

Activity: Ethnography: Farmers Market Visit



TIME ESTIMATE

1h outside of class time
30 min in-class discussion



MATERIALS

Sheets of paper or a notebook and writing materials for all participants

PURPOSE

To engage with your local food system by visiting a farmers market and analyzing them with a critical eye.

DESCRIPTION

Some consider farmers markets as one of the institutions of the local food movement - what's fresher than getting your food right from the producer themselves? This ethnography activity can be introduced before or after participants have completed the Local Food Movement Module and debriefed in class afterwards using the discussion questions. This activity was adapted from *Ethnography of Farmers Markets: Studying Culture, Place, and Food Democracy* by Carole Counihan (2015).

FACILITATOR NOTES

Direct students to resources on where to find farmers markets in their region. In Vancouver, the non-profit [Vancouver Farmers Markets](#) manages the major markets in the city. Encourage participants to think about other green markets that would accomplish the same goals of providing local food, but that may not fit under the common title (for example, farmers markets hosted at their university, greengrocers).

The activity handout on page 2 has the assignment, assessment description and guiding questions, which participants can print out and bring with them on their visit if they find it helpful. Educators are encouraged to organize a discussion after the visit.

POST-VISIT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (20-30 min)

- 1 Ask the group:
 - What trends did you notice?
 - Did anything surprise you?
- 2 If these themes do not come up in responses, prompt learners to think of the following topics:
 - Sustainable diets - did the market have sustainable food? How did you assess sustainability in this situation?
 - What were the demographics of most shoppers?
 - How affordable was the produce, goods?
 - Who benefits from the farmers markets and who do farmers markets exclude?
 - Which socioeconomic classes are most likely to shop at farmers markets?

Facilitator Note

These prompts are merely suggestions, modify questions as they pertain to your classes' subject matter.

ACTIVITY HANDOUT

Conduct ethnographic fieldwork to answer the question: Who benefits from and receives the burdens of farmers markets? Use the methodologies of participant observation and informal interview, visit a farmers market and watch and partake in shopping and eating for approximately one hour (if possible, you are not obligated to spend your own money unless you want to).

See [What is ethnography?](#) or [A Simple Introduction to the Practice of Ethnography and Guide to Ethnographic Field Notes](#) for information on what ethnography is. Take notes throughout the visit, making sure to record the date and time you visited. This activity can be completed in pairs (it's more fun if you have someone to talk to while doing it!), but the assignment will be assessed individually.

ASSESSMENT: WRITTEN REFLECTION

Write a ~3 paragraph reflection on the experience on your farmers market visit based on the following guiding questions:

Vendor type

- What types of vendors are there? How many vendors are there?
- How would you categorize the vendors present?
- How far away do vendors travel to get to the market?

Produce and Farms

- How affordable is the produce?
- Do they advertise what growing strategies they use? (talk to the farmer if it is not transparent)

Product Types

- What types of culturally appropriate foods are present and for whom are they culturally appropriate?
- For prepared foods, what kinds of prepared foods are there?
- What is the nutritional value of these prepared foods?
- How affordable is the produce? Write down three products at the farmers market and their cost, then complete a price comparison with a supermarket in the area.

Market attendees

- What people are attending the market? What similarities are there? Note their age, gender, race/ethnicity. Do people from different groups interact with each other?
- Does it look like most people are buying their entire grocery haul or just a couple of items?
- How are most people paying (cash, card, [food stamps](#))?

These reflections can be picked up at the end of the class as an 'exit ticket', where learners submit their short reflection before leaving the class or workshop, or or assigned as a take-home exercise.

NOTES: