

Food Traditions and Cultural Wisdom

This set of activities has been developed by Chaiti Seth, sustainability educator. It is an introductory-level suite of discussion-based activities to get community members, fellow professionals, or clients thinking about how their own food traditions and cultural wisdom aligns with sustainability.

Role: Dietetic Educator; Community

Activity: Education; Programming

Region: Adaptable

Materials:

Ensure participants and facilitator review concepts of sustainability prior to beginning. You can use the Glossary in this Toolkit for key definitions and concepts, and if possible, it can be made available to participants during the activities.

Objectives:

- Articulate local food traditions and cultural notions surrounding nutrition
- Make links between food traditions and cultural wisdom and western scientific nutrition models
- Identify contradictions between these two
- Consider how valuing and celebrating local food traditions and cultural wisdom can support an integrated understanding of the interconnections between nutrition and sustainability

Activities:

Festivals & Celebrations

- Ask participants to identify major local festivals and/or celebrations
- Ask participants to identify foods typically associated with these festivals/ celebrations and share in a small group
- In small groups, consider and map out how these particular foods are connected with season, climate, growing conditions, stories, nutritional needs at different times of year and/or life stages (for e.g. nutritional needs in winter versus summer or post-partum). Option: use downloadable graphic templates provided to facilitate this activity.
- Share key points from the small groups with the big group, then collectively brainstorm what these traditions might tell us about nutrition and sustainability and their interconnections.

Food Combinations

- Ask participants to identify foods that cultural wisdom says should OR should not be eaten together
- Ask participants to identify rationales for these combinations—consider seasonality, harvest time, complementary nutrition or nutrient absorption, medicinal value, etc.

- As a group, brainstorm what these combinations tell us about understanding nutrition and/or sustainability

Social Norms:

- Split into small groups. Give everyone a few minutes to reflect on childhood social norms around food (for example, eating suppers together, cooking specific foods with grandparents, community preserving or harvesting traditions, etc.).
- Ask everyone to identify one story that particularly shaped their relationship to food as a child and if appropriate to the audience, invite them to briefly write down this story. Invite each person to share this story about social norms around cooking or eating and its influence on their relationship to food.
- As a group, discuss which norms might support people's ability to choose, prepare and eat more sustainable and nutritious foods. Share a few key ideas from each small group with the large group, either orally or by writing the ideas on pieces of paper or stickie notes and posting to a common, visible space.
- Depending on the audience, consider discussing ways that the group can support each other in making more sustainable and healthy choices or identifying local resources (information, groups, places to shop, etc.) that support such choices.

Example Only: Do Not Print