Growing Your Dinner

Average Program Length: 45 minutes
Meeting Location: Outside the Lighthouse
Total material list:
--Edible food seeds
--Soil
--Pots
--Fertilizer

Activities by Scout Level

Girl Scout

Daisies and Brownies- pick at least 2 of the steps below
Juniors and Cadettes- pick at least 3 of the steps below
Seniors and Ambassadors-pick at least 4 of the steps below

Boy Scout

Lions, Tigers, Wolves, and Bears- pick at least 2 of the steps below
Webelos, Scout Rank, and Tenderfoot- pick at least 3 of the steps below
Second Class, First Class, Star Scouts, Life Scouts, and Eagle Scouts-pick at least 4 of the steps below

Background

Life was hard at the lighthouse. The lighthouse keepers couldn't just drive to the grocery store to get their food. The governmental Lighthouse Board would drop off food rations of 200 pounds of dried pork, 100 pounds of beef, 2 barrels of flour, 50 pounds of rice, 50 pounds of brown sugar, 25 pounds of coffee, 10 gallons of beans or peas, 4 gallons of vinegar, and 2 barrels of potatoes a year. The lighthouse keeper also had chickens and goats to get food from. With the lack of food choices and amounts, lighthouse keepers tried to keep a garden, and spent much time gardening. However, with the lack of water, there was little success. San Diego gets about 10 inches of rain a year, and keepers stored the rainwater in one cistern in the basement (later two more cisterns were added, and so was the large concrete basin in front of the lighthouse). Much time was spent traveling 7 miles to a well in La Playa to collect barrels of water, and haul it back over a long, bumpy road with a steep drop into Point Loma and back. Because this water was so hard to get, it couldn't be wasted and the keeper and his family had to be careful about how much they used. Other food was collected in a day's ride to Old Town, and later canned and preserved. Nonetheless, food was scarce and had to be used wisely.

The lighthouse keeper lived in a kind of food desert. But food deserts did not end in the 1800s. Currently, many people in cities and suburbs live in food deserts, and it's not because they live rurally. Many working class people in the United States live in areas that don't have full grocery stores. Many are not within walking distance of fresh, healthy food, and can't buy the fruits, vegetables, and other food items that they need to be healthy. People in these areas often don't have cars, and have to travel--sometimes for hours--on a bus just to get their groceries. They do, however, have food close to their homes. Nonetheless, this food is comprised of convenience marts and fast food restaurants that often serve only unhealthy options (chips, soda, hamburgers, french fries, etc).

Regardless, much energy has to go into making processed food (processing to extend shelf-life, chemical additions, packaging, canning, drying, boxing). How come, then, it's cheaper to buy a bag of chips that a package of

strawberries, which needs no processing? Think how much energy it takes to make a quarter pound of beef. For every ¼ pound of beef, it takes 6.7 pounds of feeding grain, 52.8 gallons of drinking water, 74.5 square feet of land for grazing, and 1,036 BUTs of fossil fuels, that contributes to climate change. Why, then, can you buy a McDonalds hamburger for $1.30, but it costs $5 for a bag of apples? Processed foods do tend to be less expensive than most fresh foods. They're that cheap because the U.S. government subsidizes (gives free money to) the producers of corn and wheat, the main ingredients in those packaged snacks, driving down the price of corn, and keeping crop prices low. Most package snacks have some form of high fructose corn syrup (a corn product), and corn is often fed to cows, making meat cheaper. For the amount of calories consumed to feed your family, it's much easier and cheaper to get full on hamburgers than it is on cucumbers. This creates the stereotype that poor and minority groups like "junk" food, even though it's not true.

Today, many people live in these modern food deserts. Like the lighthouse keeper, they don't have access to grocery stores that stock healthy food options.

Matching Badges

Junior-Gardening

Senior-Locavore

BSA-Plant Science

BSA-Gardening

Program Activities

1. Go visit the garden near the lighthouse. Walk around the area, and guess how long it would take to grow food in the amount of space given. What are some of the challenges you see (lack of water, hard soil, limited space)?

2. Plant your own edible food seed (tomatoes, beans, carrots, raspberries, onions, turnips and, greens grow well in San Diego) in a small space, like a pot or a cup. See how long (and how much effort) it takes to grow a little bit of food. Once it's ready, harvest your crop and incorporate it into a meal. How much of your crop was in your dinner? How much time do you think it would take if you had to produce the whole dinner?

3. Talk about how much effort it takes to grow food, and discuss the cost-benefit of fertilizer, pesticide, mono cropping, etc. Why are these things good to use? Why are they bad? Break into groups, and have each group pick one aspect of growing crops (i.e.: fertilizer). Each group should have two pots: one with the treatment, and one without. Plant the same kind of seed in both pots, and discover which one grows better over the short and long term. Is faster growing always better? What other factors might be important (nutrition, taste, affect on environment, etc)?

4. Problem solve ideas on what you can do to help end food deserts in San Diego. Ideas include: Non-profit grocery stores, volunteering to collect wasted fresh foods from other areas and redistribute to poor areas, Community gardens, Food trucks and vans, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes.

5. Implement your ideas on how to end food deserts in your community. (Ex: Talk to local clubs or churches to start a sustainable, local food desert in their garden).

6. At home, research American food consumption and waste. Select a single food, and see how many inputs must go into it (water, feed, resources). How far does that food travel to get to America? What is the food security of people in those countries? How much of it is wasted in the US?

For example, the US imports 713,584 metric tons of pineapple every year, and imports have increased 400% since 1960. The US now imports 90% of its pineapple from Costa Rica. Other imports come from Brazil, Mexico, and Columbia. Draw lines from all these countries to the US. In Costa Rica, 24.8% of people are below the poverty line. In Brazil, its 21.4%. In Mexico it's 52.3%, and in Columbia it's 27.8%. Americans waste 52% of all fruit products.

7. Survey where your food comes from. Keep a map of where foods that you buy originate. How many "food miles" does your food travel to you per meal. Add up the miles throughout the week. How far do these miles get you if you were to travel the distance?