

Reduce Your Food Miles



Introduction

Food miles is the distance food travels from the farm to our plates. Energy is used to grow, process, transport and store food. We even use energy to go to the shops! All of this means more greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Did you know?

- Energy is used to grow, pack and transport the food that we all use and buy. This uses energy and produces greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.
- We grow lots of food in Ireland. We also sell food to and buy food from other countries around the world. When we buy carrots from South Africa they travel 6000 miles. It is better for the environment to buy food that is grown nearby.

Packaging - Most things we buy have packaging, however some food has too much packaging, so more energy is used to make it, put it on and transport it from the factory, to the shop and to your home.

Seasonal produce - Fruit and vegetables can have a certain growing season and will be ready to harvest and eat at a certain time of year. For example, Irish strawberries, grown outdoors, will be ripe in summer. Some fruit and vegetables are grown in heated greenhouses or bought from warmer countries so they are available during winter. This uses energy, so it's better to choose food that is 'in season'.

Food waste - On average each of us is throwing out about 80kg of food waste each year (which is the same weight as a baby elephant!) so the average Irish household may be throwing out between €400 – €1,000 worth of food into the bin each year!

- The foods we throw out most include salad, fruit & veg and bread.
- While we do compost a lot of our food waste using brown bins, a lot of food still ends up in the dump and it takes even more energy to transport, and treat this waste.
- Rotting food in dumps can cause pollution.



What can we do?

- Think before you buy - Choose locally grown food that is in season.
- Try to buy certified organic food.
- Find out about your local farmers markets.
- Talk to your local greengrocer, butcher and fishmonger and find out where their produce comes from.
- Grow some of your own fruit and vegetables in school or at home
- Choose products with least packaging.
- Ask people to try the 100 mile diet for one month!
- Leave the car at home and bring your own re-usable bags when going shopping.
- Try to buy what you need when you need it and store your food properly.
- Get composting!

Resources for Teachers and Students

Websites

- Online food miles calculator <http://www.foodmiles.com/>
- A web site to help the consumer understand food miles <http://www.foodmiles.ie/>
- Stop Food Waste is a new campaign from the EPA <http://www.stopfoodwaste.ie/>

Videos

- 'Field to Fork' is a series of animated educational videos explaining how food travels from field to fork:
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 - [Field to Fork - Episode 1 "Where does food come from?"](#)
 - [Field to Fork – Episode 2 "Food Miles"](#)
 - [Field to Fork - Episode 3 "Economy"](#)
 - [Field to Fork - Episode 4 "Health and well-being"](#)
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- 'Grow It Yourself Ireland' has video tutorials on how to grow your own vegetables from carrots and lettuce, to peas and potatoes <https://giy.ie/get-growing/>



Resources for Teachers only

Classroom activity

- ***Favourite food from home***
 - Ask the pupils to choose their favourite item in their lunchbox or ask them to bring in their favourite food from home.
 - Help them to read the labels on the item to investigate where the food comes from.
 - Discuss how far the food has travelled. How was the food transported - by boat, plane, train, truck, van? Could this be bought in Ireland?
 - Try to calculate how much carbon dioxide was emitted using the [Food Miles calculator](#).
- ***Play food mile detectives at the supermarket***
 - Give the children a list of 4 or 5 fruit or veg, eg bananas, strawberries, potatoes, apples and brussel sprouts, and ask them to find out where they have come from by looking at the packaging when they are in the supermarket.
 - In class, compare the list of countries of origin and using the food miles calculator see who's shopping has the lowest carbon footprint.

Lesson Plan

Use [Exploring our Energy](#) lesson plans to learn about how to grow food. Need link to 3rd and 4th class – Chapter 1 and 2

