

ACTIVITY

resource use

overview

Everything in our world originates in nature, but sometimes we have to look closely to discover this. The chocolate in those delicious chocolate chip cookies came from cacao beans that grew in the rain forests of South America; the carageenan that gives your ice cream its thick, creamy texture is a North Atlantic seaweed. Both of these favorite treats rely on foods from ecosystems under threat from human activity. How many of the components of the foods that we eat travel great distances before they arrive at our table? What is involved in getting them to our tables? What effects does our demand for foods from distant places have on the people who live there, and on their environment?

The activity *You've Got the Whole World in Your Shopping Bag!* is designed to start students thinking about the origins of everyday foods. (The activity may be found on pages 6-7 of the magazine, *It Takes All Kinds to Make a World*, or online (www.amnh.org/nationalcenter/it_takes_all_kinds). Students should work in pairs or small groups. Once your students begin to think about the origin of everyday foods, you can try one of these extension activities.

1. Home Kitchen Journal

After they have completed the activity, *You've Got the Whole World in Your Shopping Bag!* ask students to research 10 food items in their own kitchens or the kitchens of relatives or neighbors. Back in the classroom, working in pairs or groups, guide them to research the following using books, the Internet, or other sources:

- the origin of the items
- the processes by which the items reached their homes (including food processing, preservation, transport)
- any information they can find out about the use of herbicides and pesticides in the cultivation or production of each food item. What effects do these have on the local environment or the health of the local community?
- How are the foods eaten in their country of origin? Does exporting these foods to countries like the U.S. have any effect on local peoples' consumption of these foods?

As an extension of this activity, students may conduct similar investigations in the school cafeteria, at a local restaurant, a fast-food franchise, or at the delicatessen counter of a local grocery store. How many locally-grown foods can they identify? What can they learn about how these foods are grown and the effects their cultivation has on the local environment, the health of the community, and the economy? What can they find out about the people who grow these foods?

Display a map of the world in the classroom. Students can locate the origins of food items on the map using index cards and string. The cards—tacked to the walls with string leading to the appropri-

ate location on the map—should include the name of the food and any important information the students would like to include.

2. Biodiversity Cookbook

Encourage students to bring in family recipes, particularly those recipes that have been passed down from their families' countries of origin. Ask students to conduct research on the origin of the ingredients in these recipes:

- How are these ingredients cultivated?
- How does this compare with how they were grown 50 years ago? One hundred years ago?
- What agricultural changes have occurred over time?
- What can students learn about the impact these changes have had on local biodiversity and on local ways of life?

Invite students to carry out research drawing on the knowledge of relatives, as well as books and the Internet. What can they learn about how diets have changed in the last hundred years? What effects on biodiversity and human health can they discover?

Compile a class cookbook of the recipes. Include information about how changes in the cultivation of foods impacts the environment and the lives of the people who grow the food.

3. Think Globally, Act Locally

Using *You've Got the Whole World in Your Shopping Bag!* as a starting point, ask students to investigate the original uses for the items in the kitchen picture.

- Which items are a luxury in the U.S. and a staple in their country of origin?
- Which items have gone from local staple to cash crop?
- What effect do cash crops have on local biodiversity, the local economy, and people's health?
- Which items have healing properties? How are these used in their country of origin?
- Which items are eaten only in processed form in the U.S. but not in their county of origin?
- What are the ways in which global use of an item contribute to biodiversity loss?

After students investigate how products from other countries reach their tables, ask them to investigate products available from

local sources. Arrange a visit to a farmers' market or a store that concentrates on selling local produce. Or invite local experts to speak to your students about regional farming practices and markets. Once students have gained some knowledge of the agriculture and food consumption in their own area they can conduct further research into:

- how local agriculture has changed over the last hundred years
- how local agricultural techniques contribute to habitat loss or habitat preservation
- how the community's food choices affect local and global environments

Ask students to present what they have learned about food production and its effect on biodiversity to another class in the school.