

Environmental Sustainability: Hunger in the Classroom

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Synopsis

There is no argument that the United States is one of the richest and supposedly best fed nations in the world. Yet 39 of my 180 students do not have enough food to eat on a daily basis. They must rely on a program called free and reduced lunch. Some schools within the Charlotte Mecklenburg system have rates as high as 90% of their student body on free and reduced breakfast and lunch. That could be as high as 21 out of 25 kids in a kindergarten class. Charlotte is a microcosm of a larger world. We have enough food to more than adequately feed our growing population. How we grow and distribute it is a question that needs to be addressed. According to United Nations statistics, seventeen thousand children a day die across the world as a result of starvation. In this unit I plan to address our food history as a nation from early colonization to present day. I want my students to change the way they look at food, past, present and future. For the future we must come up with solutions that will be able to sustain our growing global population with good and nutritious food. These solutions will also benefit our global environment and economy.

The initial goal is for my classes to look at their community first. We have implemented a money fund raiser to benefit local community food banks. My students planned and planted a fall garden of peas, sprouts, carrots, turnips and Swiss chard. Organic food production was introduced to them and this garden will use no pesticides or harmful fertilizers. Once harvested, the food products will be given to Angels and Sparrows Soup Kitchen. Two of my classes will visit local organic farms to see how we can produce vegetables and meat in a healthy and sustaining manner. Coupled with the use of political cartoons, videos from YouTube and *Food, Inc.*, I hope to introduce them to the problems with our industrialized food production system.

After students have completed the strategies and activities I have planned for them I hope that they can begin to make wise decisions about the effects of mass produced food on our environment, health and economy. From this I know that they can make positive changes not only in their local community but eventually globally.