



Unit 4

Food production

Cross-curricular – Geography and Science

- 1 Look at the photo and the title of the text. What do you think food miles are?



What are food miles?

Food miles are the distance your food will have travelled by the time it arrives at your supermarket. We use food miles to measure how much energy is used when we move food around the world. It is a way of estimating the effect of food production on climate change. Buying local food uses fewer food miles, and should therefore be 'greener' and produce fewer carbon emissions. Not everybody agrees, however.

In the past, farmers used to pick English apples in September and October, and that was when people ate them. Some apples were stored, but it was not possible to buy a really fresh apple in the spring. Today, apples from other continents are

sent by plane or ship. Therefore there will always be fresh apples on the supermarket shelves – because they will have come from New Zealand or South America.

There are websites where you can calculate how many miles a food item travels in its lifetime. For example, green beans from Africa will have travelled nearly 7,000 kilometres to get to London. This journey will have created 416 kg of carbon by plane. That figure is around 335 kg for a journey by road, and 116 kg by rail. The same quantity of green beans grown in Spain will have travelled 1,266 kilometres to get to London, creating only 77 kg of carbon by air, 62 kg by road and only 21 kg by rail.

So it seems obvious that you will be helping reduce carbon emissions and saving the planet if you buy food grown locally, or at least in Europe. But is it that simple? An expert on African agriculture says that African beans are grown by workers in the fields who do not have high-tech machines. Kenyan farmers, unlike Spanish farmers, do not use tractors or chemical fertiliser. These farms also make work for many people in developing countries. You have to think about that, as well as the air miles used to get the beans to the supermarket.

So, will the green shopper really have helped reduce carbon emissions by buying local products? It is a complex question which we will be discussing for a very long time.

- 2 Read the text and check your answer to 1.

WORD BOOSTER

Match the words and definitions.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1 carbon emissions | a using the most advanced technology |
| 2 high-tech | b vehicle used on farms to pull machines |
| 3 fertiliser | c carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide produced by cars, aeroplanes etc. |
| 4 tractor | d something added to land to help plants grow |

- 3 Are these statements true (T) or false (F)?

- Food miles tell you how far your food travels to arrive at your supermarket.
- It used to be possible to eat fresh apples all year round.
- Moving food around by plane causes more carbon emission than by road or rail.
- Green beans are not only grown in Africa.
- If food travels long distances, the carbon emissions will definitely be greater.
- African bean farmers have developed machines to work for them now.

- 4 Find words in the text which mean:

- using information to guess something (*paragraph 1*)
- made or produced (*paragraph 3*)
- amount (*paragraph 3*)
- poor, without much industry (*paragraph 4*)
- not simple or easy to understand (*paragraph 5*)

- 5 Explain in your own words what the writer says about the following.

- The difference between buying Kenyan beans and Spanish beans if you live in London.
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- The difference between Kenyan bean farmers and Spanish bean farmers.
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- 6 Answer the questions.

Do you think it is important to know if food is local or flown a long way to your supermarket? Why?/Why not?