LESSON 2

Seasonal, Local Food

The story of food includes where it's grown, and when.

GRADE	TIME	FINAL PRODUCT
Grades 6–8	Two class periods, 50–60 min each	Seasonal Food Wheel + team resources booklet

BIG IDEA

Foods have seasons. Eating in-season, locally grown food can support local farmers, reduce transportation pollution, and provide fresher, tastier food. The choice isn't all-or-nothing; it involves real trade-offs.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does eating locally grown and seasonal food benefit the health of people and the environment?

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Map your foodshed.

Across two class periods, students investigate seasonality and local food systems.

Day 1 opens with the Nourish short film *In Season*, an optional sensory tasting, and a foodshed-mapping exercise using a 150-mile (240-kilometer) compass radius. Students begin building their Seasonal Food Wheel for the region. Day 2 finishes the Seasonal Food Wheel, then teams research nearby places to find local food (farmers markets, CSAs, community gardens, food co-ops). Teams contribute one page each to a class Local Food Resources booklet that goes home with families.

The lesson closes with a discussion of trade-offs: local isn't always practical, and that's part of the story.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Four subjects, one lesson.

SCIENCE (NGSS)

What students do

Apply scientific principles to evaluate how seasonal eating and food transportation affect environmental impacts. Analyze and interpret data from maps, seasonal calendars, and foodshed models to identify patterns in food systems.

Three-dimensional emphasis. SEPs: Analyzing and Interpreting Data; Developing and Using Models. CCCs: Patterns; Cause and Effect.

MS-ESS3-3

ELA (CCSS)

What students do

Integrate information from maps, charts, and texts to explain local and seasonal food systems. Write informative texts about benefits and tradeoffs of seasonal and local food. Engage in collaborative discussions about geography and seasonality.

RST.6-8.7 WHST.6-8.2 SL.6.1/7.1/8.1

SOCIAL STUDIES (C3)

What students do

Explain how environmental and cultural factors influence food production and consumption. Explain how economic decisions in agriculture affect the well-being of communities. Evaluate how local food systems support communities while involving tradeoffs.

D2.Geo.4.6-8 D2.Eco.1.6-8 D2.Civ.12.6-8

HEALTH (NHES)

What students do

Analyze how seasonality and freshness affect personal and community health. Evaluate how access to local and seasonal food influences nutrition and well-being. Advocate for food choices that support healthier people, communities, and ecosystems.

NHES 1 NHES 2 NHES 8

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

What to know before you teach.

One important part of the story of food is how far it travels to reach us. In the past, many people grew or gathered food close to home. Today, much of our food travels long distances (sometimes across countries or continents) before reaching our plates.

When fruits and vegetables are shipped, flown, or trucked long distances, they're often picked before they're ripe so they can survive the journey. As a result, these foods may be less flavorful and nutritious, use more fuel, and create more pollution than locally grown alternatives. Eating locally grown foods in season can support local farmers, reduce transportation pollution, and provide fresher, more nutrient-rich foods.

However, eating only local foods isn't always possible. In many regions, seasonal availability is limited, and a balanced diet may include foods grown elsewhere. Understanding seasonality, distance, and foodsheds helps students see food choices as part of a larger system, and weigh real trade-offs honestly.

VOCABULARY

Words to grow on.

Introduce the five terms on Day 1 after the film.



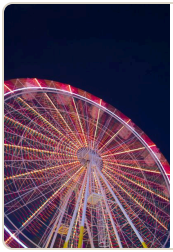
in season

Ripe and ready to harvest nearby, in the months when a food naturally grows.



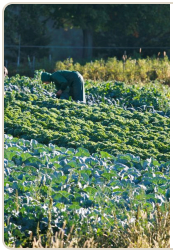
local food

Food grown and produced close to where it is eaten, usually within the same region.



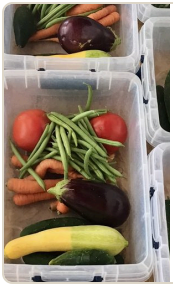
radius

The distance from the center of a circle to its edge.



foodshed

The area where food is grown and produced to feed the people who live there, like a watershed but for food.



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
Paying a farm in advance for a share of its harvest, delivered as regular boxes of fresh, seasonal food.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

What you'll print and cue up.

MATERIALS

- **Nourish short film**: *In Season* (Multiple Voices, ~2 min): community voices describe what's in season near them.
- **Visual glossary slides**: one per term.
- Two food items for the comparison one currently in season locally, one shipped from far away.
- **Optional**: small samples of a local in-season food with toothpicks and napkins.
- **Seasonal Food Wheel student pages**: printable PDF, 2 pages per student.
- **Local Food Resources student pages**: printable PDF, 1 per team.
- Regional or state map showing at least 150 miles (240 kilometers) in all directions from your school; include the legend or mileage scale.
- **Geometry compasses**: 1 per student or pair; and colored markers, scissors, glue, paper brad fasteners.

PREPARATION

- Cue up *In Season* for Day 1, Step 1.
- Bring two food items: one in season locally, one shipped from far away. If nothing is currently in season where you live, use a stored local food (potato, onion, stored apple).
- *Optional:* prepare small samples to taste.
- Locate a regional seasonal produce chart for your state or region. Print copies for each student or pair.
- Print the Seasonal Food Wheel student pages (2 per student) on cardstock if available. Pre-cut wedge if it'll save class time.
- Print the Local Food Resources student pages (1 per team).
- Pre-form teams of 3-4 for the Day 2 Local Food Resources work, ideally by category (farmers markets / CSAs / community gardens / stores or restaurants).

DAY 1

Foodsheds and Seasonal Food Wheels

50 minutes

1 Watch: *In Season* + opening question

8 MIN

TEACHER

- Pre-frame: introduce the film. Ask students to listen for one food that surprises them.
- Play *In Season* (~2 min). Captions on.
- Pair share: one food from the film, what season it was, and whether they've eaten it.
- Whole-class capture: Invite 2–3 students to share. Capture words on the board.

STUDENTS

Share with a partner: one food, what season, and have you tried it.

2 Vocabulary + in-season vs traveled-far

8 MIN

TEACHER

- Hold up your two foods. Ask: **"Which is grown nearby right now? Which traveled a long way?"**
- Reveal each food's story: where it likely came from and what time of year it's in season locally.
- Project vocabulary slides. Walk through the five core terms.
- Optional taste: if you have samples, have students wash hands and try the in-season food. Ask: **"How does it taste? What words describe it?"**

STUDENTS

Guess which food is local and which traveled far.

Taste the in-season food (optional). Use 3 words to describe it.

3 Mapping our foodshed

9 MIN

TEACHER

- Distribute the regional map and one geometry compass per student or pair.
- Direct students to draw a 150-mile (240-kilometer) radius circle around your town.
- Discuss as a class: What towns, agricultural areas, waterways, or landmarks are inside the circle? Is 150 miles (240 km) a good definition of a foodshed? Why or why not?
- Highlight the concept: a foodshed is the working geography of where food might realistically come from for our community.

STUDENTS

Use a compass to draw a 150-mile (240-kilometer) circle around your town on the regional map.

Notice what's inside the circle: towns, farmland, water, mountains.

Discuss: is 150 miles (240 kilometers) a fair definition of local for our region?

4 Begin the Seasonal Food Wheel

18 MIN

TEACHER

- Distribute the Seasonal Food Wheel student pages (2 pages per student or pair).
- Show the color code: each season has its own color on the Wheel.
- Project (or print) the regional seasonal produce chart. Ask students to draw and label at least 2 foods per season in the appropriate color band.
- Encourage drawings + labels rather than labels alone.
- 5 min before time: ask students to add at least 2 year-round foods to the center circle (eggs, stored apples, honey, herbs, etc.)
- Note: students will finish assembly and reflection on Day 2.

STUDENTS

Use the regional chart to find what's in season locally each month.

Draw and label at least 2 foods in each season's color band.

Add 2 year-round foods to the center circle.

5 Closing + preview Day 2

4 MIN

TEACHER

- Direct students to store their Wheel pages safely.
- Preview Day 2: finish the Seasonal Food Wheel, assemble it, and build a Local Food Resources booklet to take home.

STUDENTS

Store your Wheel pages safely.

Notice what's in season this week.

DAY 2

Local Food Resources booklet.

55–60 minutes

1 Finish and assemble Seasonal Food Wheels

12 MIN

TEACHER

- Return Seasonal Food Wheel pages. Ask students to complete any seasons they didn't finish on Day 1.
- Walk through assembly together: cut the wedge from the top circle, place it on the bottom circle, fasten the center with a brad. *Optional:* glue a small regional map (or the 150-mile (240-kilometer) map from Day 1) onto the back of the bottom circle.

STUDENTS

Finish drawing and labeling local foods on your Wheel.

Cut out the top circle's wedge.

Stack and fasten with a brad. Glue the 150-mile (240-kilometer) map on the back.

2 Form Local Food Resources teams

5 MIN

TEACHER

- Form teams of 3-4 (or use pre-formed teams). Each team takes ONE category: "Farmers Markets," "CSAs," "Community Gardens," or "Stores or Restaurants."
- Distribute the Local Food Resources student page (1 per team).
- Project a few good starting places: a national or regional directory of farmers markets and farms that sell directly, your regional agriculture department, or a local farmers market's website. A search for "farmers market" plus your town finds most of them.

STUDENTS

Review the Local Food Resources page with your team so you know what info to gather.

3 Team research

20 MIN

TEACHER

- Direct teams to research 3–5 specific places in their assigned category. For each, list: name, address, what's sold, season(s) available, contact info.
- Circulate. Coach teams to confirm the place is actually open and operating (don't trust outdated listings).
- Ask teams to also draft 2–3 sentences on **"Why this category matters to families looking for local food."**

STUDENTS

Research 3–5 places in your category.

Fill in the Local Food Resources page: name, location, what's sold, season, contact.

Write 2–3 sentences on why your category matters.

4 Assemble the booklet + trade-offs discussion

12 MIN

TEACHER

- Collect team pages and assemble them into a class Local Food Resources booklet (paper-stapled or shared digital doc).
- Lead a brief class discussion. Ask one or two:
  - What are the benefits of eating in-season and local?
  - What are the trade-offs?
  - When does it make sense to eat food from far away?
  - Who in our community depends on local farms?
  - Who might struggle to access local food?
- Capture key trade-offs on the board.

STUDENTS

Hand in your team's Local Food Resources page.

Share one benefit and one trade-off of eating local, in-season food.

Listen for trade-offs others raise.

5 Closing + take-home

5 MIN

TEACHER

- Direct students to write their name on the back of their Seasonal Food Wheel.
- Distribute (or queue digital distribution of) the class Local Food Resources booklet to take home.
- Invite students to ask a family member what season foods they remember from their own childhood. Plant a curiosity seed.

STUDENTS

Take home your Seasonal Food Wheel and the class Local Food Resources booklet.

Ask a family member: what season foods do you remember from when you were a kid?

ASSESSMENT

What understanding looks like.

Students demonstrate understanding by:

- Using vocabulary (in season, local food, radius, foodshed, CSA) accurately.
- Drawing an accurate 150-mile (240-kilometer) radius on the regional map.
- Completing a Seasonal Food Wheel with at least 2 foods per season and 2 year-round foods, placed in correct months.
- Contributing accurate, useful entries to the team's Local Food Resources page (real places, real info).
- Identifying at least one benefit and one trade-off of local + seasonal eating.

Look-fors: teams that catch outdated listings or note seasonal limits are showing strong critical reading.

DIFFERENTIATION & SCAFFOLDING

Build access in.

FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

- Allow food labels on the Seasonal Food Wheel in a student's home language alongside English.
- Pre-teach the four season names paired with the Wheel's color code.

FOR STUDENTS WITH RESEARCH IEPS

- Pre-curate 5-6 trustworthy local-food websites for each category, so teams have a clear starting set.
- Provide a graphic organizer breaking each Local Food Resources entry into smaller prompts.

FOR STUDENTS WHO FINISH EARLY

- Glue a small regional map on the back of the bottom Seasonal Food Wheel showing where the foods are grown.
- Add a fifth pile: foods you'd LIKE to try but haven't yet.

CONTEXT NOTES

Local food access varies. Some students live near farmers markets and full grocery stores; others live in food deserts. Don't presume access; invite the conversation. The trade-offs you discuss should include access, not just freshness.

Climate context. If you teach in a longer-growing-season region, the Wheel will fill easily. In colder climates (Upper Midwest, New England, Alaska), winter will rely heavily on stored or preserved foods. Both are valid local food systems.

EXTENSIONS

Five ways to go further.

EXTENSION 01

Plan and prepare a 150-mile (240-kilometer) meal

Students use their Seasonal Food Wheels to plan a meal made entirely from foods in season locally. They identify the dish, list ingredients with seasons, and write a paragraph explaining their choices. If kitchen access allows, the class prepares and tastes one of the dishes together.

EXTENSION 02

Learning from local growers

Arrange a class visit to a local farm or farmers market. Before the visit, students generate three questions about what grows there and when. During the visit, students interview a farmer or vendor. After, students update their Seasonal Food Wheels with anything new they learned.

EXTENSION 03

Design a seasonal garden

Students draw a garden plan using plants suitable for the current season. They research growing requirements of different vegetables and fruits, then sketch a map of the garden area showing the location of each plant.

EXTENSION 04

Land use with digital tools

Students use Google Earth or Google Maps to explore how land in their region is developed, undeveloped, and farmed. They analyze how land use patterns influence food production and food access.

EXTENSION 05

Seasonal storytelling

Students write a one-page narrative from the perspective of a food traveling through its season: sprouting in early spring, ripening in summer, harvested and eaten in fall.