

Identifying Food Product Sources

Have you ever thought about where the food you buy in the supermarket comes from? Is it grown in your local area, or does it come from another state or even another country? You might be surprised to find out how far the foods you eat have travelled before they reach your table.

Identifying where fresh produce has come from often is fairly easy. Many times the stores selling the produce will advertise the source of a crop. For example, you might see a sign that advertises Washington state apples or Georgia peaches. If food is grown locally, most stores will want to let shoppers know it.

Identifying where the ingredients in packaged food come from usually is a little more difficult. Most packaged food labels only indicate where the product was packaged or distributed, not where the ingredients were grown. For example, a can of coconut milk might state “Product of Dominican Republic.” That information only tells you where the coconut milk was processed. The coconuts that were used to make the coconut milk may have been grown in the Dominican Republic or they may have been imported to that country from another country and then processed to its consumer form.

So how can you find out where the foods you eat were grown? If the source of the fresh produce isn’t advertised, you can ask the produce manager about its source. Finding the source of the packaged foods might take a little research. In this activity, you will work with a group of students to track down the source of ingredients in a packaged food product.

OBJECTIVES

Identify the ingredients used to make a packaged food product.

Investigate the source of ingredients in a packaged food product.

Explain the process used to make the product.

MATERIALS

- food product labels
- glue stick
- paper
- pen or pencil
- reference books about food products
- scissors

Procedure

1. Work with a group of students to choose a food product label. Your assignment is to find out as much as you can about where the ingredients in the product came from. You will find some of the information on the label, but you also might have to do research. Information about the product might be found on the web site of the company that produces or distributes the product. To find the company’s web site address, first look on the product label; companies often include their web site information there.
2. Begin by recording the name of the product on the Product Summary data table on the next page. Then list all the product ingredients from the label.

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3. With your partners research the source of the ingredient. Does it come from a plant or an animal? From what part of the plant or animal? For example, if your label includes potatoes in its list of ingredients, find out what part of the potato plant we eat. Also tell how potatoes are grown. Summarize this information in the second column of the data table.
4. Next find out where each ingredient is grown. As an example, if your label indicates that the product contains apples, check the company's web site to see if it tells where the apples are grown. If not, use references sources to find out where apples typically are grown. Knowing the specific type of apple used in the product will help you track down the most likely place it was grown. Different types of apples grow in different locations. Knowing the type will help you narrow down the list of possible sources. Record this information in the last column of the data table.
5. Research the process used to make your product. Again, the company web site might give you information about its procedures. Or you might try phoning or emailing the company for the information. If you can't get information from the company, check the Internet or other sources to see if you can find general information about the process. Summarize your information at the bottom of the data table.

PRODUCT SUMMARY

Product Name _____		
Ingredient	Plant or Animal Source	Source Location
How Product Is Made:		

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Analysis

- 1. Examining Data** Look through the ingredients you listed from the food label. Identify plant parts—roots, stems, leaves, fruits, and seeds—among the foods listed in the chart. You may not find every part represented on this list. What parts of plants do you think you eat most often? Explain.

- 2. Classifying** Look at the Nutrition Facts box on your product label. Does the product fit into a single category in the Food Guide Pyramid, or does it have ingredients from two or more categories? What are the suggested serving size and estimated Calories per serving?

- 3. Identifying Patterns** Were there any ingredients in your Product Summary data table that you were unable to find a possible place of origin for? If so, what problems prevented you from finding the information?

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- 4. Classifying** Do you consider any of the ingredients in your product to be exotic? Were these ingredients grown in the United States or in another country?

Conclusions

- 5. Applying Conclusions** Many of the foods you eat are grown and packaged in the United States, where government regulations help ensure the safety of food products. But some of your food may originate in other countries. Why might knowing where food originates be important information for a consumer?
