

Ethical Eating

"How we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used."

--Wendell Berry



Environmental Science Practicum 410 Senior Project:

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Experience our project at <http://www.appropedia.org/Ethical_eating_and_food_production>

Introduction & Problem Statement:

Food is now, as it always has been, an integral part of our human lives. In recent history major changes have been experienced in the global production of food and agriculture. One of the most influential driving forces of these changes is the rapid advancement of technology (FAO 2008).

Food and agricultural related technologies are accelerating at such a pace that it is challenging for the average person to keep current on new developments. Often, not enough information is provided to them. This makes it difficult to determine how these developments should affect our individual food choices. The process of consumer decision making is arduous, especially at the individual level.

Reasons for the lack of information are plentiful. Pertinent information is frequently difficult to locate, and one must cover many sources to acquire a complete picture. Available information is often disorganized and not presented in a format that is user friendly. Most scientific studies have fallen short. More research of better quality is needed than that which is currently available (Williams 2007).

This lack of information has resulted in significant consequences. The distance between the consumer and producer has widened significantly. Nearly all food is purchased in supermarkets. Consumers have little, if any, contact with the farmers and food producers (Brom 2000). This disconnect has grown so extreme that many children have never visited a farm nor seen food being grown. If asked, most of these children won't be able to explain where the food at the supermarket comes from.

Consumer concerns with respect to food and agriculture have never been more prevalent. Some people are concerned about certain products because of the wider impact these products

have on their society and the world. Others are concerned about the safety and security of the food they consume.

Whatever the reasons for concern, it is clear we must evaluate how we grow, produce, and purchase our food. By closely examining the food we eat and how it came to our table, we can initiate discussions about the costs and benefits of our current food production and consumption practices.

Goals and Objectives:

To attempt an answer to the problem of ignorant consumerism is an enormous undertaking. We believe that it is beyond the ability of one person to tackle such an issue in its entirety. However, like a child learning to walk; taking one step at a time, we have chosen a manageable piece of the puzzle to put into place.

We (Zoe Dagan, Jessica Rendon, Chris Stadler, & David Finston) have collaborated to create a resource with the goal to promote ethical eating. "Ethical eating, like ethical living, is not about absolutes. It's about doing the best you're willing and able to do – and nurturing a will to keep doing better." (Baumel 2008). This can be done by (a) educating consumers about the costs and benefits of the multitude of food choices, and (b) encouraging consumers to utilize this new education to make informed choices when consuming food by thinking globally and acting locally. In essence: eating ethically.

The Process:

The process of building a workable solution was tedious and time consuming and took the better part of three months. Our initial brainstorming took us in one direction, yet three months later our product is very different from our original idea.

We began in January with the inspiration to focus on bioregional food within the Humboldt County region. We eventually chose to step back from this specific topic, with the intent to create a resource that had the potential to be useful outside of our immediate region. We instead decided to make the argument for ethical food.

Our first thought was to create a printed handbook which would include persuasive essays, a local farmer directory, and cookbook recipes. A bit later we came to the consensus that this format would be limiting for a number of reasons, primarily due to limited distribution capabilities and lack of funding for printing.

This revelation led to the determination that we would present our resource via digital medium instead of hard copy distribution. We chose the internet as our digital medium. The internet is ideal for a number of reasons. Our resource will act as a liaison between information already existing on the internet and the consumer. This reduces our redundancy; why reinvent the wheel? The internet has a user-base that far surpasses any distribution potential of a hard copy resource. Utilizing the internet will allow us to update the content as necessary, which would be nearly impossible with a hard copy resource. The internet will also allow people to interact with the resource via discussion forums and surveys.

Appropedia.org will host our resource. Appropedia is an interactive site where you can search for “collaborative solutions in sustainability, poverty reduction and international development.” The materials available on Appropedia are free for anyone to use, and the site is open for anyone to contribute. To date, there are a total of 10,743 pages. Our page will be number 10,744.

The Project:

The project itself will include a written component (short essays, stories) and a graphical component (graphs, images, and charts). The graphical component will assist the reader in understanding the complex ideas presented. To garner interest in our website, we will advertise on appropedia.org, myspace.com, and other member-based internet communities. As well, small bookmark-style fliers will be distributed on campus and in our local community.

The project will detail the following topics:

- Agriculture Production Methods
 - Organic (Industrial versus Small Scale)
 - Conventional
- Local & Seasonal Food Production
 - Food Safety
 - Food Security & Farm Security
 - Humboldt County case study (Farmers markets, CSA)
- Certification & Labeling
- Social Responsibility of Individual Food Choices
 - Vegetarian & Vegan Choices
 - Health & Nutrition
- Energy Use in Food Production
- How to Eat Ethically – Actually Doing It!
 - Purchasing choices
 - Questions to ask
- Resources & references

Monitoring and Evaluation:

To facilitate monitoring and evaluation of our project, we used a program provided by Google called Google Analytics. This program tracks the people who access your site, and provides you with a collection of data about each user (such as where they are from, where they accessed your site from, how long they browsed your site and many other useful statistics). This will help us to judge whether or not the project actually met our goals and objectives. These statistics can help us to determine whether or not people are actually looking at and reading our information.

For further monitoring, Appropedia allows users to edit and make comments. We have asked users not to make edits or comments until after May 8th to allow us to complete our project, but if a user edits our page, or leaves a comment, they are able to tell us what they thought of our page and whether or not they found it useful.

In addition to Google analytics, we created a MySpace page which will serve a dual purpose. The first was to create a location from which people could find out about, and hence access, our site on Appropedia. The second purpose of the MySpace account was to allow us to make "friends." These friends will either voluntarily request friendship, or will receive a friendship request from us directly. We are assuming that whoever decides to be our friend on MySpace either already has an interest in eating ethically, or is interested in it and wants to learn more.

All group members will be responsible to oversee both the MySpace and Appropedia pages. This will entail visiting the two sites (about once a month), reading over comments and inputs, and deciding how best to address the comments and enhance the two pages' effectiveness.

What We Would Have Done Differently:

While the process that led to this final project was arduous at times, in the end, it helped to better focus and structure our project. In the beginning of the semester, we were constantly questioning what we should do, and what would be the best way to go about it. It is possible that if we had stuck closely with our original idea of focusing our project toward the local community, our product may have been more focused and concise. Instead however, we set our goals higher with the intent to educate the internet community. It is difficult to determine what is the most effective way to persuade people to make ethical eating choices, and many factors played into our final decision. One of the more compelling reasons we chose to affect the internet community was that many people in the local Humboldt community are already fairly knowledgeable about ethical food choices. We wanted to educate a broader range of people, who may have more need of this knowledge.

Having more time for brainstorming and implementation of our project would have been beneficial. There were many different factors we considered, forcing us to strictly budget our available time, and therefore we had to limit the scope and size of this project due to our time constraints. If we had more time, we would have expanded upon the topics which we covered. We would also have utilized other ways of disseminating our information to get people more connected and excited about the ideas of ethical eating and food choices.

Summary:

In recent history we have experienced major changes in the global production of food and agriculture. One of the major forces driving this change is the rapid development of new technology. The process of consumer decision-making is complex. We are often not provided with enough information to make informed choices regarding the food products we consume.

This lack of information has resulted in significant consequences. Our project proposes a solution to these consequences.

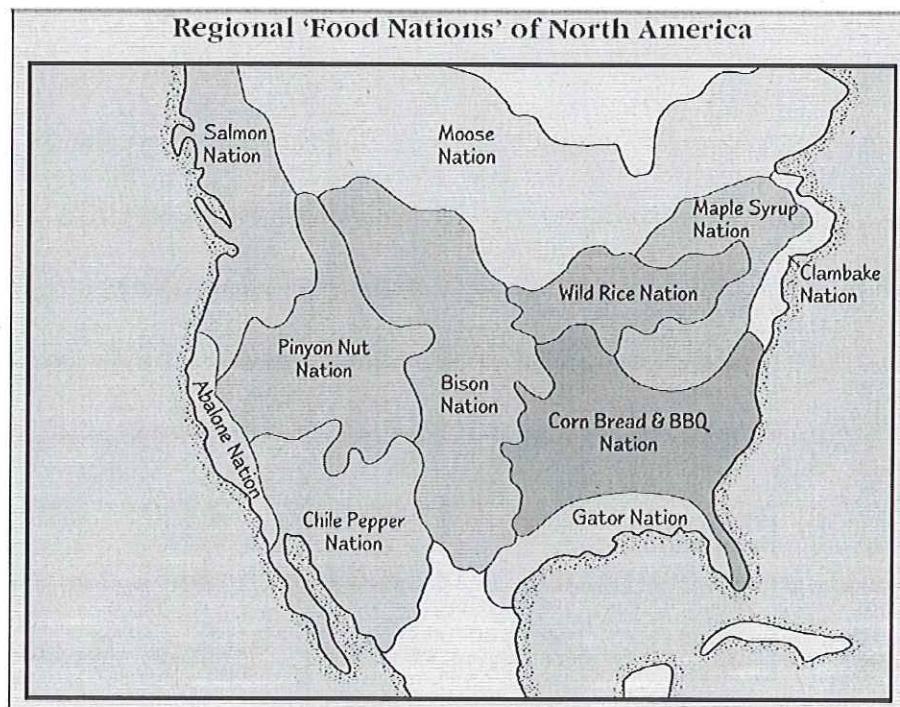
This project was created with the intent to persuade people to examine the food they eat and how it came to the table. The purpose of the examination is to generate discussion about the costs and benefits of our current food production and consumption practices. Hopefully the education will inspire individual change and act as a step toward a brighter future.

Appropedia Link:

http://www.appropedia.org/Ethical_eating_and_food_production

MySpace Link:

<http://www.myspace.com/ethicalfood>



Summary of work:

1. David Finston:

Total Time: Approximately 40 hours total

The bulk of my time went into research and working with the group to help plan for and figure out what we wanted our project to be. My contribution to the project included the written portion discussing the pros, cons, and general information about conventional food, as well as the pros, cons, and general information about food labeling. I also contributed to the Myspace page, which included setting it up, as well as uploading my information onto the Appropedia website.

2. Jessica Rendon

Total Time: Approximately 45 hours total

During the beginning of the project I spent most of my time collaborating with the group and brainstorming ideas. I also spent time helping to write and edit documents that were due. Towards the end of the project, the majority of my time was spent doing research and writing my portions of the website (farmed vs wild and vegetarianism), uploading it, and formatting it. I also added information to the Myspace page.

3. Zoe Dagan

Total time: Approximately 42 hours

In the start of the semester, much of my work was done during our designated lecture times. During the middle and toward the end of the semester, I also utilized time outside of the class to work on the project. A majority of my time went into the brainstorming and conceptual stages of our project. I did quite a bit of research surrounding our topic, some of which I shared with the other group members. Once implementation began, my focus was creating the sections discussing (a) organic food production on a small scale as well as an industrial scale, (b) Fair trade foods, and (c) the nutritional quality of organic vs. conventional foods. I contributed to both the Appropedia site as well as the Myspace site.

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