

2010

THINK GREEN

**TIPS AND
RESOURCES**
for
**EARTH-FRIENDLY
LEARNING
PROJECTS**



Green Your Plate

CAN YOUR STUDENTS TELL

the difference between a potato and a tomato? Have they ever seen chicken that isn't shaped like a nugget? Do they know where to find fresh fruits and vegetables in their own neighborhood? If you've watched celebrity chef Jamie Oliver try to sell American kids on a healthier lunch menu, you know that the answers can range from humorous to downright alarming.

With encouragement from First Lady Michelle Obama and others who care about improving the health of young people, many schools are taking steps to encourage better eating habits at lunchtime. To give lunchtime an Earth Day makeover, look for connections between healthy eating and a healthier planet. This is a perfect opportunity to design projects that get students using their critical-thinking skills for a genuine—and motivating—purpose.

John Muir Elementary, in Berkeley, California, has taken a number of steps to reinvent lunch for the kids' benefit. Students now enjoy recess first, followed by a more relaxed lunch period. Food-related projects are integrated across the curriculum and often make use of the school garden and kitchen. Similarly, at Lewis Elementary School, in Portland, Oregon, lunch is a daily opportunity to connect learning and environmental action. Students turn lunch scraps into compost for their thriving school garden (which they water by harvesting rainwater). They have cut the school's trash-collection costs by replacing Styrofoam containers with reusable trays and utensils (with parent volunteers taking turns on dish-room duty). Eco-Schools (www.eco-schools.org) encourages sustainable practices in schools worldwide.

Some students discover that poor food choices in their neighborhood are affecting their health. Using a mapping tool like Google Earth (<http://earth.google.com>) to locate sources of fresh food (and fast food) can help your students find out if they are among the 6.5 million American children who live in a "food desert"—that is, they live more than a mile from a supermarket. That can set the stage for advocacy projects that get students speaking up to improve local food choices. In New York, urban teens working with the Center for Urban Pedagogy made a compelling video called *Bodega Down Bronx* (www.anothercupdevelopment.org/projects/detail/57/description#description) to illustrate the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood.



Related Resources:

- Let's Move is a new national initiative to raise a healthier generation of kids. Watch the video message from First Lady Michelle Obama (www.letsmove.gov).
- Ann Cooper, also known as the Renegade Lunch Lady, shares her insights about youth and nutrition in this talk from TED.com (www.chefann.com/html/about-chef-ann/audio-video/TED-ChefAnn.html).
- Learn about the Edible Schoolyard project in this *Edutopia* story and video, "Middle School Students Grow Their Own Lunch." (www.edutopia.org/garden-of-eating-middle-schoolers-grow-lunch).
- Find more food-related resources, including a Rethinking Lunch School Guide, at the Center for Ecoliteracy Web site (www.ecoliteracy.org/essays/new-agenda-school-food).