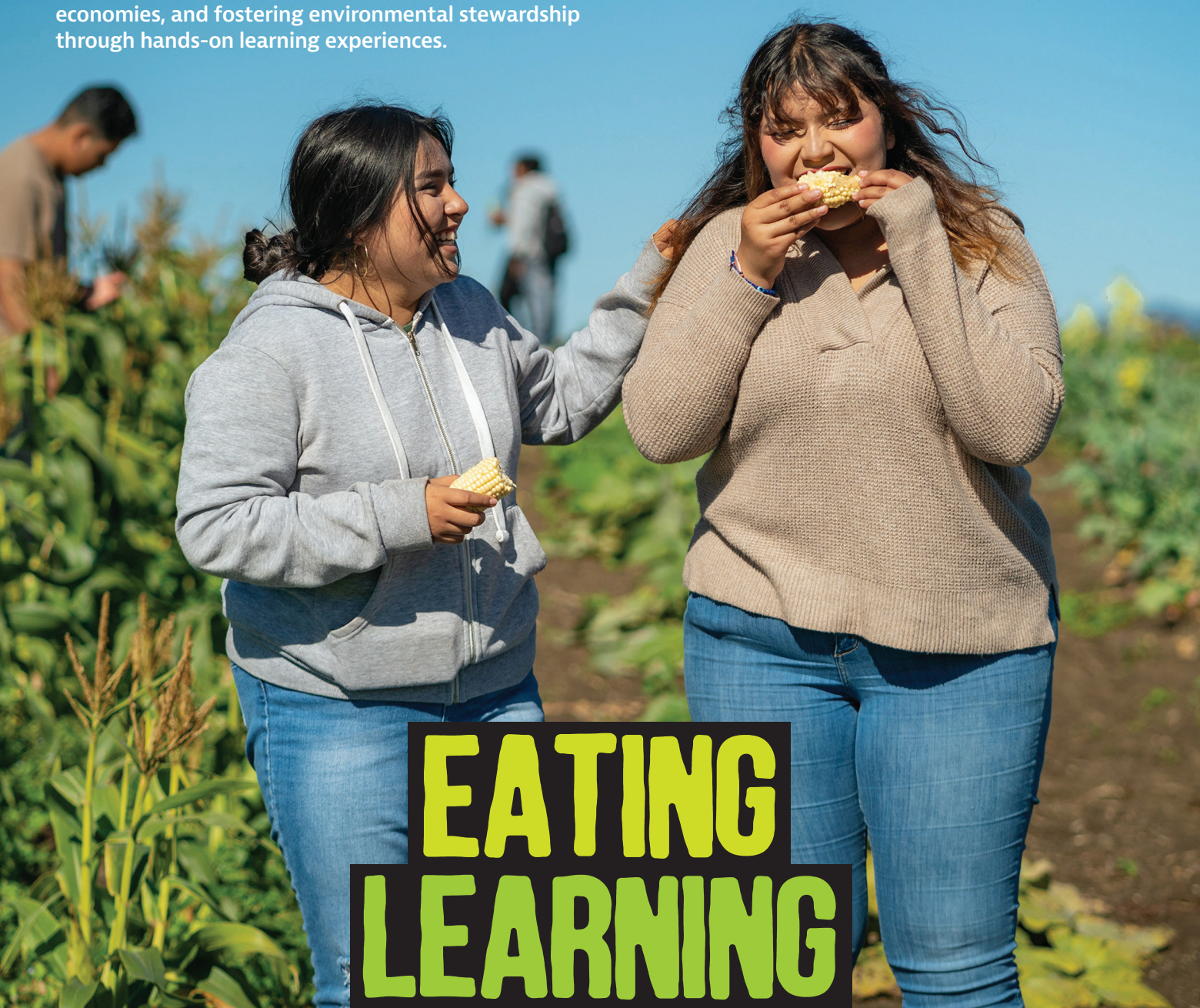


Farm to school programs benefit students by promoting healthy eating habits, supporting local agriculture economies, and fostering environmental stewardship through hands-on learning experiences.



Cindy Hu ||
Center for Ecoliteracy

EATING LEARNING GROWING

Students enjoy fresh corn
from a farm near their
Pajaro Valley school.
Samantha Cruz and Fransisco
Javier Serano

Culturally Relevant Farm to School Education

We all eat, but how many of us truly understand where our food comes from? Such fundamental human understanding can connect us to one another and enhance learning for public school students, from science to math to language arts and more.

All students deserve access to fresh and local food at school and opportunities to experience where their food comes from and how nature helps it grow. Yet in California, a state that produces nearly half of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States, many students do not have access to fresh, California-grown food at school.

The Center for Ecoliteracy is a nonprofit that advances change in U.S. public education and school food systems to support students and the people who nourish them. Based in California, we provide programming for educators, school nutrition professionals, and school communities on school food systems change, ecological education, and policy and advocacy.

The farm to school movement strives to connect local farms and schools to provide students with locally sourced food in the cafeteria, classroom, and school garden. In 2020, the Center for Ecoliteracy successfully advocated for state funding for the California Department of Food and Agriculture to establish the Farm to School Incubator Grant Program. Since then, the state has invested nearly 100 million dollars to expand and sustain the farm to school program. We developed *Eating Learning Growing* to provide resources and professional development for farm to school educators.

Farm to school education is an opportunity for students to taste local foods, learn where their food comes from, and experience the cultures that celebrate them. Whether students live in an

urban environment or a rural one, food can provide insight into the natural world and human society, providing pathways to observe, investigate, and learn.

What Is Farm to School?

Farm to school education connects learning to the real world by helping students foster a deeper appreciation for local agriculture and healthy eating habits. Students experience and understand how nature supports life and the food they eat. Farm to school can take many forms, from classroom lessons to field trips in the school garden. Many programs include meeting farmers and farm workers to learn about the hard work that goes into growing food and about the ecosystems that support healthy crops. For students, tasting locally grown fruits and vegetables engages their senses and provides experiential learning.

Educators can incorporate local food into the curriculum as a hands-on and engaging approach to teaching essential concepts about food, health, agriculture, and nutrition. When educators bring cultural relevance to farm to school education, they can create meaningful and engaging learning experiences for all students. And when this happens, students' health, attendance, participation, and academic success can all improve.



A student harvests carrots fresh from their school garden.

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Farm to School Short Film

This bilingual short film showcases California's Pajaro Valley Unified School District and the power of youth leadership in the farm to school movement. Watch at www.ecoliteracy.org/farmtoschoolfilm



Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Promoting culturally relevant pedagogy is a way to help all students succeed in school. The California Department of Education references Gloria Ladson-Billings' seminal article, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," and defines culturally relevant pedagogy as "a theoretical model that focuses on multiple aspects

of student achievement and supports students to uphold their cultural identities. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy also calls for students to develop critical perspectives that challenge societal inequalities.”¹

Culture is powerful, yet there are few formalized efforts to fully reflect the cultures and diversity of students through farm to school education. This lack of representation is a missed opportunity, as culturally relevant lessons have the potential to make learning about food, agriculture, and the environment more real while nourishing students’ bodies and minds.

California has the largest agricultural economy in the United States. Its farms, ranches, and food producers employ many students’ families. By featuring farmers from different backgrounds in educational materials, inviting them to speak to students, and creating opportunities for students to visit farms, students can see themselves as future farmers and understand the important role that agriculture plays in our society.

The *Eating Learning Growing* Guide

We believe that students learn best when they see their cultures and languages reflected at school and in the healthy fruits and vegetables they enjoy. The *Eating Learning Growing* guide and its framework, activities, and reflections are designed to help educators easily enrich existing lessons to include diverse topics, histories, learning styles, and customs.

Educators can use the guide and apply this framework to make the many wonderful existing farm to school lessons more culturally relevant

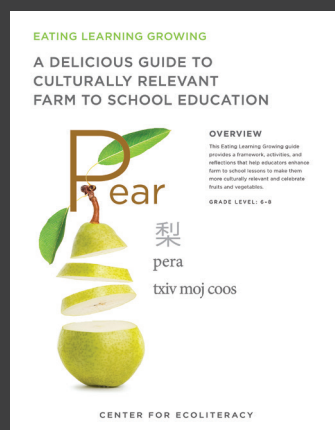


A student tries a blackberry grown by a visiting local farmer.

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for the students in their learning environment. The resource includes guidance on how to:

- **Select a farm to school lesson.** This guidance will make the process of enriching a lesson easy, interesting, and relevant to students.
- **Get to know students.** Fostering a sense of belonging is a key element of creating transformational learning experiences for students. Before enriching a lesson, understanding students’ interests and cultures will make it easier to design lessons that connect to students’ lived experiences and to build your own knowledge from this foundation.
- **Enhance lessons using the Smart By Nature Principles.** The Center for Ecoliteracy developed a set of four ecological principles as a part of its foundational work in schooling for sustainability. The *Eating Learning Growing* guide uses the Smart By Nature principles to explore how to extend, enhance, and enrich existing lessons. The principles are:
 - » Nature Is Our Teacher
 - » Sustainability Is a Community Practice
 - » The Real World Is the Optimal Learning Environment
 - » Sustainable Living Is Rooted in a Deep Knowledge of Place.



Download *Eating Learning Growing: A Delicious Guide to Culturally Relevant Farm to School Education*

This guide provides a framework, activities, and reflections that help educators enhance farm to school lessons to make them more culturally relevant and celebrate fruits and vegetables. Download the guide and watch the video at www.ecoliteracy.org/elg.



Students taste strawberries grown by a visiting local farmer.

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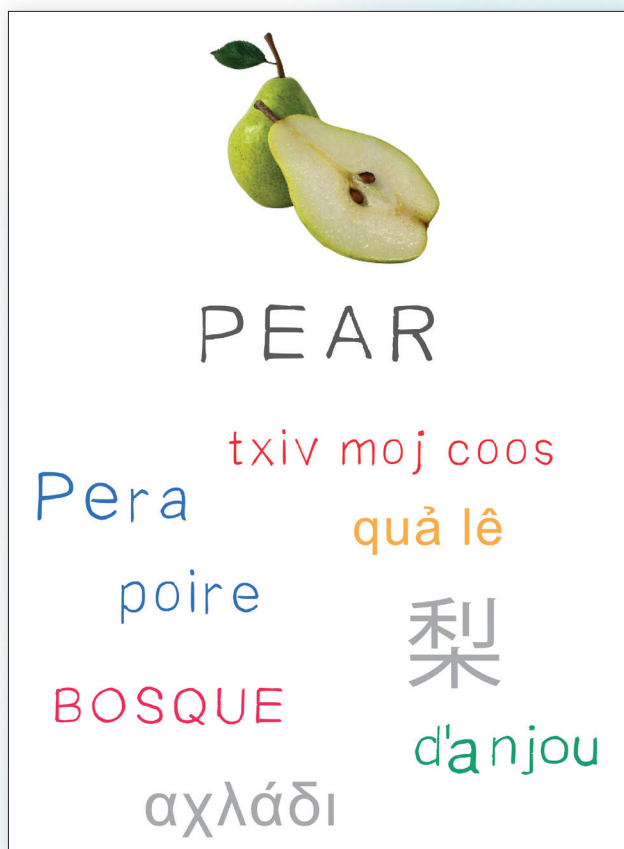
- **Incorporate social justice standards.** When applying culturally relevant pedagogy to a lesson, it is helpful, important, and necessary to consider social justice principles. The guide includes a primer on the social justice standards developed by the organization Learning for Justice (see page 17). These standards offer a framework for anti-bias education

and help guide learners in celebrating the diversity in their communities while enhancing their ability to work with others of different backgrounds on a path toward community action. The social justice standards framework provides helpful support for this process.

- **Ensure a positive farm to school experience for all students.** Even with



Eating Learning Growing posters enliven a school cafeteria wall in Sacramento, California. © Center for Ecoliteracy



the most inclusive lesson planning, some topics or activities in farm to school education may cause stress or feelings of discomfort for some students. The guide provides insight into some common scenarios that might arise and ways that educators can plan ahead and respond constructively in the moment.

- **Include yourself as a learner.** As an educator, you are a lifelong learner. Students will benefit from your reflections about your own relationship with farm to school. As you begin your work, consider:
 - » What are your own eating habits and food traditions, and what has shaped them?
 - » How have your habits changed over time?
 - » What larger societal factors shape how you eat?
 - » How does this inform your view of farm to school?

The *Eating Learning Growing* guide includes activities, reflections, and resources that help farm to school lessons become more engaging and culturally relevant. Some activities are formal and standards-based while others are informal and easy to incorporate into a class period. One such example is an activity that encourages students to explore diversity and community by inviting them to share the

name of a crop in all the languages they know. This simple activity can spark further explorations of food and culture.

Activity: What is this crop called? This engaging activity challenges students to identify the fruit using just a picture and a large sheet of paper.

Free Resources for Educators

As you strive to create a culturally relevant farm to school experience for your students, visit ecoliteracy.org/elg to download *Eating Learning Growing: A Delicious Guide to Culturally Relevant Farm to School Education*. Also available for download is a vibrant set of award-winning graphics, including a large-scale banner with a mosaic butterfly made from legumes and a suite of eight posters featuring fresh fruits and vegetables and their names in 18 languages spoken throughout California. We designed these materials to transform classroom spaces, dining environments, hallways, gymnasiums, offices, and more, offering beauty and inspiration while creating a sense of belonging within your school community.

Note:

¹ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/culturalrelevantpedagogy.asp>

Disclosure Statement:

The author is an employee of Center for Ecoliteracy.