

8. Up Close and Personal with a Farmer

How many people still know someone who farms? In Quebec, only 1.7% of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihood, compared with almost 50% a hundred years ago. Today, farms are called agricultural exploitations, cows are animal units and farmers are producers. By conducting an interview with a Quebecois farmer at school, students will demystify one of the oldest, most important, and rapidly changing, job.

Learning Objectives

Have students :

- Prepare and conduct an interview with a farmer (or someone working in the agricultural sector) who is willing to share his/her experience;
- Become aware of the realities of the farming world and the role of farmers in Quebec's agricultural sector;
- Become familiar with the skills and knowledge required to feed people.

Preparation

- Get in contact with a local farmer* (see Appendix 1) in order to organize a meeting with the class. Conduct a preliminary interview with the farmer and obtain some information about his/her activities and the kind of agriculture he/she practices. If possible, ask the farmer to bring tools or objects he uses (pictures, tools, equipment, seeds, plants, animals...).
- Prepare the drawing materials for the students.

Materials

- Drawing
- One copy of the "Sample Interview Questions" (Appendix 2).
- One copy per student of the document "Who Does What?" (Appendix 3).
- Camera and costumes (optional).

Key Person

- A farmer or an agricultural worker (see Appendix 1).

Did you Know?

- In the last 100 years, we've observed a concentration of power and resources in farming. The number of farms in Quebec has gone from 200,000 to 30,000 while the existing farms become bigger and bigger.
- While some food companies record profits of more than 150% for a given product, farmers, on average, receive only 0.7% of the product retail price.
- Small farms yield the greatest returns. On average, in the United States, a four-acre farm earns \$1400 per acre compared to \$12 per acre for a 6000 acre farm.

***Note:** : It can be interesting to invite two different types of farmers (for example, a milk producer and a vegetable farmer or an organic and a conventional farmer) in order to broaden the students' understanding of agricultural realities.

Presentation

- Ask students to draw out what they think a farmer and his farm look like.
- Lead a short discussion between students based on their drawings (stereotypes, perceptions, representative characteristics).
- Hand out one copy per student of “Who Does What?” (Appendix 3). Correct this activity in class once it is done.

Answers: 1-13; 2-16; 3-11; 4-15; 5-14; 6-17; 7-12; 8-20; 9-19; 10-18.

Synonyms : Vegetable farmer, farmer, family farmer.

Main Activity

- As a group, ask students to come up with and write interview questions* in order to better understand the daily realities that farmers face, to learn more about farming jobs and to check if their drawings accurately depict a farmer’s life (see Appendix 2).
- Determine who is going to ask each question to the farmer and who is going to take notes.
- Welcome and briefly present the farmer to the class.
- Invite students to begin the interview and to take notes.
- Remind the farmer, if needed, to present any material/object he brought along.

Integration

- After the interview, ask the class: How much did they like the experience? Which type of agriculture was introduced? What are the benefits and constraints of being a farmer in Quebec? Is it easy to sell agricultural products? Are there benefits in selling products directly to consumers? Now that they know a little more about farming, is farming a job that interests them?
- Ask students to take their first drawing of a farmer and propose that they adapt it based on what they have learnt. Are there any modifications? What are they?
- For homework, ask students to help spread the word in their community about the farming world and the realities that farmers face by writing a short article for the school newsletter or the local newspaper about farmers and agriculture.

Enrichment

Have the students explore one of the following topics through a class discussion, a written assignment, a research project or a skit:

- the difference between rural and urban life.
- **organic** agriculture versus conventional agriculture.
- the difference between different agricultural practices used in Quebec (ex.: livestock farming vegetable production, etc.)

***Note:** If time permits, help the farmer prepare his visit by providing him a list of questions that the students will ask.



Take Action!

To help them connect with their food, know where their food comes from and support local farmers, invite students and their family to:

- Visit public markets at least once a month (July – November).
- « At dinner, replace at least one imported product by a locally-grown or prlocally-processed food (jams, patés, canned produce, fruits and vegetables, etc.). It's easy to find them in the grocery store or, even better, in a specialty store.
- Visit a local farm to meet the farmer, handpick fruits or vegetables or sign-up with a family farmer that is part of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) network : <http://www.equiterre.qc.ca/agriculture/alimentation/agrotourisme.php>.

References

- “Find a Farmer Near You” (Appendix 1)
- Romeo Bouchard (2005), Plaidoyer pour une agriculture paysanne : Pour la santé du monde, Écosociétés, 232 pages.
- Radio-Canada Archives (videos) : http://archives.radio-canada.ca/IDC-0-17-1784-12118/politique_economie/fermes_familiales/clip6
http://archives.radio-canada.ca/IDC-0-17-1784-12115/politique_economie/fermes_familiales/clip3

Appendix 1 🍅 Find a Farmer Near You

« Different organizations can help you find a farmer or someone working in the agricultural sector willing to come meet your students. Below are useful contacts and information.

1. If your school's cafeteria or snack program is linked to a farm through *Soup's On! For Responsible Institutional Eating* project, contact Équiterre's ecological agriculture team or your school's food service to obtain your farmer's contact information:

Équiterre

2177, Masson St., office 206, Montreal QC H2H 1B1

Phone: 514 522 2000, ext. 294 or 1 877 272 6656, ext. 294

Email: infoasc@equiterre.qc.ca

2. Consult Équiterre's list of organic farms that are part of **its network of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** which includes more than 100 farms throughout Quebec:

<http://www.equiterre.org/agriculture/paniersBios/listeFermes.php>

3. Consult the **repertoire of organic Quebec products** (you will be able to find farms in your region classified by type of production):

<http://www.produitsbioquebec.info/DispatcherInterrogationGrandPublicFr.do>

4. Contact the Minister of Agriculture, Fishing and Food of Quebec (MAPAQ) to find the closest MAPAQ service center who can help you find an agricultural consultant (agronomist) who works with farmers willing to meet your students.

MAPAQ

200, chemin Sainte-Foy, Quebec QC G1R 4X6

Phone: 418 380 2110 ou toll-free: 1 888 222 6272

<http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/Fr/Regions/>

5. Contact your regional *Union des producteurs agricoles* federation:

http://www.upa.qc.ca/fra/agriculture/regions_decouvrir.asp



Appendix 2 🍅 Sample Interview Questions

Here is a list of questions that you can use to help and to inspire students in preparing for the interview with a farmer:

- Which type of agriculture do you practice (vegetable production, livestock, milk production, etc.) and why (ex.: why this type of agriculture and not another one)?
- Describe your farm.
- What are the main crops/products that you grow or sell (ex. : vegetables, fruits, etc.)?
- Why did you decide to be a farmer?
- How did you become a farmer?
- Describe a typical day during the harvest season.
- How long have you been farming for?
- How many hours do you work per week?
- Do you have employees? How many?
- What are the principal qualities that a farmer should have?
- Which months are the busiest for you?
- Do you use pesticides at your farm? Why?
- Are you an organic farmer?
- What does organic mean?
- Where do you sell your products? What are the benefits and constraints of this marketing approach?
- Do you sell directly to consumers? Do you like that?
- What do you like the most and the least in agriculture?
- Should more young people get into farming? If yes, how do you suggest they become farmers?
- In your opinion, what will Quebec agricultural sector look like in 2040 or what will a farm look like?



Appendix 3 🍅 Who Does What?

Do we say farmer or market gardener? Depending on the type of agriculture practiced by the farmer, we attribute a specific name to his occupation. Identify who does what by drawing an arrow to connect the type of farmer with the corresponding definition below.

Type of farmer	Definition
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Orchard farmer● Maple farmer● Beekeeper● Market gardener	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Person who keeps bees● Person who breeds cows and calves● Person who grows fruit● Person who grows vegetables, fruit, flowers, or ornamental plants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Horticulturist● Pig farmer● Cattle farmer● Milk producer● Stock breeder● Shepherd	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Person who cultivates vegetables● Person who cultivates maple syrup● Person who raises pigs● Person who raises sheep● Person who breeds animals● Person who raises cows to produce milk

Here are a few synonyms used to describe a farmer that cultivates vegetables : market gardener and horticulturist.

Do you know other synonyms used? Which ones?

