**What is Healthy Food?**

**Class activity for Chapter 9**

***Food, Farms and Community***

**Material Requirements: None**

**Time Requirement: 20-30 minutes**

Chapter 9 in Food, Farms, and Community explores the relationships between lack of access to healthy food and various diseases associated with poor diets. An important aspect of gaining access to healthy food though is understanding what healthy food actually is. In reality, if you were to poll several health professionals about their notions of what constitutes healthy food, you would likely get several different definitions. This makes it challenging to advocate for access to healthy food.

For this activity, break students into small groups and invite them to wrestle with three questions:

1. What food should be considered healthy?
2. What criteria should be used to decide whether a particular food is healthy or not?
3. In our modern political process, who gets to decide what criteria are used to define healthy food and which foods fall under the definition of ”healthy”?
4. How does the free market system influence the popular definition of “healthy food?”

These questions are challenging to answer, and indeed researchers have invested lifetimes attempting to answer them without enjoying definitive success. Part of the reason for this is that a variety of interests influence the scientific community, leading to many conflicting studies and conclusions about which foods are good and which are not. It may be worthwhile to assign students Marion Nestle’s 2016 article titled ‘Corporate funding of food and nutrition research: science or marketing?’ from the *Journal of the American Medical Association: Internal Medicine* (listed in resources for this chapter) as a prelude to this activity, as she discusses this issue in detail. There are, of course, many other articles that also touch on this issue that can also be assigned.

Once students have had a chance to discuss the questions, bring the class back together. Were students able to reach consensus in their small groups around what foods should be considered healthy and what criteria should be used to make that decision? How did students deal with the political aspect of this issue?