

What's this lesson all about?

Food often takes a complex journey from the field to our plates. This lesson provides an overview of the food system, a complex web of activities involving the production, processing, transport, and consumption of food.

## LET'S START WITH VOCAB

**Conventional Food System:** A model that centers around achieving maximum efficiency at the lowest cost for both the producer and the consumer.

**Sustainable Food System:** A model that focuses on ensuring that the practices used will feed and nourish everyone for generations to come.

**Production:** The action of making or manufacturing from components or raw materials, or the process of being so manufactured.

**Consumer:** A person who purchases goods and services for personal use.

**Processing:** Perform a series of mechanical or chemical operations on (something) in order to change or preserve it.

**Distribution:** The action of sharing something out among a number of recipients.

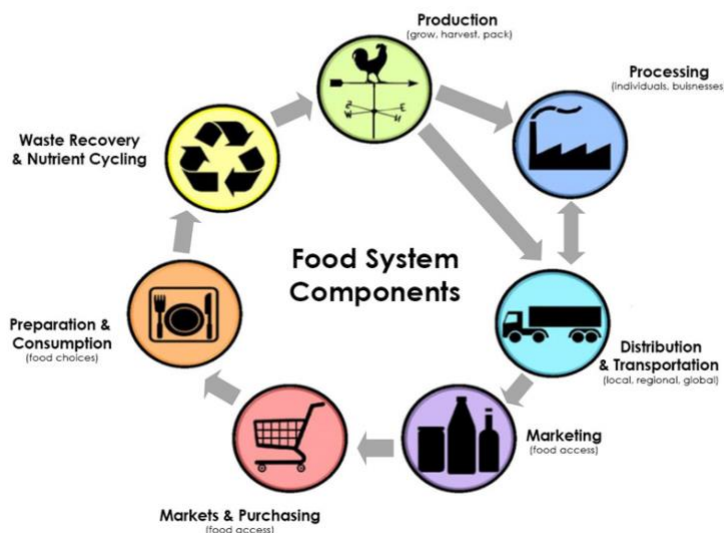


## WHAT IS A FOOD SYSTEM?

A food system is a set of interconnecting activities that work together to bring food to our table. A well-functioning food system is accessible to all, minimizes waste, and is environmentally sustainable.

Here is a graphic from Cornell University showing the basics of a food system:

### What is a community food system?



## HOW DOES IT AFFECT US?

Food systems have environmental consequences.

- It's up to us to preserve soil and water health for future generations.
- These environmental outcomes tend to have disproportionately negative effects on communities of color. This is called *environmental racism*.

Food systems have social consequences.

- An impactful food system makes sure that everyone has ample access to culturally relevant and nourishing foods.
- An inadequate food system fails to nourish all people equally.
  - Consider here the existence of [food deserts](#), for example.

A sustainable food system is a closed loop:

- Waste is minimal and nearly all of that excess returns to the earth to feed the soil for future food.
- Sustainability will allow the next generation to eat, too!

## STILL CURIOUS?

WATCH: There is still a lot to learn about food systems, and especially so as we move forward to feed a growing population. Farmers, scientists, and general food enthusiasts all seem to see it a little differently. Check out these differing views and discuss what makes sense to you.

- The future of food: [focusing on efficiency](#).
- The future of food: [regenerative agriculture](#).

DISCOVER: What's your FoodPrint? Whether it's a salad, a hamburger or your morning egg sandwich, your meal has an impact on the environment and on the welfare of animals, food/farm workers and on public health. Find out: [The FoodPrint Calculator](#)