

# Anthropology and Agriculture

with Professor David Himmelgreen  
and Emmanuel Roux

## Talking points

### Knowledge

1. How many microorganisms are there in one gram of healthy soil?
2. What percentage of our food is directly or indirectly produced from soils?

### Comprehension

3. How do urban farms benefit their local communities?
4. Why are anthropologists interested in food systems?

### Application

5. Imagine that you are a student on the 15th Street Farm NEP. What questions would you ask Emmanuel to find out more about how healthy soils produce healthy food?

### Analysis

6. Emmanuel often uses the metaphor of a city to teach his students about the microorganisms in the soil. What do you think this metaphor teaches students about soil? Why do you think metaphors are a good way to help students understand new ideas?
7. One activity in the NEP allows students to taste the unusual flavours from plants that they have grown like papayas and dandelions. What are the motivations behind this activity? How will this help the students form a connection with nature?

### Synthesis

8. The 15th Street Farm NEP involves hands-on activities for students to take part in. How would you design an activity that helps students understand that humans are a part of nature, and that damaging nature damages humans?
9. Imagine you are an anthropologist evaluating the 15th Street Farm NEP. What interview questions would you pose to a focus group (of children and adults who have participated) to evaluate the NEP's impact?

### Evaluation

10. The 15th Street Farm NEP aims to help local communities learn about where their food comes from and reduce food insecurity in the local area by teaching local children and families about the links between agriculture, nutrition and well-being. How effective do you believe these approaches will be at reducing local food insecurity, and why?
11. Imagine you are an anthropologist working for the US Department of Agriculture which is funding the 15th Street Farm NEP. How would you use quantitative data (for example those collated from surveys) to evaluate the success of the NEP?

### Creativity

12. Urban farms are a great way of helping people in cities reconnect with nature. How else might city-dwellers be able to improve their connection with the natural world?



## Activities

### 1. Put yourself in someone else's roots

One activity that students on the 15th Street Farm NEP take part in involves looking at an old tree and asking questions about it.

Head out to your school grounds, local park, forest, urban farm, or any other green space near you and look for an old tree. Once you have found a tree to focus on, spend a few moments with it. Walk around it and look up into its canopy. Touch its bark and look around underneath it for fallen twigs and leaves. Sit down and lean against its trunk.

Consider that this tree grew from one seed among thousands of others. The chances of this one particular seed taking root in this exact spot are extremely slim. As you are sat under your tree, write your answers to the following questions.

- What conditions had to be perfect for this particular seed to take hold and begin life as a tree?
- What is it about this spot that helped the tree grow for such a long time?
- How have the local surroundings changed over the course of the tree's life?
- How has the climate changed over the course of the tree's life?
- What interactions might the tree have had with other humans?
- What interactions might the tree have had with animals above and underground?
- What would it feel like to be this tree?
- If the tree could talk, what would you say to it?
- What do you think the tree would say back?

Anthropologists like David aim to involve a wide range of community members in projects like the 15th Street Farm NEP. How would you adapt this activity for older members of the community? To what extent would you need to? What could adults gain from exploring the life of a tree?





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## 2. A community event

David says, “Food is central to the human experience.” Whether people are celebrating, commemorating or commiserating, food is usually involved.

Think of a significant date in the school year, and devise a celebratory or commemorative event. For example, you could plan an event to mark the completion of the academic year or to celebrate a sporting event.

As part of your planning, consider the following:

- Why is this date important for your community?
- What do you want your community to gain from the day? How will you know the event has been a success?
- Who will be involved in the day?
- What activities could the day include, and why?
- What food could you serve at your event, and why?
- What will each person attending contribute to the event? Will people be given specific roles on the day?
- How will you ensure everyone feels welcome and part of your event?
- How will you make this event and this sharing of food special and memorable?

When you have planned your event, share your ideas with a small group of classmates and ask them for their feedback. To what extent do they think your event will bring your community together? What would they particularly enjoy about your event, and

why? How could your event be even better? How do they think your community will benefit from your event – on the day and into the future?

## 3. Grow your own indoor herb garden

Whether you live on a farm or in an inner-city high rise, it is possible to grow your own herb garden; all you need is a sunny windowsill!

“You could start with radishes, as they grow to harvest in 21 days,” says Emmanuel. Growing your own herbs is also a great way to begin growing some of your own food and will provide some interesting flavours to add to your cooking. “Start with a plant or a cutting of basil or mint in a glass of water. Watch the roots develop and transplant in soil when they are between 2 and 5 cm long.”

Here is a quick and easy guide to growing your own herbs inside:

**Choose a sunny spot.** Herbs thrive in sunlight, so the sunnier the better.

**Choose your herbs.** Some herbs grow better indoors than others. Basil, oregano, thyme, rosemary, mint, chives and parsley are all relatively easy to grow.

**Choose the right container.** Most herbs will grow in any container as long as they have enough space and some drainage. Plant pots are ideal, but

large yoghurt pots with small holes poked into the bottom will also work.

**Water your herbs.** Most herbs need a surprisingly little amount of water to thrive. You should try to keep the soil moist, but not waterlogged. If the leaves begin to turn yellow or wilt, you are using too much water!

**Harvest little and often.** Pick a few sprigs or leaves at a time. This encourages the plant to grow back more quickly.

## More resources

- You can learn more about the 15th Street Farm NEP on their website: [15thstreetfarmnep.com](http://15thstreetfarmnep.com)
- Keep up to date with the latest developments on 15th Street Farm via its Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/15thstagrihood](https://www.facebook.com/15thstagrihood)
- Listen to Emmanuel talk about 15th Street Farm on this YouTube video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2c0a634WGcY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2c0a634WGcY)
- Play this free online game to learn more about how to protect the quality of soil: [www.myamericanfarm.org/games/thrive-game](http://www.myamericanfarm.org/games/thrive-game)