

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

High Food Prices Cause Concern Worldwide, 04/21/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june08/food_4-21.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. Where does the food you eat come from?**
- 2. What changes have you noticed in the price of food?**
- 3. What factors do you think influence how much food costs?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

- 1. What is happening to the price of food around the world?**

ANSWER

A combination of factors has caused food prices around the world to soar, making it difficult for poor people across the planet to feed their families.

- 2. What are some of the causes for the high costs of food?**

ANSWER

The cost of basic foods such as wheat and corn have doubled and tripled over the past few years due to several reasons. Most recently, the rising price of oil has made food cost more to transport and produce.

In addition, biofuels such as ethanol, touted as a way to reduce fossil fuel consumption and reduce the reliance on Middle Eastern oil by creating fuel out of plants, are also being blamed for the food price climb. Because the U.S. and European governments pay farmers to plant corn to make ethanol, they have inadvertently driven up the cost of corn as well as soy and other basic food crops.

And finally, rising wealth in heavily populated countries such as China means that more people are eating meat, which in turn has increased the demand for grain to feed animals.

- 3. Who are the people most dramatically impacted by the rising cost of foods?**

ANSWER

Rising prices have affected everyone -- but poor people in the developing world may be suffering the most.

"High food prices dismay even relatively well-off Americans — but they're truly devastating in poor countries, where food often accounts for more than half a family's spending," New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote in early April.

4. How does the rising cost of food impact global security and stability?

ANSWER

As poor people around the world go hungry, the unrest caused by high prices could also pose a threat to global security and stability.

In Haiti, rioters burned tires and fought the police. Haitian Saint Louis Meriska told the New York Times that he couldn't afford to feed his children.

"They look at me and say, 'Papa, I'm hungry,' and I have to look away. It's humiliating and it makes you angry," he said.

5. How is the food cost crisis impacting politicians?

ANSWER

Malaysian President Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is in danger of losing his seat, could be the first prominent political casualty of the crisis, according to the Times.

"It's the worst crisis of its kind in more than 30 years," Jeffrey Sachs, a special adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General, told the Times. "It's a big deal and it's obviously threatening a lot of governments. There are a number of governments on the ropes, and I think there's more political fallout to come."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What do you think world leaders should be doing to deal with the problems caused by the rising costs of food around the world? Come up with a plan and present it to your class.

2. Examine the role biofuels plays in the rising cost of foods. How does a society balance the need for food with the need for sustainable energy? Who are the winners and losers in this struggle? Do you think governments should subsidize ethanol production? What should be done?

3. Visit this food cost crisis site from the BBC:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/world/2008/costoffood/default.stm

Choose a story that you think best describes the effects of rising food prices. Compare your choice with the rest of the class. Why did you choose that story? What do you think will happen?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.