

Can you beat the System? Simulation game

This is a simulation game to introduce pupils to the idea of a *global food system*, by putting pupils in the position of a small farmer producing food which goes into this system. By doing so it highlights to pupils some of the inequalities of the system, and helps them to think about the challenges small farmers face within this system. It is a great way to introduce pupils to Oxfams **Food for Thought resources**, which form part of the **Food for Thought** project for schools. This project supports pupils to learn and think about the global food system, then take action as Global Citizens. It also gives pupils the opportunity to share their experiences with other young people globally using **Class for Change**, a new online space launching in March 2012.

For more information visit www.oxfam.org.uk/foodforthought.

Please note - a longer version of this game available for older/more able pupils.

Ages

8 – 11 years

Time required

1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes depending on age and ability.

Subjects

Geography / Citizenship / ESDGC / Global Citizenship

Aims

- To explore factors affecting people's ability to grow food
- To highlight inequalities in the global food system
- To develop empathy with the injustice felt by small scale farmers

Resources

- Crop templates and Group scenarios
- 1 example completed crop
- 1 pencil per student
- 4 sheets of A4 paper,
- 2 pairs of scissors,
- 2 colouring pencils and 1 crop template per group.
- A snapshot of the broken food system in India film (2 mins, 39 secs)

All sheets are available in this document.

Video clip available to download from www.oxfam.org.uk/foodforthought.

See the Food for Thought resources, videos section.

What to do

Introduction

Show pupils the crop template. Ask them if any of them know what sort of food it is? Explain that it is called *maize*, and it is a crop which is grown across the world on many farms. Ask if any have eaten it? Some pupils will have, but many may not realise that they have.

Highlight that sweet corn is a type of maize. Ask if any have eaten *tortillas*? Explain that maize is also used for this. Ask if any eat beef? Explain that maize is also used as feed for cows, so by eating the beef they are indirectly eating the maize.

Challenge pupils to think about whether they are therefore *connected* to the farmers who grow maize?

Use this idea to introduce the idea of a *global food system*, in which there are connections between people who grow and people who buy food.

Main activity

Explain they are now going to consider what the other end of the system is like, that for farmers *growing* things like maize.

Split the class into groups of 4 and give out the materials. Explain that they are now farmers, living in a less economically developed country, making a living by growing food (maize) to sell at a local market.

Each group must create as many completed 'crops' as they can in 10 minutes (although you can extend this – see below), using the materials provided. The group who produces the most crops wins the game. However they may have to cope with a change in circumstances.

Options

If you have less time, you can stop the game after 5 - 10 minutes and give each group one of the 4 possible scenario sheets (see below for sheet). Give time to read the scenarios and do what they say, then restart the game for a further 5 – 10 minutes. Then finish.

Alternatively if you have more time you can give each group one of the scenarios first, run the game for a further 5-10 minutes, then give them an additional scenario and run it again for 5-10 more minutes. You can repeat this so groups can experience more than 1 scenario.

At the end, declare a winning team (this should be the group who experienced scenario 4!)

Discussion

First give pupils some time to talk about what it was like being a small farmer as part of this global food system. What was challenging? Why? How did they have to work to be successful?

As a class, discuss the following:

- What was it like being a small farmer in the global system?
- How did each group manage after the scenarios were introduced?
- How did this make them feel?
- What was fair about the game, and what was unfair?

Explain that the game illustrates some of the challenges and inequalities small farmers face within the global food system.

Draw out the different experience when small farmers were either supported (by the government) and not supported (other scenarios).

What would the impact of these things be on the *wider global food system* of farmers

- Being supported
- Not being supported

Try and draw links to how much food would be available globally, and what might happen to the cost of food. Also use the idea of *fairness*. Would the system be fairer if small farmers were supported?

Extension

You can show pupils the film clip. What things in the clip do pupils recognise from the game. Extend the discussion to pupils thinking about 5 ways in which small farmers may be supported.

Share ideas as a class.

Next steps

You could try some of the subject specific LEARN resources as part of the **Food for Thought** resources.

Alternatively you could try the THINK power-shift activity to move pupils to thinking about who can help make the system fairer, and what pupils themselves can do if they wish.

Linking to the wider project

Wallchart opportunity...

When pupils have completed the game this is an opportunity to complete a section of their wallcharts.



... and don't forget the wider *Food for Thought* project

Make sure that once you have taken your pupils through the **learn**, **think** and **act** stages of the *Food for Thought* project they go online at **Class for Change** to share their experiences with other pupils across the world.

Class for Change launches in March 2012 as part of the Oxfam *Food for Thought* project.



See www.oxfam.org.uk/foodforthought

Scenario 1- Climate change

Background

Global temperatures are rising due to climate change. This means some of your crops will die (yields are lowered) – possibly half could in some African countries. Also *extreme* weather like heat waves, droughts and floods will get worse and happen more often, and the seasons will become more *unpredictable*. This means the amount of food you can grow will go down.

Action

Your farmland is flooded and your crops are destroyed. When the floods recede, it takes months to repair the damage and start producing again.

What you must do

Any crops you've completed in the game so far will be destroyed. You must sit on your hands for 30 seconds once the game re-starts.

Scenario 2 – Your land is bought by a wealthy company

Background

Wealthy companies buy cheap farm land in poor countries. But sometimes the land they buy actually is being used by poor families to grow food. These families are often *evicted* (told to leave) with little or no warning, and they are often not given much money to make up for this. Sometimes the land is used to grow *biofuel* (which is plants we can burn to make renewable energy), and sometimes the land is left so the buyer can keep it to use later.

Action

Half of the land you farm has been bought by a large global food company (multinational) and you are no longer allowed to farm it.

What you must do

Half of your remaining paper will be removed.

Scenario 3 – Food price rises

Background

Up until a few years ago the number of people in the world who didn't have enough food to eat was going down. Now however this number is going up. A big reason for this is because the cost of food is going up. This means many families have to spend up to 75% of their money every week just on food. If food prices change suddenly families cannot cope. Farmers who grow food to sell *also* have to buy food, so this affects them too.

Action

As a farmer you can no longer afford to buy essential food you cannot grow yourself. You don't have any savings so you have to sell things you need to farm, such as farming equipment, to have enough money to buy food.

What you need to do

Half of your scissors and pencils will be removed.

Scenario 4 – Investment

Background

The 500 million small farms across the world grow enough food for 2 billion people – or one in three people on earth. This shows the impact that small farmers have in the global food system. However they can grow more food. With support from their government, and help to improve their farming methods their *yields* (amount grown) can go up. For example in Vietnam the government has helped small farmers and the number of hungry people has halved in just 12 years.

Action

The government spends money to support your small farm.

What you need to do

You will receive additional scissors, pencils and paper.

