

Map Your Food

Maps, in all shapes, sizes, and themes, are a common fourth grade social studies topic. Kids love the textures and shapes of physical maps, the intricate symbols of product maps, and the rainbow colors of climate charts. But it can be another matter all together when it comes to locating themselves within that context. Here's a fun family activity that builds this awareness, while also addressing the pressing environmental issue of our "global footprint." And if you've got a picky eater around, it just might get him to try some new foods, too!

What You Need:

- 10-20 foods that your child eats often over a week. Try to include a range of categories, from produce and meat to milk to cereals and snacks.
- Wall size map of the world
- Ball of thin colored yarn
- Push pins or repositionable tape (available at stationery or art supply stores)
- Small sticky notes



What You Do:

1. Explain to your child that you are going to figure out how far your food travels to get to you. Start by putting up the world map, and marking your home town on it with a colored marker.
2. Invite your child to explore the kitchen with you, and pull out your 10-20 common food items. Keep them in their containers, or leave stickers on them, for this activity—you want to find out where they're from!
3. Now, one by one, "map" your food: stretch your yarn from your house to the country or state, or even city, where your food was grown or made. Label each string with a post-it.
4. This being fourth grade, your child is studying map legends and learning to figure distance ratios. So take out a plain piece of paper and start a list: for each food, use the map legend to figure how many miles it came, assuming it came "as the crow flies." (It may not have, but this will still give us a useful ballpark). If a product came from within 50 miles, it may be too hard to be exact; just give it an average number of, say 20. And if it came from your back yard, of course, you can savor writing a nice round "0"!
5. When you're done, you should have a dramatic map with lines of varying lengths. Leave it up for the week and talk it over. Are there any foods you might choose that are closer to home? Tally your first total of miles...and then, for the next couple of weeks, see if you can beat your score. What is it like to "eat local," and how can you do it more often?