2019.pdf?utm_source=Community&utm_campaign=bb24d62d5e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_12_16_06_27&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_cd3d37894c-bb24d62d5e-254945313&mc_cid=bb24d62d5e&mc_eid=b8ae50cf45>

<https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2012/09/04/how-green-is-local-food/>

**Goal**: By learning about where local food is grown and who grows it, students will feel a stronger appreciation for and connection to the food they eat. Students will also learn how to support local farmers and their community.

**Activity:** Worksheets, video, and discussion

*Introduction and Video*

*Slide 1:* Raise your hand if you know anyone who owns a farm, or if you grow food at home. On a scale of 1-10, how familiar are you with the process of growing food. *Students may type in the chat.* What kinds of food do you think grow abundantly in San Diego? *Students may be unmuted to answer.*

*Slide 2:* There are many different kinds of crops grown in San Diego County, but the most abundant are avocados, lemons, and tomatoes. 40% of all of the avocados produced in California come from San Diego County. The local citrus industry is also very large, and is worth over $150 million. Part of this is due to the climate here, where citrus can grow year round. The County is also home to one of the nation’s largest growers of vine-ripe tomatoes.

*Slide 3:* Farm size varies in San Diego, but the majority of local farms are between 1 and 9 acres. This picture is of the EUSD Farm Lab, a small farm that provides produce and lunches to all 9 elementary schools in Encinitas. The County also has the highest number of organic farms in the country. There are many requirements farmers have to follow to be certified organic, and the County is currently home to about 350 organic farms. What do you think some of those requirements for organic farmers might be? What are the benefits of these requirements? *Students may be unmuted to answer.*

*Slide 4*: The farmers in San Diego County vary in years of farming experience, but about 55% of farmers are over 50 years old. This shows a need to train and develop farming skills in a younger generation. What do you think those training programs should look like to make sure they are of interest to a younger generation? This picture is of the strawberry fields in Carlsbad, currently run by Jimmy Ukegawa, who is 60 years old. A family business, this farm has been running since the 1950s. What would be some benefits and challenges to life as a small-scale farmer? *Students may be unmuted to answer.*

About 35% of the farms in the County are run by women, including large vineyards and ranches. How do you think we can even this out and encourage more women to work in agriculture? *Students may be unmuted to answer.*

*Slide 5:* Let’s watch a video highlighting the practices of one of our local farms. As you watch, pick up on what they mention and write your answers to the four questions on the worksheet. You may also write ideas you think of, even if they are not specifically mentioned in the video. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/181843741>

*Discuss students’ answers on the worksheet.* Ideas and discussion points are below.

* What practices can San Diego farmers use to be environmentally friendly?
  + Many San Diego farms are organic farms, meaning they don’t use pesticides or chemicals on their plants, but instead use compost, cover crops, and mulch instead.
  + Saving water by promoting healthy, rich soil through the methods mentioned above.
  + Growing fruits and vegetables seasonally.
  + Some farmers use animals to eat the weeds that might grow, rather than chemical weed killers. Stehly Farm in Valley Center uses baby doll lambs to eat the small weeds!
* What are some barriers farmers might be facing to begin these practices?
  + Most of the farms in San Diego are small, and might not have the budget or capital to begin using organic farming practices.
  + There is a steep learning curve when it comes to organic farming.
  + San Diego has a very high water cost, and that may restrict what crops farmers can afford to grow (though compost and mulch can greatly reduce the water footprint).
  + Industrial farming practices are much grander, yet cheaper and faster, making it difficult for local farmers to compete.
* How can farms reduce food waste? What can they do with the food they don’t sell?
  + Farmers can donate “ugly” produce that might not sell in the grocery store to local organizations that will distribute it (ex. Imperfect Produce).
  + Farmers can allow groups to come and “glean” their extra food, meaning volunteers will come pick the produce and take it with them, often delivering it to organizations who can distribute it to those in need. If the extra food is not suitable for human consumption, it can be used for animal feed.
  + Farmers can compost inedible food and use that as natural fertilizer.
* How can you support local farms?
  + Shop at farmers markets! You can have one-on-one contact with the folks growing your food, and support them directly.
  + Join a CSA. A Community Sponsored Agriculture box can be delivered to you from a local farm for a subscription fee. Many San Diego farms have these, and you receive fresh produce year round!
  + Choose grocery stores and supermarkets selling local produce.

**Locals Farms in San Diego Worksheet**

1. What practices can San Diego farmers use to be environmentally friendly?
2. What are some barriers farmers might be facing in beginning these practices?
3. How can farms reduce food waste? What can farmers do with produce they don’t sell?
4. How can you support local farms?