**The Origins of Local Food**

**Class activity for Chapter 2**

***Food, Farms and Community***

**Material Requirements: Large pieces of paper**

**Time Requirement: 30-45 minutes**

Every piece of food we eat starts somewhere, whether that food was produced far away or in our own backyard. In some circles, locally-produced food is especially sought after and it is assumed that this food can be produced more efficiently or that it has a lower environmental or more positive social and economic impacts. Sometimes this is true, although not always.

For this exercise, break students in your class into small groups of three to five and invite them to explore the origins of a type of locally-produced food they’ve eaten recently. Although a piece of notebook paper will be adequate if they choose something fairly simple, like a whole fruit, vegetable or meat, if students choose a processed food like bread, cheese or a confection it may be useful to provide larger sheets of paper. Have students first name their food and its ingredients (if it has any), then invite them to probe each ingredients’ origins. Access to the internet can help elucidate a realistic list of ingredients and find their sources, and choosing foods produced by local businesses who list their ingredients on their website can be particularly helpful. While exploring the origins of various ingredients, encourage students to acknowledge any transportation, industrial processing and packaging needed to turn the ingredients into their final form. Students should be encouraged to explore the many inputs required by agricultural systems to produce whole foods, including things like fertilizers, pesticides, machinery and labor. You can allot as much time as you like for this activity, although beyond about 45 minutes students typically begin losing interest.

As students finish up their tree diagrams, guide class discussion with a few pointed questions. First, how many foods were produced with ingredients or agricultural inputs that were entirely local? How many foods required certain inputs shipped in from other parts of the country, or even from other countries? For local foods that required ingredients or agricultural inputs shipped great distances, are they really local? What are some of the assumptions that consumers typically make about local food and how it is produced, and how do those assumptions compare to the realities of local food production? What food choices would students have available if food had to be produced entirely locally, with local ingredients and grown with locally produced agricultural inputs, including fertilizers, pesticides and fuel?