

# Hungry for Change Discussion Activity

Active, personally relevant learning is at the heart of an effective education. This activity takes participants through a process of exploring sustainability through shared discovery and personal reflection designed to help shape the way we think and act. This activity offers excerpts from *Hungry for Change: Food, Ethics, and Sustainability*, a 4-6 session discussion course used by small groups to explore our food system and their roles in it.

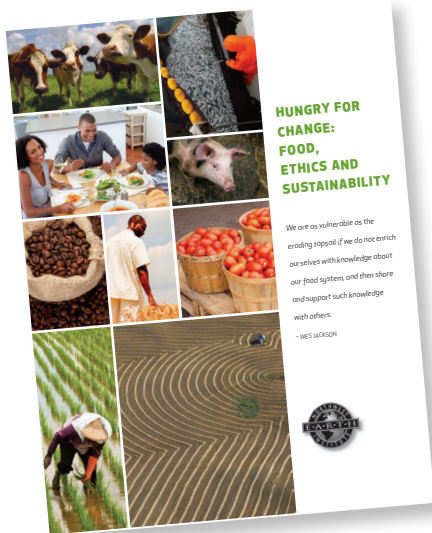
## "Three Pillars of a Food Revolution"

By Anna Lappé

A few years ago, I stumbled on a United Nations study that transformed how I think about the climate crisis. In the report, researchers pegged greenhouse gases from the livestock sector at 18 percent of total global emissions. Combine this with other aspects of our food chain — from agricultural

chemical production to agribusiness driven deforestation to food waste rotting in landfills — and the food and agriculture sector is responsible for nearly one third of the planet's manmade emissions. Move over Hummer; it's time to say hello to the hamburger.

It doesn't take high-level math to realize if we're serious about averting the climate crisis, we need to add the food chain to our conversation. (Of course, we should be talking about agriculture's impact on the environment for a host of other reasons, too.) Agriculture is the world's single largest user of land and water, using up 70 percent of the world's freshwater resources every year. Agriculture is also responsible for widespread air and water pollution and agricultural chemical runoff that causes aquatic dead zones around the world. At last count, there are more than 400, including one in the Gulf of Mexico that swells every year to a size



Read more in *Hungry for Change: Food, Ethics and Sustainability*

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## A FEW POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

- To get to know one another through small group dialogue.
- As an interactive way to engage in a conversation around food, ethics and sustainability issues.
- As a way to enhance systems thinking skills.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

1. Gather together a group of your coworkers, classmates, friends, or family — over a healthy potluck lunch, classroom activity, or as the discussion opener for a movie screening.
2. Print off copies of this discussion guide for all members of your group.
3. Individually, take 10-12 minutes to read the excerpts in this discussion guide.
4. In small groups of 3-5, spend approximately 15-20 minutes with the discussion questions. Start with the Circle Question. Have each person briefly answer the Circle Question, with no comments, questions, or interruptions from others. Make sure each person has a chance to answer the Circle Question. Then, move on to the other questions, with participants responding voluntarily. Have group members share their opinions, experiences, feelings and suggestions.
5. During discussion, keep in mind that listening is as important as speaking. Avoid judgment of others. Agreement isn't necessary for effective dialogue.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Purchase the complete *Hungry for Change* discussion course book or other NW Earth Institute discussion courses from NWEI's online store: [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)

Participate in NWEI's Annual EcoChallenge: [www.ecochallenge.org](http://www.ecochallenge.org)

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three times larger than the BP oil spill. So what can we do? Thankfully, we're learning every day about the power of sustainable food systems to help reduce emissions from the food chain and mitigate the climate crisis.

Now, the "food system" may sound (and feel) like an abstract concept that has nothing to do with the sandwich sitting on your desk for lunch, but it's all related. And that sandwich you're about to eat connects you to the livelihoods and fates of farmers and food workers around the world. It also connects you to the climate.

*Read the full piece in Hungry for Change. Excerpt from an article that Anna Lappé adapted from a speech she gave for National Cooperative Growers Association.*

### **"Food is Cheap at Market, but Costs a Lot Elsewhere" by Marion Nestle**

Food prices are indeed going up, and I can hardly keep track of the possible causes: natural disasters, crop failures, commodity speculation, corn used for biofuels, lack of research in agriculture, the declining value of the U.S. dollar and just plain greed.

But we Americans still pay relatively less for food than anywhere else because so

many of the costs of industrialized food production are "externalized." We pay for them, but not at the grocery store.

### **HEALTH CARE COSTS**

Let's count obesity as another externalized result of a cheap food system. The cheapest foods are high in calories and low in nutritional value — "junk" foods. When food is cheap, people eat more of it.

Abundant cheap food leads companies to aggressively market their products to be eaten any time, any place and in very large amounts — all of which promote biologically irresistible overeating.

Current estimates of the costs of obesity and its consequent illnesses in health care and lost productivity approach \$147 billion annually, almost the same as the cost of unsafe food.

Accurate or not, such numbers provide ample evidence for the need to bring agricultural policy in line with health policy.

To pick just one example: Dietary guidelines say to eat more fruits and vegetables, and cut down on sodas. But the indexed cost of fruits and vegetables has increased by about 40 percent since the early 1980s, whereas that of sodas has decreased by about 20 percent.

The high externalized cost of our present food system is a good reason to reconsider current policies. Now is the time to start working toward food system policies that will better promote health, safety and human welfare.

*Read the full piece in Hungry for Change. Excerpt from foodpolitics.com by Marion Nestle.*

### **"Transforming our Tastes" by Raj Patel**

Reclaiming control of the food system requires both an individual and a collective effort, and requires both individual and collective rights. It demands tough democratic deliberation about where the boundaries between the two should be. It's a discussion that ought not to be pre-empted by its definition so much as broached by it.

The span of these actions ranges from the individual to the global. Some will require international cooperation for change. Some will be up to us as individuals. Together, these actions and rights form a cycle — to change ourselves, we need to change our world. To change our world, we need to change ourselves. Both are necessary. Both are difficult.

Listing those changes is hard, because they vary according to circumstance. There are some broad outlines, though. Starting at the individual level,







one of the most difficult, because fundamental, changes that many of us will face is to:

*Transform our tastes.* Much of the damage done by the food system is carried out under the alibi of “consumer demand.” Food system corporations are merely providing the sugar, salt, fat, and flesh that everybody wants to eat — or so they claim. The most obvious way to choke the supply is to douse the demand. This is easier said than done, of course. It isn’t easy to override our body’s hard-wiring for processed and energy-dense foods, especially when we have come to accept them as normal.

*Read the full piece in Hungry for Change. Excerpt from Stuffed and Starved by Raj Patel courtesy of Melville House.*

### CIRCLE QUESTION

What makes you hopeful about the future of food?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Lappé argues that our food choices connect us to the environment and to food and farm workers. Do you think these considerations should affect consumer choices? If so, how?
2. What role does price play in your own food buying decisions? What role do health considerations play? Are you willing to pay more for foods you view as healthier?
3. What tastes might you need to change to reclaim control of the food system, as Raj Patel suggests?
4. Briefly describe your ideal “food future.”

### PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- **Learn to cook.** A diet of whole foods is better for you, better for the planet, and a lot tastier than processed foods.
- Buy food that is **produced locally** and **without harmful chemicals**.
- **Volunteer** in your community’s food system! Join a work party at a local farm, help out your neighborhood food co-op, or organize a Northwest Earth Institute discussion group.
- Become aware of and support improved conditions for **farm workers**.
- If your community is lacking healthy, local, sustainable, and equitable food options, brainstorm with others about how **you can make a difference**. Contact your city’s sustainability office or food policy council, write to your elected officials, and organize with others in your network.

Learn more about Northwest Earth Institute’s discussion-based resources at [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org).