



Menu for the Future Discussion Tool

Northwest Earth Institute, a non-profit that facilitates education and connection around topics in human and environmental health, is proud to offer this educational discussion resource for Food Day.

This sampler offers excerpts from *Menu for the Future*, a 6 session discussion workbook used by small groups to engage in a process of exploring our food system through shared discovery and personal reflection.

Food Day seeks to bring together people in every city and state in the country to learn, debate, and mobilize to improve our food system. On October 24, use this discussion guide to connect and talk with your coworkers, classmates, friends, and family about what "Eating Real" really means.



"Inheritance" by Sue Browning

It was in my Grandma Clara's farm kitchen, amid a cloud of flour and the heady fragrance of yeast, that I inherited my knowledge of breadmaking. I can't use the word learned because that would be an inadequate description. From an early age, my education extended beyond our kitchen into the fields where oats and wheat grew, the barn where milk and butter came from, and the chicken coop where I collected brown eggs from disapproving hens who scolded me for my efforts.

On bread day I helped my grandmother gather tools

and ingredients on the kitchen counter. The counter ran beneath a window that faced west across land ruffled with fields of hay and corn. Beyond the windowsill, a line of oak trees my grandparents had planted early in their marriage followed a tractor road

as it curved between the garden and the machine shed. The oaks stopped at the edge of the garden, but the dirt road went on until it was swallowed up by pasture. In spring, while I created white mountains on the counter with the flour sifter, we watched my grandfather plowing
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AREAS FOR APPLICATION

Workplace — Brown bag lunch discussion, team building, worksite wellness, office sustainability

Higher Education — Course activity, faculty and staff development, student group icebreaker, eco and green teams

Community — Home, neighborhood, parent group, community association

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Purchase the complete *Menu for the Future* discussion book from NWEI's online store: www.nwei.org

Join the national Food Day movement and learn more at www.foodday.org

Participate in NWEI's Annual EcoChallenge: www.ecochallenge.org

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL ON FOOD DAY

1. Gather together a group of your coworkers, classmates, friends, or family — over a healthy potluck lunch, classroom activity, or as the discussion opener for a movie screening.
2. Print off copies of the discussion guide for all members of your group.
3. In small groups, read the first excerpt and spend approximately 10 minutes with the discussion questions. Have group members share their opinions, experiences, and suggestions.
4. Form new groups if numbers allow for the remaining excerpts and questions.
5. During discussion, keep in mind that consensus isn't the goal. Agreement isn't necessary for effective dialogue.



in the distance, the rich soil churning up behind him like black flour.

We would begin by dissolving cake yeast in warm milk in a giant stoneware bowl. Slowly, I added flour one cup at a time. After we had a gummy mixture of flour and liquid, we added salt, melted butter, more warm milk and flour, until the sticky mass could no longer be managed with a wooden spoon. Now it was ready to be turned out on the floured counter.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a food that you truly savor?
2. How is this story similar to, or different from your childhood memories of cooking and eating?
3. Sue Browning says that her “education extended beyond the kitchen.” What does she mean by this and how does your knowledge of food extend beyond the kitchen?

“Organic, Local, and Everything Else: Finding Your Way in the Modern Food Fray” by Zoe Bradbury

What I’ve started to wonder amidst all the ferment about local and organic is this: Why turn it into a boxing match? Why the reductionist, either/or mentality? Why not local and organic, and while we’re at it, grass fed, family scale, socially just, economically viable,

carbon neutral, humane, culturally vibrant, community-based and ecologically renewing?

The trouble seems to be that there isn’t a word that can say it all, or a system that can certify it all, which poses a challenge to the everyday eater on a budget who wants to grab and go. It’s simply not simple. Even if your primary concern as an eater is focused more tightly around pesticides or reducing your carbon footprint, it’s still not always easy to know what’s best to eat.

But there is something central to remember: there is no perfect answer. Tradeoffs abound. Systems are complex. Food is messy. Eggs are perplexing. Far-flung conventional pineapples leap unexpectedly into shopping carts. And one question leads to another. If you’re asking those questions of yourself, the grower at the farmers’ market this summer or the person stocking eggs at the grocery store, it’s a very good sign that you’re engaged square in the middle of the complex system that feeds you — sleeves rolled up, learning, and awake.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you ever feel confused or conflicted when shopping for food? Explain.

2. Zoe Bradbury mentions that systems are complex. Describe your understanding of a food system.
3. What role do you (or can you) play in your local food system?

“Returning Stories to the Modern Kitchen” by Ann Vileisis

We have many opportunities to push our food system in hopeful new directions. Modern cooks might start gardens of their own. The Square Foot Gardener, a classic book designed to guarantee beginners’ success, advises novices to begin with two square feet of garden per family member in a small patch of yard or even on a patio. A garden can entail any level of commitment, from simply growing salad greens and herbs to orchestrating an array of flavorful vegetables. At the most basic level, gardening shows us what it takes to raise food, from the work of shoveling earth and pulling weeds to the joy of watching seeds grow into plants with frilly leaves. Even more, gardening offers the distinct personal satisfaction of knowing the whole story of food that you raise, gather, cook, and eat.

...Our industrialized food system has grown under a covenant of ignorance — with consumers not asking and producers not telling. As the stories





of our foods ceased to be told, we lost track of where and how they were produced; and as we lost knowledge about our foods, we lost awareness of how eating fits our human selves into the broader natural world. But today, with new interest, new understanding, and new stories, we have the chance to rediscover some of that knowledge and awareness, and with it, we just might find a way to live better on the Earth and, finally, to eat well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about the last meal you ate. Describe what you know about the ingredients and how they were created.
2. What are some actions you can take to push our food system in new directions?

Learn more about Northwest Earth Institute's discussion-based resources at www.nwei.org.

Join the national Food Day movement at www.foodday.org to learn more about diverse food system issues, access our free education and activism materials, connect with the online community, and get ideas for how to stay involved.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- **Learn to cook.** A diet of whole foods is better for you, better for the planet, and a lot tastier than processed foods. Get healthy recipe ideas at www.foodday.org.
- Buy food that is **produced locally** and **without harmful chemicals**.
- **Volunteer** in your community's food system — on **Food Day** and throughout the year! Join a work party at a local farm, help out your neighborhood food co-op, organize a Northwest Earth Institute discussion group, host a Food Day event, and check out opportunities on the Food Day events map.
- Become aware of and support improved conditions for **farm workers**. You can find books, articles, and films on this subject at www.foodday.org/resources.
- If your community is lacking healthy, local, sustainable, and equitable food options, brainstorm with others about how **you can make a difference**. Contact your city's sustainability office or food policy council, write to your elected officials, and organize with others in your network.