

Lesson 4

The Hands That Feed Us

[Lesson Duration: 50 Minutes]

Social Studies



Lesson Overview

At least one in six members of the U.S. workforce are employed in the food chain, from farm fields to food service.¹ Students will identify different jobs, examine their working conditions, and consider how to improve workers' health and quality of life.



Learning Objectives

- Identify the roles of workers at every step in the food supply chain.
- Analyze the wages and working conditions of food chain workers.
- Describe workplace changes food chain workers are advocating for.



Essential Questions

- How are different food chain workers positively or negatively affected by their jobs?
- What can be done to improve wages and working conditions for food chain workers?



Materials

- Student handouts
- Gallery Walk Signs
- Sticky notes or index cards
- FoodSpan Infographic



Resources

- *Crops and Ecology* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-production/crops-and-ecology/)
- *Industrial Food Animal Production* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-production/industrial-food-animal-production/)
- *Food Processing* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-processing/)

Warm-up: Following Workers Along the Food Chain

Social Studies
[10 minutes]

Have students form groups and brainstorm different jobs at each step of the food supply chain. Students can refer to their **FoodSpan Infographic** to help generate ideas. Have students write each job on a **sticky note** or **index card**, then post their jobs on the board in order from field to plate.

Discuss:

- Which jobs are missing?
- Which jobs require the most people to accomplish?
- Which jobs involve the most physical labor?
- Which involve the most skill?
- Which jobs involve the greatest risk of injury and disease?

Main Activity: Gallery Walk: Voices From Across the Food Chain

Social Studies
[15 minutes]

Post the four **Gallery Walk Signs** around the room. Have students use the **Gallery Walk Handout** and move from one post to the next, writing their responses to the following question concerning each job: *What risks and challenges does someone with this job face?*

As a class, share responses and discuss:

- What surprised you about the people whose quotes you read? Which one stood out the most?
- In addition to your original answers, what other challenges might food chain workers face?
- Why would workers accept these jobs? Is it always for financial reasons alone?
- What would our food system be like without these food chain workers?

Main Activity: Case Studies: Food Justice in Action

Social Studies
[20 minutes]

Divide students into groups and assign each group a worker profile from the **Food Justice in Action Handout**. Each profile highlights some of the challenges faced by food chain workers and some of the campaigns and organizations working to promote fair wages and safer working conditions. Ask each group to read its case study and prepare a brief presentation that will:

- Describe the risks and challenges faced by these workers
- Describe the intervention to promote fair wages and/or safer working conditions
- Assess whether they think the intervention is an effective approach
- Propose an additional intervention

After each group presents, discuss:

- *Do these interventions involve many steps, and if so, what might be the first step?*
- *How might these interventions affect other workers in the food system?*
- *How might these interventions affect consumers?*
- *What arguments might be made in opposition to these interventions?*

Encourage students to consider the challenges of finding solutions that satisfy all parties.

Wrap-up: What Can We Do?

[5 minutes]

Have students write a journal entry in response to the prompt: *How can individuals, communities, and governments promote fair wages and safer working conditions for food chain workers?* If time allows, have students share their responses.

“Our very lives are dependent, for sustenance, on the sweat and sacrifice of the campesinos. Children of farm workers should be as proud of their parents’ professions as other children are of theirs.”

– Cesar Chavez,
farm worker and
labor leader



Share Your Knowledge: Ask students to tweet about what they learned about food chain workers: What conditions do they experience? What can people do to support workers? Tag **#foodworkers** and **#foodspan** to join the conversation.

Extensions:

Revisiting the Infographic (Social Studies)

Distribute copies of the **FoodSpan Infographic** (students may already have their own from previous lessons). Ask students to identify parts that represent food chain workers. Ask: *Do these accurately represent what we learned about food chain workers? If not, what could we add to make the infographic more accurate?* Working individually or as a class, have students draw their own versions, create a collage, or add images to the existing infographic. Share photos of students' work on social media and tag #foodspan.

Workers' Rights History (Social Studies, ELA)

Students will conduct a research project on an important event in the history of food chain workers' struggles, such as Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers' grape boycott or the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' "One Penny More" campaign. Drawing from at least three reputable sources, students will write a report examining the event, movement, or individual and the results for food chain workers.

Food Chain Workers Film Analysis (Social Studies)

Students will watch and analyze a film about food chain workers, such as *The Hand That Feeds* (<http://thehandthatfeedsfilm.com/>) or *Food Chains* (<http://www.foodchainsfilm.com/>).

In a report, students will address some or all of the following questions:

- *What risks and challenges did the workers face?*
- *What strategies did they employ to improve their conditions?*
- *What barriers did they need to overcome?*
- *Who were their allies and who was the opposition?*
- *What were their successes and failures?*

1. Food Chain Workers Alliance. *The Hands That Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers along the Food Chain*. 2012.