

Customizing Lessons to Climate, Culture & Students' Needs

Adapting FoodCorps Lessons

At FoodCorps, we understand that every school, classroom, and community is different. Growing seasons, culinary traditions, and the life experiences of students vary significantly from place to place. Accordingly, we've intentionally designed all FoodCorps lessons to be adaptable, while still retaining the essential goals of FoodCorps service. We encourage you *not to adapt* the core learning objective behind each lesson because these are central to giving students a strong foundation in how to grow, prepare, understand, and enjoy healthy food; instead, we encourage you to adapt the details within lessons to the cultural context, available ingredients and supplies, seasonality, and varying comfort and skill levels of the students you are working with. You will notice that we've intentionally left room for you to decide how you might adapt each lesson to your needs.

Cultural Relevance

Food is at the heart of culture, and it looks, tastes, and feels different depending on where you are in the country. To honor that diversity, we created the FoodCorps Lessons with a level of adaptability that encourages adjustments to be made around which plants to grow and which ingredients to use in recipes, so the program maximizes relevance to your students. We recognize that beans are a staple food in some communities, and okra is a staple in others, so the lessons can (and should!) be adjusted to teach students

skills in growing, preparing, and eating healthy food that matches the local context. Make sure to give yourself adequate time to plan for these adaptations.

It's important to learn about various cultural groups that live in the community and are represented among your students. Here are some questions to consider:

- What are the staple foods of these cultures?
- What types of foods are celebrated and are a source of pride?
- How could these foods be highlighted in your service?
- What foods might be forbidden for cultural or religious reasons (such as pork)?
- Are the ingredients you are using locally available *and* affordable to students' families?
- How do cultural beliefs or traditions about health and well-being show up in this community?
- What can your students teach you about food? What new foods can you try?

When you are striving to be culturally responsive by featuring foods that reflect community customs and traditions, do your homework before you decide on a specific recipe. Reach out to parents, teachers, elders, farmers, and cooks in the community to learn about local food traditions. Use this information to support adapting your FoodCorps Lessons appropriately. Refer to your School & Community Guide and the Get to Know Your Community section of this guide for other tips on connecting with the local community.

It is a good rule of thumb to avoid meat when cooking with students—for cultural reasons as well as safety ones. Also be aware that some cultural groups are sensitive to certain foods (like dairy), and many schools have prohibitions around nuts and other allergens. This presents an opportunity to highlight lesser known and highly nutritious sources of protein.

Introducing students to a broad array of new foods and new food traditions is an important and positive part of FoodCorps service. We just encourage you to take an approach that is rooted in and mindful of local traditions and work outward from there.

Seasonal Relevance

As you get to know your school, teachers, and students, we encourage you to think ahead about what lesson you will teach when and the best timing for specific lessons. You will notice that all FoodCorps lessons are structured around fall, winter, and spring—the seasons that take place during the school year. However, this doesn't mean that you can't adapt a fall lesson for spring or vice versa.

It is also important to explore opportunities for curriculum integration with the teachers you partner with. Would a garden-based lesson on compost fit nicely with a science concept a teacher is introducing in the classroom? Pay close attention to the “Adaptations” section of each FoodCorps Lesson. This will provide ideas about how to extend learning opportunities on the specific topic covered in the lesson. Be creative about looping back to a theme multiple times during the school year. Mix and match lessons to work for your specific teaching situation!

Recommended Resources

- American Indian Health and Diet Project: “History of Traditional Tribal Foods”
- FoodCorps webinar: “Building Racial Equity in Service”
- FoodCorps Massachusetts webinar: “Serving Up Tradition: A Guide For School Food In Culturally Diverse Communities”
- FoodCorps webinar: “Teaching Food and Culture”
- Native Food Systems Resource Center
- Oldways resources
- Southern Foodways Alliance resources
- University of Arizona Family and Community Medicine, College of Medicine webinar: “Nutrition Education with American Indians”
- USDA webinar: “Incorporating Traditional Foods in Child Nutrition Program Menus”