

# Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

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Join us on Wednesdays and Fridays for Skills for Everyday Living, a series that goes beyond the classroom to prepare students for the many challenges of the real world. Our current topic is **Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions**, developed by *Facing the Future*. Series ends June 13.

*"Food is our common ground, a universal experience."*  
— James Beard, American chef and food writer

## Food for All

There are two big challenges to feeding the human population. The first is ensuring that people can get the basic food they need and that our food distribution systems work so that no one is seriously malnourished or starving. In this article, we will examine this challenge and some possible solutions.

The second challenge is to make sure that the way we produce food is sustainable so that the systems that support all life on Earth are not damaged. Tune in on Friday to learn more about this challenge and its solutions.

The United Nations reports that today more than 840 million people in the world — mostly women, children and the elderly — are hungry. This isn't because there's not enough food to go around. In fact, there is now more food grown than ever before.

### Then Why Are People Going Hungry?

Even though there is more than enough food for everyone, the food is not distributed equally. In some cases, even if food is available, some people do not have the money to buy it. In other cases, a specific group of people may be prohibited from accessing food resources. In many cases, governments in poor countries sell the food they grow to other countries in order to pay their debts instead of using it to feed their people. Armed conflict also can lead to hunger when farmers are forced to abandon their lands.

People in wealthier or developed countries consume much more food and calories than do people in developing countries. This is primarily due to a high

consumption of animal-based foods. In India, the average person eats about 11 pounds of meat each year, while an average person in the United States eats about 269 pounds.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the consumption of food is so out of balance that more than 1 billion people, mostly in developed countries, are now overnourished to the point of being overweight or obese.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, even in the United States, millions of people live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. Here in Washington state, approximately 100,000 residents are chronically hungry.

### Causes and Effects of Malnutrition

All of us have probably experienced some form of hunger at some point in our lives. Can you remember a time when you were very hungry? What did it feel like? Were you able to think about anything else?

Malnutrition is a lack of healthy foods in a person's diet, which can negatively impact their growth and development. Malnutrition can be caused not only by lack of food, but also by eating poor-quality food. In developing countries, poor-quality food usually lacks sufficient nutrients, but in wealthier developed countries, poor-quality food is usually those items high in fats, salts and sugars. Obesity, due to poor-quality food, is rapidly becoming a worldwide problem as unhealthy Western foods — primarily fast foods — are becoming more popular.

### Providing Food for Today and Tomorrow

Over the past 50 years, food production has grown faster than the rapidly growing population, and is predicted to keep growing faster than population through 2030. Yet experts believe that people will still go hungry in many parts of the world unless poverty and unequal food distribution systems are addressed.

Many organizations are dedicated to making sure that all people have access to food. Some are large intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), which provides food for people in regions facing severe hunger and food shortages. WFP addresses the root causes of hunger, such as poverty, population and armed conflict, through programs that boost economic development, agricultural production and food security.

A large number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are working on solutions to hunger. One such organization is Heifer International, whose programs provide livestock and training in livestock care to people in need around the world. Donors purchase gifts of domestic animals, such as goats, cows or chickens, for poor communities; residents are then trained to care for their animals and harvest their milk or eggs.

Other groups are working to ensure greater access to food locally. Most schools provide free meals to students who might not be able to purchase lunch. Many food banks, including Second Harvest and Northwest Harvest, help to distribute healthy food to families in Washington.

What measures can you take to help address food needs locally or globally?

<sup>1</sup> Norman Myers and Jennifer Kent, "New Consumers: The Influence of Affluence on the Environment," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, April 15, 2003, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/100/8/4963/T3>.

<sup>2</sup> Lester R. Brown, "Plan B Rescuing a Planet under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble," *Earth Policy Institute*, 2003, [www.Earth-policy.org/Books/PlanB\\_ch5\\_socialdivide.pdf](http://www.Earth-policy.org/Books/PlanB_ch5_socialdivide.pdf).

Cuisine a la American...



Horsey cartoon from June 14, 2001 – Uncle Sam super-sizing

## Activity

Visit the United States Department of Agriculture's food pyramid page at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov). Click on *My Pyramid Plan* and enter your information to see your customized food pyramid. Then answer the questions below:

- How many servings of fruit should you eat each day?
- What kinds of vegetables are best for you?
- What kinds of foods should be the largest portion of your diet?

## Take Action!

Does your community have what it takes to help end food security problems? Find out what kinds of foods are readily available in your neighborhood. Create a list of 10 foods that are part of a healthy diet. Think carefully about which foods are most healthy: fresh or processed fruits and vegetables, organic or nonorganic dairy products, fish or beef, etc. Visit the grocery store closest to your house and see if all 10 foods you listed are available. If not, talk to the store manager about why you think he or she should sell those foods.

Learn about other ways you can ensure food security in your community at [www.foodsecurity.org/what\\_you\\_can\\_do.pdf](http://www.foodsecurity.org/what_you_can_do.pdf).