

HOW SAFE IS THE FOOD WE EAT?

Social Sciences, Science, Health and Safety Activities on a Food Safety Theme



THINKING ABOUT OUR FOOD

- Have students list the food they eat during a typical week. Place the food into general categories such as meat, fruit, vegetables etc.
- Where do we get our food from? List common sources such as supermarkets, butchers, takeaway outlets, greengrocers. Where do these common food outlets get the food they sell from? Challenge students to trace the food back to the source, **eg** orchards, farms ...
- Do any students have home gardens or orchards where they grow some of their own food? If so, are there any special measures the gardeners take to ensure that the food grows strongly and is not damaged by insect pests. Invite a keen gardener to talk to the class about the special measures taken to promote growth and to protect plants.
- Have students read through the introductory section of Agricultural Compound Residues in Food (pgs 2-3). Discuss the following points:
 - *throughout history, what have humans competed with to get sufficient food?*
 - *what is meant by a pesticide and what were some of the very early pesticides used?*
 - *speculate on measures that could be taken to keep vermin and animals from destroying and damaging food.*
- Have students recall and list the simple precautions we all must take when handling and preparing the food we eat.
- Introduce the idea that as well as taking the hand washing and food preparation/ storing precautions, we also want to know how safe the food is that we are eating. Can they think of any food that it is not safe to eat? **eg**
 - *are all mushrooms safe to eat?*
 - *when are shellfish not safe to eat?*

COMPOUNDS & CHEMICALS

- Read through the information on pages 5 and 6. Through discussion help students work through the following ideas:
 - *agricultural compounds can be natural or synthetic*
 - *there are many natural chemicals present in all foods*
 - *the purpose of natural animal and plant pesticides*
 - *identify the reasons why we use agricultural compounds and who uses them (include home gardeners emphasising the importance of following the label instructions on the way that we should use them)*
 - *what has to be weighed up before we use them?*
- Discuss the fact that 80% of the food we produce is exported overseas. Brainstorm and list some of our major food exports. What do students think would be the consequences for New Zealand if these food products were not safe to consume?
- When is the only time that agricultural compounds are approved for use in plants and animals? Discuss what is meant by competing goals.

HOW WE KEEP OUR FOOD SAFE ACTIVITIES

- Tell students that the New Zealand Food Safety Authority is a Government organisation that regularly tests our food and sets strict limits on the amount of residual chemicals (MRL- maximum residual limit) that are left in the foods we produce.
- In groups, have students conduct booklet research and report back on one or more of the following:
 - *why we allow residues in our food at all?*
 - *what has to happen before a new agricultural compound can be used?*
 - *what happens when the MRL is exceeded?*
 - *how do we compare with other countries and why are some chemicals banned overseas but not here?*
 - *what are natural toxins and how safe are they?*
 - *what testing programmes are in place in New Zealand?*
 - *what actions can people personally take to lower their intake of residues?*
- Have students prepare illustrated and written reports in a question and answer format to form the basis of a wall chart display and/or a page on the class/school website.

PEOPLE'S CONCERNS

- Tell students that since the 1930s when scientists began to invent better pesticides and medicines to protect plants and animals, some people are concerned about our food being safe to eat. Introduce the residue concept.

Agricultural Compound Residues in Food Booklet

Copies of this new booklet are available FREE from NZFSA. Hard copies can be ordered by calling 0800 693 721 or download in pdf format at: www.nzfsa.govt.nz > Links on front page. Have students monitor the website on a regular basis and report back on current food safety issues.

