

# WILDFLOWERS NATURE SCHOOL

## SUSTAINABLE EATING GUIDE

As a program that is about understanding nature, we cannot ignore the impact of humans upon nature. When dealing with children it's important to try our best to set the example of ways to live to protect their future. How we eat has a major impact on the sustainability of a healthy planet, as well as sustainability of a healthy body. The practices that will sustain both healthy body and healthy environment I dub "sustainable eating."

From the most local of our environments (our bodies) to the most global, the most sustainable food system focuses on fresh, locally produced foods. Packaged foods are best avoided for 5 reasons: 1) to reduce waste (packaging necessitates a lot of resources), 2) sometimes there are additives that are questionable or unhealthy, 3) it is less likely that packed foods are local, contributing to resources used in transportation and support of large agri-business over small farmers, 4) foods lose nutrition quickly over time from moment of harvest, 5) if we grow up knowing that food does not come from a package, it can affect future purchasing, lifestyle, health & voting habits. That doesn't mean you have to become a chef. Kids like simple foods. Buy in bulk. If you like using bags, try sturdy zip-locks that you wash & re-use. If you wish your child to have milk or juice at lunch, you might put it in a sealed container (thermos, plastic jar, etc.) rather than aseptic packages.

At least for snack & lunch here, do your best to send only: organic, 100% whole grain, no sugar, local, fresh foods with little packaging. We are trying to be a "No-Waste" School so items creating trash is discouraged. Trash brought is sent home in lunchbox. Food policy for snack to share is underlined below.

### AVOID BRINGING PRE-PACKAGED FOODS

The order of effect of sustainable practices is as follows: 1) reduce (don't buy it), 2) re-use, 3) recycle. When we do a unit on recycling, I will teach a chant that tells this order: "Reduce, re-use, recycle, and rot". The latter refers to compost - really a form of recycling. Because re-use is better than recycle, we'll try to catch kids to bring home larger parts of their lunch they don't eat in hopes there can be another use for it at home. For smaller pieces, we use a compost bucket. We have several compost sites here: in a heap, in a bin, and in a worm bin. If you would like any info on how to set one up at home, let me know. A mature 4' x 3' worm bin will compost all the food (vegetable) scraps of an average non-gardening family of 4 and produce an outstanding garden amendment (vermicompost) and a fun place for kids to explore critters (bugs, worms).

### ONLY WHOLE GRAINS

A whole grain is one in which they have not removed the nutritious part of the grain in processing. Remember: there is little nutrition in refined (= not whole) grains. If it's refined, it raises blood sugar quickly (which causes it to fall quickly). Please do not bring refined grains for snack to share (crackers, pretzels, or bread made with white flour, etc.). Be a label-reader. If the word "whole" is not next to "wheat", it is not whole wheat flour. If the 1st ingredient is a whole grain, but the 2nd is not, it is not as nutritious a product as one that is of all whole grains. Many bread, cereal, & cracker titles are misleading. "7 grain", "wheat", etc. does not mean the grains are whole. When they refine grains, they remove the bran (where all the fiber is) & the germ (chock full of E & B vitamins and more). If you bake, only use whole grains & replace up to about 1/4 of flour with: 1) some bran & germ, 2) quinoa flakes or quinoa flour (for protein), 3) flax seeds or flax seed meal (omega-3 & vitamin E), dry milk (protein compensating carb; calcium). Most of those require adding a T of gluten flour if it needs to rise.

### 90% ORGANIC

The sprays conventional farmers use on foods not only raises a health safety concern for eating the food, but does serious damage to the balance in nature when used. Ask for my handouts on worst foods to eat non-organic. Organic foods are solely consumed by some of our families. In respect for their beliefs and the reality that our kids should not be the consumer of the mass amounts of dangerous chemicals that truly are residual on non-organic foods, do your best when bringing snack for the group to bring only organic (especially for produce).

### LOW SUGAR AND SOME PROTEIN

Read the nutrition box for the grams of sugar per serving. If that is new for you, compare cereals for a base understanding. Then read the box for crackers - can be surprising. A little protein in a meal is good to keep the carbohydrates from adversely affecting blood sugar levels (cheese, turkey cubes, egg salad, etc). Some of our children really require some protein at snack, but all benefit. Blood sugar rises quickly from sugar and then falls, often in a crash. This crash causes the body to crave more sugar to bring the levels back up. That's why kids that eat sugar crave sugar and start to seem pickier about food. It takes at least several days to readjust.

### FRESH, LOCAL

Fresh, local foods cannot be underemphasized. Every day a fruit or vegetable is off of the mother plant, it is losing nutrients. Processing food not only strips produce of nutrients, but it strips it of its essence. A child growing up valuing the taste of fruit and vegetables picked ripe in just the last couple of days at most, will become an adult that not only eats healthfully, but enjoys life deeply. For one that tastes fruit fresh off the tree, or carrots fresh out of the ground, understands what a rich abundant wondrous world we live in. (Check out the Slow Food movement for more on that.) Eating close to the source is also a jumping point for living close to the source. Living simply will assist in creating a happy adult that finds value in life as it is abundantly out there in nature. Lastly, support local farmers and get off the treadmill of this crazy food cycle here where the average piece of food travels 1400 miles.

Important note: NONE of us here solely eat organic, unrefined, non-packaged, no-waste, low-carb foods. This is not neurotic perfection school. That being said, let this focus of our program be a benefit as a tool / a reminder / a learning opportunity to improve the foods in our family's lives, a vibrant healthy agricultural system, and the future of our planet.