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Connecting Local Food Systems to Youth

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Connecting Local Food Systems to Youth

Abstract

Youth with few farming experiences have little understanding of where foods originate. The camp objective was to provide an opportunity for youth to understand food systems and associated jobs. The Food Products workshop focused around trail mix production. Town maps were drawn for each ingredient starting with the farm, then adding processing businesses, and ending with the consumer. Participants wrote down the jobs involved at each step of the food system and reported to their peers after receiving training. Benefits from the program included a better understanding of food systems in communities and agricultural careers and development of life skills.

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Agricultural Ties

Fifty-seven percent of 7 million youth involved in 4-H live in large cities (+50,000 people) and their suburbs. Across the nation, only 10% of 4-H youth members live on farms and have a direct rural background (National 4-H Council, 2005). Youth who participate at the Boulder Mountain Youth Camp are from Blaine, Camas, and Lemhi counties in south central Idaho. The majority of these youth come from families with few agricultural ties.

Food from the Grocery Store

These youth have no direct understanding of where food products originate. Many youth believe food comes from the grocery store, not from a farmer's field or a rancher's feedlot. Youth also don't realize the variety of jobs involved in agriculture production and the number of people employed in post farm production.

Local Food Systems

In order to help youth (ages 8-13) gain a better understanding of local foods systems, planners for the camp asked adult volunteers and industry ambassadors to speak on a variety of topics, including wool, beef, trees, and other food products.

The objectives of the camp workshops were to:

- Give youth the opportunity to learn about local food systems and careers,
- Increase youth life skills such as reading, measuring, problem solving, and public speaking.
And
- Provide fun and learning opportunities

Camp Workshops

Food system workshops covered production, management, and by-products of a specific product or commodity, coupled with a fun activity. The Food Products workshop was based on making trail

mix, and youth discussed local food systems in relation to the peanut, raisin, M&M ingredients (4HCCS; Wild Over Work). The Food Products workshop goals were to teach youth:

- About raw food supplies and how they become final products consumers can purchase at the local store,
- About jobs associated with many different aspects of food production,
- How their own family employment is important to the community.

Youth Life Skills

Participants were engaged in multiple activities at the food products workshop. Youth read how trail mix ingredients are grown. Other youth located on maps where ingredients are produced in the different regions of the world. Youth followed directions by reading and measuring the correct amounts of each ingredient of the trail mix recipe.

Gate to Plate Map

All youth participated in drawing schematic maps (one for each trail mix ingredient) on newsprint, starting with the farm that grows that particular ingredient. Businesses that process raw products were added to the map, which ended with the supermarket and the consumer's home. Participants were asked to write down the jobs involved at each place of business. Each ingredient group explained the production events to the other youth. Youth also described their parents' occupation, and adults helped explain that job's importance to the community.

Camp Accomplishments

Summer camp was a great opportunity to give youth a better understanding of local food systems. Volunteer adults and industry ambassadors provided energized workshops to camp participants. The workshops were centered on raw goods but also developed life skills of youth, including public speaking, reading, problem solving, and measuring. Youth became more aware of jobs and careers involved in final production preparation, and 24% of those attending the food products workshop reported they learned more about where different food comes from. Youth who participated feel stronger in their understanding about raw food products and have a better awareness about food systems in their communities. Youth are also building confidence knowing their family plays a role in their community and that they have a purpose.

References

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