

Lesson 15

Food Policy in Action

[Lesson Duration: 45 minutes, plus 20 optional minutes]

National Education
Standards Alignment

Social Studies

Science

Health



Lesson Overview

Students will explore key areas of policy influence on the **food system** and learn how individuals and communities can influence food policy decisions. The lesson wraps up with a mock **food policy council**, where students will adopt the perspectives of different stakeholders and propose their own food policy interventions. This lesson leads naturally into the culminating Food Citizen Action Project.



Learning Objectives

- Explain how policy influences the food system and provide examples.
- Analyze the power of engaged citizens to change the food system through policy.



Essential Questions

- How can policy address food system problems?
- How can individuals and communities influence food policy?



Materials

- Student handouts
- Presentation slides
- *Food Policy* primer
- FoodSpan Infographic



Resources

- *Food Policy* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-policy)

Warm-up: Mapping Policy's Influence

[5 minutes]

Have students look at their **FoodSpan Infographic** and mark areas where they think the government has influence and how. Ask volunteers to share their ideas and discuss: *How does government policy affect the food system?*

Main Activity: Prioritizing Federal Food Policy Goals

Science, Health, Social Studies
[15 minutes]

Students will examine key areas of food policy and debate which types of programs should be prioritized.

Have students read the **Food Policy Goals Handout** to familiarize themselves with these goals: supporting farmers, feeding the hungry, keeping the food supply safe, and protecting the environment (refer to the **Food Policy primer** for references and additional details). Note that policies may be unsuccessful in meeting these goals.

Divide students into small groups to discuss how they would prioritize these goals. Have each group create a pie chart showing the percentage of the federal food policy budget they would devote to each goal. Have each group choose a representative to present their chart and explain the rationale for their priorities. Encourage debate between groups with conflicting priorities.



Teacher Note: Consider giving students the option to make the pie bigger. What other food policy goals should receive funding? What other federal expenditures would you reduce in order to expand the pie?



Teacher Note: While this lesson is about both food and agricultural policy, for the sake of brevity we just say “food policy.”

Main Activity: Mock Food Policy Council

Social Studies
[20 minutes]

Food policy councils bring together stakeholders in the food system to study it and recommend ways to make it more equitable and **sustainable**. Display the **Food Policy Council slides** to provide information about the purpose and makeup of a food policy council.

Assign each student a stakeholder role on a food policy council (see slide). Multiple students can have the same role. Distribute the **Food Policy Council Roles Handout** and have students consider their stakeholder's perspective and goals. Have each stakeholder propose at least one policy idea, from their perspective, to improve the food system in their city, state, or region. Encourage debate. Then, have each stakeholder vote for the top three policy ideas.

Optional Activity: Food Policy Case Studies

Social Studies
[20 minutes]

Students will explore the role of the government in the food system by looking at two historical case studies. Divide students into pairs and distribute the **Food Policy primer**. One member of each pair will read about the Agricultural Adjustment Act (see the *Supporting Farmers* section); the other will read about the creation of government hunger relief programs (see the *Feeding the Hungry* section). Then, students will exchange what they learned with their partner.

As a class, discuss:

- *Should the government renew its involvement in regulating market prices for food? If so, why?*
- *What might happen if the government did not offer economic support to farmers?*
- *How might we decide whether federal hunger relief programs are effective?*
- *What policies might better support a healthy, sustainable food system?*



Teacher Note: Many of the ideas pioneered in the Agricultural Adjustment Act live on in what became known as the U.S. Farm Bill, which is arguably the most influential piece of legislation on the U.S. food system. The Policy Research Project extension allows students to explore the Farm Bill in greater detail.

Wrap-up: My Role in Food Policy

[5 minutes]

Have students write a journal entry in response to the prompt: *What is one federal, state, or local policy that you would create or change to improve the food system in your community? Why?* Optional: Have students share their responses. This activity leads naturally into the culminating Food Citizen Action Project.

Extensions:

Revisiting the Infographic (Social Studies, Science)

Distribute copies of the **FoodSpan Infographic** (students may already have their own from previous lessons). Ask students to identify parts that represent food policy. Ask: *Do these accurately and fully represent what we learned about food policy? If not, what could we add to make the infographic more accurate?* Working individually or as a class, have students draw their own versions, create a collage, or add images to the existing infographic. Share photos of students' work on social media and tag #foodspan.

Film: Food Citizens on Film (Social Studies)

Students will watch and analyze a film about a community's struggle for food system change, such as *The Garden* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1252486/>). Discuss: *What does this film show about the power of communities to change the food system through policy? What can we learn from the successes and failures depicted in the film? How might we lead similar movements?*

Policy Research Project (Social Studies, ELA)

Each student will conduct a research project examining one policy area in the Farm Bill—such as economic support to farmers, nutrition assistance, or environmental conservation—and analyze the debate surrounding it. *What does the policy aim to do? Why do proponents of the policy support it? Why do opponents disagree with it? Which stakeholders, if any, does it benefit and which, if any, does it hurt? How could this policy be changed to make it more effective? Have students share what they learned.*



Share Your Knowledge: How can policy help address food system problems? What food policies should we create or change? What can individuals do? Ask students to tweet their reflections and tag **#foodpolicy** and **#foodspan** to join the conversation. Include the handles of your state or federal representatives to make sure your voice is heard!