LESSON 5

Know Your Farmer

Every farm is a web of relationships.

GRADE	TIME	FINAL PRODUCT
Grades 6–8	One 50-minute class period	Farm Profile + a 2-slide pair presentation

BIG IDEA

A regional food system is made up of people, places, and choices. Knowing the farms in our region helps us understand where our food comes from, who grows it, and why their work matters to our health, our economy, and our community.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who grows our food, and why does their work matter to our community?

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Meet the people who grow your food.

In one 50-minute class period, students become investigators of their regional food system. After a brief opening inquiry ("Where does our food come from? Could you name a farm in our region?") and a quick vocabulary preview, pairs are each assigned one local or regional farm to research.

Using farm websites, news articles, and farm directories, pairs complete a Farm Profile and build a 2-slide presentation: one slide introducing the farm and one slide explaining why it matters environmentally, economically, and to the community.

The class closes by plotting each researched farm on a regional map, surfacing patterns about where food in their community actually comes from. The slide deck and the regional map become a shared, growing artifact across the unit.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Four subjects, one lesson.

SCIENCE (NGSS)

What students do

Apply scientific principles to design methods for monitoring and minimizing human impacts on the environment, applied to local agriculture. Analyze interactions among organisms and between living and nonliving parts of ecosystems, applied to farming systems.

Three-dimensional emphasis. SEPs: Obtaining, Evaluating, and Communicating Information; Developing and Using Models (maps as system models); Asking Questions. CCCs: Systems and System Models; Cause and Effect; Stability and Change.

MS-ESS3-3 MS-LS2-1

ELA (CCSS)

What students do

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of informational texts about farms and food systems. Write an informative explanation of the assigned farm. Present findings clearly, sequencing ideas logically and using relevant evidence.

RST.6-8.1 WHST.6-8.2 SL.6.4/7.4/8.4

SOCIAL STUDIES (C3)

What students do

Construct maps and explain geographic relationships related to farms and food systems. Explain how economic decisions in agriculture and food production affect the well-being of farmers, businesses, and communities.

D2.Geo.1.6-8 D2.Eco.1.6-8

HEALTH (NHES)

What students do

Explain how food production and farming practices connect to human and environmental health. Analyze how community, economic, and cultural factors influence farming practices.

NHES 1 NHES 2

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

What to know before you teach.

A regional food system is made up of the people, places, and steps involved in bringing food to a community. Farmers, as stewards of the land, are central actors in that system. Their decisions about soil health, water use, crop diversity, and animal welfare ripple through the environment, the economy, and local communities.

When middle school students investigate their regional food system, they begin to see how geography influences food production. Climate, soil type, access to water, and distance to markets all influence what farms grow and how they operate.

Many students will discover farms they've passed in a car or seen at a farmers market but never investigated. Others, especially those in rural communities or families connected to agriculture, may already have first-hand knowledge to bring in. The lesson is designed to honor both starting points.

VOCABULARY

Words to grow on.

Introduce the five terms via the vocabulary slides before pairs begin their research.



food system
All the people, places, and steps involved in bringing food to our community.



farm
A place where crops are grown or animals are raised for food.



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



seasonality
The time of year when certain foods are naturally harvested in a region.



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

- ☐ **Visual glossary slides**: one per term.
- ☐ **Farm Profile student page**: printable PDF or digital document, 1 per pair; guided investigation worksheet.
- ☐ **Slide deck template**: Google Slides: 2 slides per pair, Farm Overview + Why This Farm Matters.
- ☐ **Regional map for posting farms**: chart paper, poster, or projected Google Map of your region.
- ☐ Colored dots or small Post-it notes for marking farm locations (1 per pair).
- ☐ Devices with internet access for the research step (1 per pair).

PREPARATION

- ☐ Research and assemble a list of regional or local farms or ranches with a web presence; enough to assign one farm per student pair. If your region includes fishing or aquaculture enterprises, include those.
- ☐ Cue up the vocabulary slides.
- ☐ Set up the Google Slides template with 2 slides per pair: Slide 1 (Farm Overview) and Slide 2 (Why This Farm Matters).
- ☐ Prepare the regional or state map on poster board, chart paper, or a projected Google Map ahead of class. Mark your school's location.
- ☐ Decide pair groupings in advance; student research goes faster when pairs are pre-set.

THE LESSON

One farm, researched and shared.

50 minutes

1 Opening inquiry + Vocabulary + assign farms

7 MIN

TEACHER

- Open the inquiry: Ask quickly, going around the room: where does most of our food come from? Could you name a farm in our region? Why does it matter who grows your food?
- Family knowledge prompt: invite students with family connections to farming, kitchens, markets, or food service to share. Take 1–2 responses.
- Vocabulary: project the vocabulary slides. Walk through the five terms at a brisk pace: image, term, definition.
- Distribute + assign: hand out the Farm Profile page (1 per pair). Assign each pair a specific farm from your pre-prepared list; project or write the assignments on the board.
- Bridge: today, pairs will investigate one real regional farm and add findings to a class map.

STUDENTS

Share quick answers to: Where does our food come from? Could you name a regional farm?

If your family has connections to farming or food work, share one thing you've learned.

Read along with the vocabulary slides; ask clarifying questions.

Find your partner and examine the Farm Profile page so you know what you're looking for.

2 Farm Investigation

18 MIN

TEACHER

- Direct pairs to use their farm's website, news articles, and farm directories to complete the Farm Profile.
- Project investigation prompts: location, what they grow or raise, farming practices, seasonal crops, and how they sell their food.
- Circulate. Help pairs find and interpret web content; coach when a website is hard to parse.
- Encourage students to make a reasonable inference (with a question mark) when a website doesn't directly answer a question.
- 5 min before time: ask each pair to circle the one most surprising thing they learned about their farm.

STUDENTS

Complete the Farm Profile together using the farm's website, news articles, and directories.

Mark inferences with a question mark: guess thoughtfully when a website doesn't say directly.

Circle the one most surprising thing you learned.

3 Build the 2-slide presentation

15 MIN

TEACHER

- Open the Google Slides template. Each pair claims one pair of slides.
- Display the requirements:
  - Slide 1 (Farm Overview): farm name, location, what they grow or raise, photo(s), one key fact.
  - Slide 2 (Why This Farm Matters): environmental impact (soil, water, biodiversity, animal welfare, open space); economic impact (jobs, products, services); and community contribution (farmers markets, CSAs, schools, food banks, restaurants).
- Set a visible 13-min timer. Reserve the last 2 min for source citation and a fast peer scan.
- Remind students: complete sentences, cite at least 1 source on each slide.

STUDENTS

Build your two slides using research from the Farm Profile: complete sentences, cite at least 1 source.

Spend 2 min at the end to peer-scan with another pair: spot anything missing.

4 Map the Farms + closing reflection

7 MIN

TEACHER

- Direct pairs to the regional map. Each pair places one colored dot or Post-it at their farm's location and writes the farm name.
- Lead a brief whole-class analysis. Ask: What patterns do you see in where these farms are located? How far is food traveling? Where in our community might you find or buy food from these farms?
- Close with a short reflection prompt: why does farming matter to our community? Take 2–3 quick responses.
- *Optional:* collect Farm Profile pages for assessment.

STUDENTS

Place your pair's dot on the regional map and label the farm name.

Notice the patterns: where are the farms? How far is food traveling?

Share one reason farming matters to your community.

ASSESSMENT

What understanding looks like.

Students demonstrate understanding by:

- Using vocabulary (food system, farm, local food, seasonality, CSA) accurately.
- Obtaining and recording accurate information about a real regional farm.
- Connecting the farm's geography to its environmental and economic impacts.
- Explaining why the farm matters environmentally, economically, and to the community.
- Communicating clearly through the Farm Profile and 2-slide deck.
- Citing at least one source per slide.

Look-fors: pairs that ask honest questions about their farm's practices (rather than just praising them) are demonstrating stronger informational analysis.

DIFFERENTIATION & SCAFFOLDING

Build access in.

FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

- Pair multilingual learners with classmates who share their home language when possible.
- Allow Farm Profile responses to be drafted in a home language, then translated to English on the slides (or both).
- Pre-teach the five vocabulary terms with visual examples on the slides.

FOR STUDENTS WITH READING OR RESEARCH IEPS

- Pre-curate two or three farm websites at a Grade 6 reading level for each assigned farm.
- Provide a graphic organizer alongside the Farm Profile that breaks each question into smaller prompts.
- Allow students to record audio responses to the Farm Profile and transfer key points to the slides with a partner's help.

FOR STUDENTS WHO FINISH EARLY

- Add a third slide: **"One question I'd ask the farmer"**, with reasoning.
- Begin one of the lesson extensions (Farm Interview, Cultural Foodways Spotlight).
- Help another pair whose farm has limited web information.

CONTEXT NOTES

Rural and farming-family students. In rural districts, some students will have direct family ties to conventional, organic, or regenerative farming. Treat all farming approaches respectfully: the lesson is about understanding the food system, not ranking the farms. Family knowledge is a resource; invite it.

Urban students. Most urban students have not visited a working farm. Show photos and videos generously, and lean into farms students may have encountered indirectly: community gardens, school gardens, urban farms, farmers markets.

Timing note. The 50-min flow is tight. If the slide build runs over 15 min, plan a short follow-up day (15–20 min) for slide completion and the regional map share-out.

EXTENSIONS

Six ways to go further.

EXTENSION 01

Farm Interview

Students prepare 3–5 questions and interview a farmer at their researched farm by phone, email, or in person at a farmers market. They summarize insights about farming practices, seasonality, and community relationships, and add what they learn to their slides.

EXTENSION 02

Farm Visit

Arrange a class visit to a nearby farm. Students observe crops, soil practices, irrigation, and harvesting. Before the visit, they generate three questions tied to their research; after, they compare what they observed to what they read online.

EXTENSION 03

Regional Food Map Project

Students expand the classroom map to include multiple farms across the region, plus distribution centers, farmers markets, and grocery stores. They analyze patterns (clusters, gaps, distance) and identify potential Farm to School connections in their district.

EXTENSION 04

Farm to School Connection

Students analyze their researched farm's crops and design a realistic school lunch item that could feature one of its seasonal products. They calculate approximate harvest timing, estimate quantities, and discuss whether the farm could realistically supply the school cafeteria. Could pair with a visit to the school food service director.

EXTENSION 05

Cultural Foodways Spotlight

Students research how one crop from their farm is used in different cultural cuisines around the world. They create a short slide or poster showing recipes, traditions, and celebrations connected to that food, and reflect on how Farm to School and farmers market programs can honor cultural diversity in a community.

EXTENSION 06

Optional Nourish short film

Know Your Farmer (Nigel Walker, ~1:30 min): Walker reflects on what it means to grow food for a community. Use as a class opener if a 5-min budget can be found, or share as a follow-up during Farm Investigation.