

How Close Can You Stay?

Christine Petersen and Lyn Baldwin

Thompson Rivers University, Department of Biological Science, 900 McGill Rd., Kamloops BC
V2C 0C8 CA
(cpetersen@tru.ca; lybaldwin@tru.ca)

Extended Abstract

This workshop featured the novel “How Close Can You Stay” project we co-designed for our BIOL 3430 Plants & People students to encourage them to value eating locally grown produce. Suggested by the current trend of “localism” (Nabhan 2002; Smith & MacKinnon 2007), this project was a great opportunity to share the sphere of influence that biology courses can have in regards to our relationship with plant based foods and our local communities. To increase awareness of local food availability, the students attended fieldtrips to several grocery stores and nearby farmers in mid-winter. Students then specifically chose a recipe featuring this locally grown produce. They created a colourful poster highlighting their recipe, listing where plant based ingredients came from, and included a map showing how far the ingredients traveled. Students then prepared their recipes and as a class, we gathered for a huge feast! The extensive menu had 28 different dishes ranging from appetizers, entrees and desserts. Being late March with little locally fresh produce, the recipes used lots of apples, potatoes, carrots, onions and other easily stored plants. We enjoyed homemade potato skins, creamy butternut squash soup, borscht, local elk, moose and deer stews with root vegetables, and finished off with three homemade ice creams featuring blueberries, cherries and pumpkin! To capture the student’s experiences and thoughts throughout the entire project, and probe their botanical sense of place (Wandersee *et al.* 2006), they also wrote a creative nonfiction reflective essay about being a “locavore”. Within the course, the HCCYS project provided 25% of the final mark, equivalent to the midterm and final exam marks (further details and rubrics available on request). Overall the project seemed to be a positive experience for our students with many claiming to be more aware of and more appreciative of local producers, as well as their own personal connections with their food. “You can’t buy happiness,” wrote one student, “but you can buy locally and essentially they’re the same thing.” Others felt this project helped them share their schooling with their families, took them “out of the classroom” and gave them a “real world experience”.

At this workshop there was a 5-minute survey where participants in small groups guessed where they thought a certain list of plant foods came from using a map of North America. We compared the survey results with our students’ findings, subject to seasonality, in the form of poster images and excerpts from their essays. The benefits for participants are twofold: to share the project idea with fellow educators and encourage the concept of eating locally. Note: a version of this material is also forthcoming in a Green Guide published by the Canadian Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Keywords: local foods, plants, people

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