

# Making Youth Known



Common Ground

Young People Harvest Food and Community

WHAT  
**Kids**  
CAN DO

**Powerful learning  
with public purpose**

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## **Who we are**

What Kids Can Do, Inc. promotes the value of young people, working with teachers and other adults, on projects that combine powerful learning with public purpose. We collect and share feature stories, student work and voices, research and resources that expand current views of what constitutes challenging learning and achievement, particularly for adolescent students. We believe deeply in the contributions of youth as citizens. We put youth voices and work at the forefront of all we produce.

## **What we value**

Powerful learning in which young people:

- Engage in issues that have meaning to them and their communities, in work that inspires their commitment and effort.
- Conduct work that crosses disciplines, connects academics to the real world, requires the application of new information.
- Encounter high expectations, plentiful opportunities to gain new skills, substantial support, clear goals and rules.
- Experience give-and-take with adults that is truly reciprocal and mutually respectful.
- Develop initiative, persistence, flexibility, risk-taking, curiosity, a social conscience.
- Have their work assessed as it unfolds and receive opportunities for ongoing feedback and reflection.
- Share their results publicly.

# Common Ground: Young People Harvest Food and Community

*Year-round, young people and adult partners work to create a sustainable metropolitan food system, to bridge communities traditionally divided by race, class, and physical distance, and to address critical environmental and social issues.*

**F**ifteen miles west of Boston, surrounded by lush fields of fresh vegetables and herbs, the roughly 60 urban and suburban teens who make up the Food Project's summer corps gather with their families each August to celebrate their season's work.

They have set a record with this summer harvest, which goes to Boston area food banks and homeless shelters: 73,000 pounds from 21 acres of conservation land in Lincoln, Massachusetts plus 6,000 pounds from two previously hardscrabble acres in inner-city Dorchester.

But the farmers, aged 14 to 19, say they too have had a growing season. "It is very special to see huge zucchini plants produce food for people in shelters—and remember the hot day two months ago when you planted one," says Jess, a young crew leader.

"Patience," says 15-year-old Shatara, asked what she gained from the experience. She adds, "Take your anger out on the weeds." "The power of connections—connecting black and white, rich and poor, young and adult, ideas with needs," another young farmer answers. A third says he has learned "the important role agriculture can play in the city."

Like the seeds these young people planted at summer's start, the Food Project (TFP) has blossomed from a small pilot ten years ago to a nationally recognized program. Year-round, young people and adult partners join the Food Project's quest to create a sustainable metropolitan food system, to bridge communities traditionally divided by race, class, and physical distance, and to address critical environmental and social issues.

Nothing about the Food Project is contrived, especially in the opportunities it provides its young growers and the impact it seeks. "The stakes for us and our young people are high," explains Program Director Greg Gale. "If we do not farm well and productively, people go hungry, land lies wasted, and families do not have access to the life-giving produce we grow."

Only a true partnership with its young crew members makes possible the back-breaking work that mission requires of them. "We could not get the work done without them," Gale continues. "We rely heavily on their commitment, talents, and

capacity to work and serve. They know this, and it is from this understanding that our journey with each new crew begins.”

### Crossing Boundaries of Age and Geography

“Impossible to resist” is how one person describes a first encounter with Ward Cheney and his yet-to-be-born Food Project in 1991. An experienced farmer in Lincoln, Cheney wanted to bring together people of diverse backgrounds—particularly youth—to grow and distribute food to Boston’s hungry and, in the process, “practice care for land and community.” The new organization, in Cheney’s words, would balance *values and beliefs* (care, reverence, usefulness) with *important resources* (people

## The Faces of the Food Project: Young and Old, Urban and Suburban

The best way to understand our community is to meet a few of the thousands of people who are part of the Food Project:

**Tashana** joined our program at age 14, and in the last seven years she has served in nearly every role available to her at the Food Project. She is now at the Cornell School of Agriculture and Life Sciences and, when she graduates, she wants to work for the United States Department of Agriculture in community nutrition.

**Devon** is a compactly built, quiet young man. He came to us from a juvenile detention center. He did well in the program but went back home into difficult circumstances.

Two years later, he was shot in a gang-related incident and was paralyzed from the waist down. He lives in a basement apartment with an elderly woman who took him in.

**Eric** graduated from an Ivy League college and has been accepted to a medical school. He turned down elite schools to gain entry to a program that trains people in community medicine. During the two years before he begins medical school, he is helping urban teens gain access to a college education. He has served in nearly every role available to him at the Food Project.

**Herv** is the father of a Food Project participant. He came to the United States from Montserrat and runs a small

construction outfit. He is a physically powerful man and he frequently comes by the urban food sites to help us pull stumps and think through construction projects.

**Susan** is a suburban mother of two sons who have participated in the Food Project. She buys all of her produce from our farm. As a town official she promotes our use of conservation land as a model of how her town can support sustainable agriculture.

**Jose’s** house borders the food lot in Roxbury. He watches out for vandals, helps get city services when we need them, and gives inspirational talks to our young people about the positive impact of their work in the neighborhood.

**Salicia** grew up in Jamaica and moved to the United States 60 years ago. She has a small and beautiful garden near our urban sites. She grows Callalu, an edible green from Jamaica, and tomatoes and sells them at our farmers’ market. Young participants in the Food Project periodically visit and help her to turn her soil.

**Domingo** grew up in Boston and was a crew leader in our program for two summers. He left the city to attend college where he majored in economics. He then returned to the Food Project to be a full-time staff member

—From *Growing Together*, by Greg Gale (2000)

of diverse backgrounds, land) and *needed products* (innovative education; food for others and ourselves; an active, responsible, informed citizenry).

Charismatic and persistent, Cheney attracted \$140,000 in funding the first year from foundations and individuals, along with office space and land from the Massachusetts Audubon Society. He hired two interns—Pat Gray, a veteran of local politics, and Greg Gale, then a Harvard Divinity School student who had worked with teens—to put his ideas into action.

At the same time Gray and Gale were rounding up young people, community partners, and the means to sow and reap, the notion of local food production in metropolitan areas began appearing in tiny pockets across the country. The images were compelling. City-dwellers grew their own food on once abandoned lots. People of all ages together worked the land, gaining new skills, possibly a livelihood. Food production, however small, succeeded without the pesticides upon which big agribusiness depended.

These images, combined with the Food Project's nascent ideas about bridging age and community, formed a heady mix. Fortunately, they were grounded in an ever more concrete sense of how the Project would manage its work, the role young people would play in every aspect of its life, and the daily norms needed to tap the best in everyone involved.

Seizing ideas and opportunities at every turn—generated by its young staff as much as by Gale and Greg—the Food Project grew steadily for six years.

From 1992 to 1996, the program raised fresh produce for 15 Boston shelters and a local farmers market from its one acre in Lincoln. A summer program became a Project cornerstone when it paid two dozen inner city and suburban teens \$125 a week to plant, grow, and harvest. In 1996, a skeptical but determined crew of teens reclaimed a half-acre former auto dumpsite in Dorchester, launching the Food Project's first urban garden. A new crew redeemed another acre and a half two years later. Along with the Project's increasing urban presence and its expanding cadre of young participants and volunteers, a year-round academic program emerged.

Spurred by a five-year, \$615,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation in 1998, the Food Project has since exploded with new programs and possibilities—along with more than doubling its conservation acreage. Today the organization has a staff of 16 and a budget of \$1.7 million. It grows over 150,000 pounds of organic produce each year (50 kinds of vegetables alone), with over half going to food pantries and shelters.

In 2001, several hundred high school students applied for 60 positions as summer crew workers (60 percent inner-city, 40 percent suburban), with a third remaining

*Young people play a role in every aspect of the Food Project, which grows over 150,000 pounds of organic produce every year. In 2001, volunteers also served 2,500 hours at local soup kitchens and shelters.*

*Increased community knowledge about gardening, soil contamination, and pollution are lasting program benefits. And as one worker says, “We’re growing a rich laboratory of give and take among the collard greens.”*

involved throughout the school year. Over 1,000 volunteers donated time in the fields and food lots.

The program ledger now includes two low-cost, inner-city farmers markets, several small food businesses, a series of free community lunches (prepared by local chefs), a Community Supported Agriculture program, and an EPA-sponsored environmental awareness program. Soon the Food Project will open a commercial kitchen in its Dorchester headquarters.

### **Along with Food, a New Sense of Community**

Working on so many levels at once, the Food Project’s impact is broad and deep.

Most tangible are the thousands of pounds of organic produce grown annually distributed to the city’s poor; the 2,500 hours volunteered at local soup kitchens and homeless shelters; the compost and soil tests freely given. The city acreage reclaimed for growing offers local residents oases where they can raise their own crops in uncontaminated soil, stop by for a free lunch, or gather agricultural tips from Food Project teens and staff who work there spring through fall.

The weekly farmers market provides tangible benefits as well. Greg Watson, director of the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust, describes it as “a much anticipated community ritual.” All the produce, otherwise unavailable locally, is sold at bargain prices. Outreach between the Food Project and various public agencies enables qualifying residents to use food vouchers. The market also provides a venue for local gardeners to sell their surplus.

A further contribution is the large map of this Boston neighborhood (“Dudley Street” to locals), which will soon hang in TFP’s new offices there. The outcome of a door-to-door survey by interns this summer, the map pinpoints each of the 156 front- and back-yard gardens tucked away in this densely populated community. The blueprint helps TFP crews know, for example, who in their “family” of urban growers is elderly and may need assistance with heavy chores, who may have produce to haul to the farmers market, who needs help remediating lead-poisoned soil. TFP youth routinely provide these extra pairs of hands.

The map also affirms the rich agricultural traditions of this largely African American and Cape Verdean community. Interestingly enough, most of these neighborhood gardeners used organic techniques where they farmed before, with chemicals unavailable. Now it is the organic aids they lack. Pressed by a group of Project interns, a nearby Home Depot recently agreed to add more organic products to its shelves.

Indeed, increased community knowledge about gardening, soil contamination, and

pollution are lasting program benefits. Amanda Cather, TFP's "urban grower," likens her work and that of the TFP youth to urban agricultural extension agents (a role that currently does not exist). Their regular workshops on growing food organically draw increasing neighborhood interest, and local gardeners often stop by TFP's two city lots to ask questions and exchange tips. "Folks here long to share their food and their knowledge," Amanda adds. "On some days, it seems like we're growing a rich community laboratory of give and take among the collard greens."

Changed perceptions and relationships accompany these sturdy contributions. The Food Project "is building a sense of what is possible on the land, tapping the agricultural pride in this immigrant neighborhood," explains Jon Barros, director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and a key TFP partner. What began as an informal security force of neighbors determined to protect TFP's 2.5 acres from vandalism (of which there has been little) has yielded a new sense of community. Barros describes a "contagious spread" with community standards emerging around "how you keep your land."

And, as hoped, the Food Project's young crews do reach across their urban-suburban divide, finding common ground as they dig and weed, and discovering places they otherwise would never know, from country lanes to AIDS shelters. At this year's end-of-summer celebration, several suburban kids spoke about how their work in the city gardens and shelters had altered their views of poverty and race—now "changed indelibly" in the words of one. Some urban kids talked of teamwork. As 14-year-old Brian said to his suburban crewmate Trevor, "You're white, I'm black, but working the fields together we've become good friends. Man, I'm going to miss you."

While small-scale sustainable farming is a difficult career path to enter, a few TFP alumni have pursued their interest in productive agriculture. Others have chosen studies and careers that enlarge upon their experience—majoring in environmental science in college, linking an interest in health with community development to start a community health clinic, looking to start a comparable organization in another city.

Sixteen-year-old Sparkle Thames, who hated her first day on a Food Project field crew and vowed never to return, is one of those young people for whom TFP has been transformative. Growing to like both her work and its mixed company—all the while ignoring comments from peers who denigrated her farming as picking cotton—Sparkle now leads neighborhood workshops on diversity to create a safe and more tolerant community. Of her experiences she says, "I feel amazed, mature, and responsible."

Teens like Sparkle, notes renewable energy advocate Greg Watson, "bring a level of

### The Soil Man

I am a hard worker with  
blackened hands.  
Hands that are filled with the  
opportunity to create life.  
I use tools to help create and  
to make a small world.  
Sometimes there are people  
helping me.  
Some younger, others older  
than I, but all with blackened  
hands.  
Water drips from their faces  
as well as mine because of  
the sun's rays beaming on us  
intensely.  
At first I'd look across an  
empty field filled with rocks,  
weeds, and dirt, but as the  
summer continues on,  
the beauty of growing crops  
that I worked so hard for fills  
the field.  
Some people say why would I  
waste my time doing what I  
do?  
I just say I like the results and  
I am the soil man.

—by Michael Holloway, 18,  
after his first month with  
the Food Project

*“Teens bring a level of energy and vitality that is like a breath of fresh air (or controlled hurricane) to the community,” says a community partner. “They think and dream without the constraints that older folks bring to the table.”*

energy and vitality that is like a breath of fresh air (or controlled hurricane) to the community. They think and dream without the constraints that older folks bring to the table.”

### **Strategies Supporting Teamwork and Responsibility**

**Awareness and Motivation.** Youth begin their experience with TFP in the seven-week summer program, the equivalent of a Food Project boot camp. Each of the 60 14- to 16-year-olds selected for the program, after extensive interviewing, signs a standards sheet signifying “they are joining a community that operates under common assumptions,” in the words of Program Director Gale. For many, this is their first job and paycheck (now \$150 a week), and the standards sheet spells out violations and consequences. A first offense, possibly tardiness, draws a warning and a talk with the staff crew leader. A second, perhaps not wearing the Food Project T-shirt (a daily requirement), means loss of a day’s pay, though two weeks of no further violations wins it back. A third offense, maybe lying or vandalism, brings automatic dismissal. Participants quickly catch the spirit of the program and major violations are rare.

Also new to these teens is working with land and farming—and the dirt, sweat, and fatigue they create. For some this is the program’s biggest lure, for others a trial whose tribulations unfold slowly.

Working in teams—ten-person crews with two older teens serving as crew leaders—provides the spark and the glue. “My crew kept me going,” is a common refrain. The crew provides the base through which TFP’s young people learn about work, service, farming, diversity, community, identity, and values. The regular documentation each summer’s crew does of its work also helps each summer’s crew see how it stands on the shoulders of those who came before.

Clearly, TFP also draws upon the desire of its adolescent participants to do meaningful work and make a difference. Speaking for her crew, 15-year-old Vera said at this year’s Family Feast, “It simply feels so good to be helping people. So good.”

And TFP brings with it the inherent blessings and curses of work that bestows concrete gratification when done well (the perfect ear of corn) and blunt reminders when neglected (peas choked by weeds). As crews deliver to city food pantries crates of fresh produce they have planted, harvested, washed, and weighed, they hold in their hands the best of all motivators.

**Capacities and Supports.** TFP’s young people commit themselves not only to daily physical work but also to intensive workshops and discussions—always guided by older teen interns and staff members (who are generally in their twenties). At the

start of each summer program, participants create personal and community goals, draft a plan for achieving them, and set targets for measuring progress. From these emerge two guiding documents, which TFP calls a “Standards Sheet” and a “Violations Chart.”

In turn, participants are introduced to “Straight Talk,” a communications tool deeply embedded in TFP’s methodology and culture and designed to encourage honesty, learning, and personal growth. Using protocols for speaking and listening candidly yet respectfully, youth meet with their peers to exchange critical information about what they are doing well, where they can improve, and any lapses in conduct.

The Food Project’s constant attention to detail—especially in relation to the capacities and supports it provides its young people—shows up in other ways, too. With Kellogg Foundation funds, Greg Gale recently consolidated into a 238-page book, *Growing Together*, the cornucopia of methods TFP has gathered and developed over the past ten years to stimulate interactive learning. Included are strategies for helping young people and their adult guides check in daily with their feelings and concerns, set ground rules, get a group’s attention, encourage participation, brainstorm, ask questions, make decisions, inspire motivation, process activities, and establish themes.

*Using protocols for speaking and listening respectfully, the young workers meet with their peers to talk about what they are doing well, where they can improve, and any lapses in conduct.*

### Meaningful Work: Twenty Questions Assessment Tool

1. Is the goal of the work clear?
2. Is there enough work for the group?
3. Are there enough resources, materials, and tools to carry the project to completion?
4. Are people organized and prepared?
5. Are people trained well enough to succeed?
6. Is the work organized so that people of all talents can make a contribution?
7. Do people understand how the work connects to the community?
8. Do people have a sense of shared purpose?
9. Is the leadership structure clear?
10. What is the quality/style of leadership you want, and is it present?
11. Is respect present throughout the work and between all people?
12. How are people given responsibility?
13. What are the strategies for building team work?
14. What are people learning through their work?
15. Is there a commitment to helping people develop skills and character through work?
16. Are you challenging peoples’ minds and bodies?
17. Do you have a discipline strategy for individuals who are unwilling to contribute to the work?
18. Do you have strategies for incorporating fun into the work?
19. What assessment/reflection/evaluation tools are in place for the end of the project?
20. How do you plan to celebrate when the work is on computer?

—From *Growing Together*, by Greg Gale (2000)

*“This is not a passenger ship,” says co-director Pat Gray, noting the central role that youth play in the Project. “We are all rowing, so we all determine where the boat is going.”*

In 1996, TFP extended its summer program to go year round, meeting a desire—indeed a passion—among some of its summer crew to remain involved during the school year. They work weekends and weekday afternoons, in this case leading volunteers of all ages in work on the land. In the winter, they prepare meals in shelters. They also get a chance to take issues stirred up by their summer’s work and study them in more detail: sustainable agriculture, small business planning, the complex dynamics surrounding hunger and homelessness.

**Opportunities.** Plentiful opportunities for young people are a Food Project staple. Certainly, with so many tasks to perform, everyone can contribute. Each job is important, from cleaning tools to making change at the farmers market to surveying community garden plots. Says the summer program coordinator, Rachel Fouche, “Every youth here has learned something and has had time to practice it. They take that with them wherever they go.”

Early on, Gray and Gale devised opportunities for TFP’s young people to grow within the program, able to return each year to tackle new challenges and roles. Some of last year’s crew workers become this year’s crew leaders. Experienced crew leaders, in turn, may serve as TFP interns, assigned to special projects like helping develop a pilot pesticide education program for urban gardeners. Interns later can hire on as staff, designing and leading their own special projects with help from a new group of interns.

In addition, Gray and Gale made a commitment from the start to an inclusive, open management style. The decisions and direction of TFP come from regular discussions among staff, interns, and crew. Indeed, teens serve on TFP’s board of directors. “If we are a model of anything,” said Pat Gray in an interview with the Christian Science Monitor, “we are a model of inclusion with rigorous standards . . . . We hire staff to be committed as we are, and we expect input. This is not a passenger ship. We are all rowing, so we all determine where the boat is going.”

### **Not Just Youth Work, Not Just Community Development**

**What Sparks the Action?** Like the agriculture upon which it is based, the Food Project is a complex and integrated system, simultaneously an agent of both youth and community development. For some, it is about giving young people a structured work experience or involving them in service learning. But TFP also stands center stage in the small but growing movement for sustainable urban agriculture. It speaks out on issues of environmental safety, pesticide, lead contamination, and not least, hunger. Its salience in the agriculture and “food security” community is underscored by the support it has attracted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency and an award from the Food and Drug

Administration. As Gray notes, “There are some people who fund us because of the significant work we accomplish. They are surprised to find out that youth are at the center of our achievements.” The many faces TFP wears seem more of an asset than a liability in regard to funding.

Another gift of TFP’s vision, its co-directors observe, is the requirement that the organization, in all its actions, be “very, very operationalized.” This sets it apart, they and others note, from most other youth development organizations, regardless of their bases of action. “Because agriculture is a business, with real, tangible, and complex organizational requirements plus unknowns like rainfall and sun,” says Gale, “we must be both highly structured and flexible.” That TFP works in two places at once, separated by a half-hour’s drive, only magnifies the operational requirements.

The fact that all the Food Project’s work occurs outdoors—in Dorchester, smack-dab in the community—heightens its visibility. “People walk or drive by our lots and see the kids with their Food Project T-shirts, sweating in 100-degree heat,” says Kristin Brennan, who manages TFP’s farmers market, “and they know these kids are real allies in developing the community.”

The Food Project, of course, is also about bridging community and race. This was its starting place: youths and adults of diverse backgrounds working side by side, moving from suburb to city and back—a commitment that placed TFP among a hundred “promising practices” recognized by former President Clinton’s Initiative on Race. The choice to begin in the suburbs, though, haunts the organization in some ways, according to Gale. It shows up most, he says, in the composition of the “senior” staff, which began and continues to be largely white.

**Many Targets, Some Concerns.** The targets of the Food Project’s work are as varied as its organizational identity. Growing healthy youth along with healthy food, harnessing both to meet the needs of inner city and suburban residents, continues to be central to its mission—thus creating a model for a more sustainable local food system. Developing community through caring for the land has prominence, too. And enveloping both is a fierce determination to transform people’s perceptions of themselves and others so that they can create a different society.

Down deep, though, the Food Project finds itself increasingly wrestling with two concerns integral to these aims. One is gaining public attention around issues of food and agriculture, especially in urban areas. With only two percent of Americans involved in agricultural production, it is not surprising that few care about it. The Food Project, of course, hopes some of its young crew members and staff will continue to speak up and work for sustainable agriculture. Indeed, as part of the summer and academic year program, TFP helps young people develop the tools (from

*“How can individuals with seemingly more resources actively give their power or knowledge to others who seemingly have less?” one college-age staffer wonders. “How do you approach neighbors in their gardens in ways that suggest equality?”*

*This summer, more residents than ever before spoke about “us” rather than “you” when they talked of the Food Project.*

presentation skills to handouts) to raise awareness and change perceptions. But the struggle remains uphill, say Gray and Gale.

The second issue concerns the extent to which the Food Project extends beyond service to truly empower the city dwellers with which it connects to promote the agricultural sustainability of the neighborhood. Adam Seidel, a college junior, began with TFP five years ago as a crew member and later joined the summer staff. He asks the tough question that always dogs well-meaning “outsiders” or those with “special knowledge” who approach a community wishing to be partners in change. “How can individuals with seemingly more resources actively give their power or knowledge to others who seemingly have less, without reinforcing the systems that allow for inequality to exist?” he wonders. In the case of the Food Project, “How do you approach neighbors in their gardens in ways that suggest equality? How do you shift the balance from preaching to bringing out and validating the wisdom in each gardener’s experience?”

Adam suspects the answer lies in building partnerships that are truly reciprocal, perhaps the final target of TFP’s diligence. This summer, Adam and others say they heard more residents than ever before talk about “us” rather than “you.” They spoke of the work of the Food Project—of harvesting crops and community—as “ours.”

## Resources: Create Your Farm

*The following excerpt is reprinted with permission from a helpful guidebook, French Fries and the Food System: A Year-Round Curriculum Connecting Youth with Farming, written by Food Project staff member Sara Coblyn and published in 2000 with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.*

**GOAL:** Students will design an imaginary sustainable farm.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** To understand and develop a working definition for the concept of sustainability. To suggest how the term can apply to many aspects of life and then specifically to agriculture.

**TIME NEEDED:**

One hour to one and a half hours

**MATERIALS:**

Flip-chart and markers

Paper and pencils for each group

Exploring Sustainability in

Agriculture sheet

**NOTE**

The key to brainstorming is to get a general, neutral definition first, and then apply it to agriculture. If “to sustain” means to make something last forever, and the group comes up with a similar definition, ask them to apply it to agriculture. How do we sustain a piece of land? How do we sustain a human body? What are the methods of keeping these things healthy? If part of a healthy agriculture is keeping soil healthy, how do we do this in a sustainable manner? Ask them if it is more sustainable to always buy chemical fertilizer to add to your soil or to create your own compost to add to the soil. Why or why not?

**PROCEDURE**

1. Brainstorm about the word “sustainable.” What comes to mind when you hear this word? A brainstorm is to get impressions on a word, even if the definition is not yet known. Write down the words on a flip chart under the heading “Sustainability.” Get as exhaustive a list as possible.
2. Discuss the words people suggested. Circle the ones that speak best to the concept of sustainability and have the person who said the word tell the group why he/she wanted it up there. Follow these leads to get closer to the definition of the word. If the group gets stuck, try relating the concept to something in their lives. Ask the young people to tell of sustainable things they have known or seen. What is sustainable in their own lives? Is it sustainable or not sustainable to spend the evenings watching TV instead of doing homework? Why or why not?
3. Once the discussion is over, try to get a working definition of the word sustainability. Have different people try to sum up what was discussed, and write it on the brainstorm sheet. When there is enough information for a working definition, end this part of the lesson by repeating the final definition and writing it on the flip chart.

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4. Organize the students into teams of eight (or smaller, depending on the size of your group).

5. Their goal is to design an imaginary sustainable farm. First list the things they will need to consider in setting up and running their farm. (For example, how big will it be? Where will it be? What will they grow? What labor sources will they use? What equipment and techniques? What markets, if any?) While they work on their farm, circulate and ask questions about things they may not have considered.

6. Halfway through their time, pass out the sheet called Exploring Sustainability in Agriculture. Have them use this sheet to check that they have thought of all the necessary inputs to a farm, and give them time to add to their design.

7. When each team is finished with its design, collect everyone back together. Each group presents its farm. Make a list on the flip chart of the issues each team considered in trying to make their farm sustainable. Keep each list separate. Deepen the discussion by asking for clarification and probing the thought process of each group as they present their farm.

8. Once all lists are on the flip chart, compare what the groups came up with against the list of the basic principles of sustainable agriculture on the Exploring Sustainability Sheets. The young people may not have heard about these methods. Each should be explained to the level of detail necessary. How many of the methods did they know intuitively?

9. At the end of the lesson, you may

want to revisit the purpose for exploring this term. Why is sustainability relevant to us in our lives, on the farm and in the supermarket when we choose what vegetables to buy? The impact of buying non-sustainably produced food includes a drain on our natural resources, health dangers to farm workers because of pesticide exposure, and pollution when we burn fossil fuel.

### TIPS

This activity works well if more than one person facilitates it. It is helpful if there are knowledgeable people available to sit with the groups as they design their farms. Invite a local farmer to do this lesson with the group.

The results of this lesson are different depending on the experience and knowledge level of the participant. It can be used as a brief introduction to the concept of sustainability and as a way for the students to start imagining a farm, or it can be used after your students have had some other lessons on agriculture and they can apply their knowledge to this activity. For instance, this lesson would work well after the lessons on compost, soil, and food systems.

### EXTENSIONS

Try this instead of the brainstorm in the beginning: Divide the group in half, and have them brainstorm with each other about examples of things in life that are sustainable. Let them discuss their ideas and then come back and share with each other. Try to come to a working definition from their ideas and finally read a formal definition to the group before they begin designing their farms.