ACTIVITY GUIDE

HIDDEN COST CAFE: A STORY OF FOOD SYSTEMS

Carbon dioxide released from food production contributes to climate change. Participants create their own meal and experiment with the carbon footprint of their food choices.

IN THIS KIT

- Box containing scale, 2 set screws, an X tray and 4 black plastic trays

- 5-part display tray (disassembled and nested)

- Whiteboard and whiteboard marker

- 2 laminated infographics "Industrial Food System" and "Local Food System"

- Month by month guide to in season produce in PA

- 2 Activity signs protected in plastic displays

- 40 pieces weighted toy food

- "Menu Breakdown" guide to the "why" of food weight

BIG QUESTIONS

- What are the steps involved in bringing food to your table?

- What is the climate impact of each of these steps?

- How can we make food choices that reduce our impact on greenhouse gasses and reduce our reliance on resources that will be scarce in the future?

HOW TO SET UP

1) Write In-Season specials on white board for current month

2) Assemble 5-part display tray and arrange weighted food on it

3) Attach X shaped tray to scale with 2 set screws

4) Place infographics and activity signs on table

HIDDEN COST CAFE

(This works best if children are directed to the activities, while caretakers are engaged in conversation and display information. This script is written for one visitor at a time but can be adapted for groups.)

- Welcome to the Carbon Café! Please choose from our items to pick out your lunch. What would you most likely eat for lunch?

- You may notice how the food feels. What do you think the weight represents? *(Common misinterpretation: The heavier food weighs more because it has more fat, more cholesterol, or less nutritional value.)*

- The weight represents carbon impact, in other words, the non-renewable resources that are being used up and converted into the greenhouse gas CO2. What you'll notice is that for the most part, the food that's good for the environment is also good for us; it ends up being fresher and less refined, both things that contribute to its nutritional value. *(Once the visitor has selected their meal, have them place it on the scale.)*

- How much does it weigh? *(Use the carbon calculator to see what the carbon footprint looks like in terms of miles driven in a car.)*

- Why do you think your meal weighed what it did? What was the heaviest item?

- Where did that item come from? How did it start? *(Guide them back back back until it is its simplest form. For example: The cheeseburger comes from wheat, a cow, a tomato.)*

- Now let's look at the different steps food can take to get from there to your plate. *(Direct visitor attention to the Industrial Food System infographic)*

- Which steps do you think this particular food item took to get from it's origin to your tray.

- What does it take to make each of these steps happen? What powers it? *(Explain that every step of this process requires fossil fuels, water, or produces greenhouse gasses. Refer to the Menu Breakdown to check the visitor's guesses and, if appropriate, give more specific details about a food item's weight.)*

- Now let's see if any of your food items are in-season locally in PA. *(refer to in-season specials and subtract appropriate amount of weight from end total)*

HIDDEN COST CAFE

FACILITATION GUIDE

- Why do you think these things are lighter because they are in season? *(Carbon release from transportation and growing requirements change dramatically when produce can be grown in-season and locally.)*

- Now it's your turn to try again! Can you pick a meal that has a smaller carbon weight?

- How might buying local food help Pittsburgh in other ways? *(refer to local food systems infographic)*

(Common responses: "I'll never stop eating meat.")
- You don't have to stop altogether to make an impact. Switching to meats that have smaller impact like chicken or rabbit, and reducing the amount of meat you eat can make a big difference.

(Common response: "But local food is so much more expensive.")
- While it's true that large corporations and other entities in the industrial food system that process large amounts of food in big factories often provide lower costs, there are programs in Allegheny county to help support low income people have access to the fresh, local food that will support small farmers and businesses in their communities and provide them more nutrients.
  If you plan ahead, eating fresh food prepared at home can be a lot cheaper. Grow Pittsburgh has lots of tools to help people learn how to grow their own food, and preserve food to eat in the winter months.
  Also, the medical costs a person can incur from eating processed foods which often have more salt to preserve them and fats, sugars and other ingredients that are hard for our bodies to process, could far outweigh the cost of buying local foods.

FINISHED KIT

ABOUT CUSP

CUSP helps urban communities explore climate impacts and solutions through active engagement with local examples.

Climate & Urban
Systems Partnership