

Energy and the food you eat



**When you buy carrots
from South Africa they
have travelled over
9,000 km!**

Think about it...

Here are some questions to get your One Good Idea team thinking about food miles...

Where did the food in your lunch box come from, can you check the labels?

How many kilometres did it travel? Did it travel by boat, plane, rail or truck?

What type of packaging is on the food?

What happens to food we don't eat?

Food miles is the distance food travels from the farm to your plate. Energy is used to grow, pack and transport food. Energy is even used to go to the shops by car! Burning fossil fuels for energy produces carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is one of the greenhouse gases which are causing climate change. Lots of food is grown in Ireland, but food is also brought here from other countries around the world. It is better for the environment to buy food that is grown nearby, here's why:

Seasonal produce - Fruit and vegetables have a growing season and are harvested at a certain time of year. For example, Irish strawberries, grown outdoors, will be ripe in summer. During winter some fruit and vegetables are grown in heated greenhouses. This uses energy, so it's better to choose food that is 'in season'.

Packaging - Most foods have packaging, some food has too much packaging. Energy is used to make the packaging, wrap the food, and transport it from the factory, to the shop and to your home.



Food waste - Each of us is throwing out about 80 kg of food waste each year (the same weight as a baby elephant!). The average Irish household may be throwing out between €400 – €1,000 worth of food each year! The foods thrown out most include salad, bread, fruit and vegetables. While food waste from brown bins is composted, a lot of food still ends up in the dump. It takes even more energy to transport and treat this waste. Rotting food in dumps can cause pollution.

What can you 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. 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 150 Km 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!

Find out more

Resources for Teachers and Student

Websites

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



Videos

- 'Field to Fork' is a series of videos explaining how food travels from field to fork:
 - [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"](#)
- Video tutorials on how to grow your own vegetables <https://giy.ie/get-growing/>

Resources for Teachers only

Classroom activities

- **Play food mile detectives at the supermarket:** Give the children a list of 4 or 5 fruit or veg, e.g. bananas, strawberries, potatoes, apples and brussel sprouts. 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

- Learn about how to grow food using the lesson for 3rd and 4th class – Chapter 1 and 2 [from SEAI's resource for teaching sustainable energy in Primary School](#)

