

This module explores the social implications of food in shaping connections in our communities by exploring the role food plays in different cultures. By cooking at home or finding ethnic neighbourhoods with restaurants that serve their favourite dishes, newcomers make connections to local communities and maintain links to their countries of origin. While many ethnic food products are readily found in Canada, this module acknowledges the challenges that newcomers can face even to meet their basic food needs. Income, proximity to affordable grocery stores and fresh food markets, as well as complex food labelling can make it difficult for newcomers to access healthy food.

While those interviewed continue to eat and cook in much the same way they did before coming to Canada, local tastes and markets have impacted the habits of these individuals and their families. South Asian immigrants miss the level of spice they were familiar with in India and Pakistan, while a Japanese immigrant has developed a sweet tooth. One woman has adopted steaming as a way to create more healthy meals for her family. The mother of one participant, whose family had a cook in Pakistan, became a self-taught cook after immigrating.

The videos also address changes in global food culture during various periods of migration to Canada. One participant noted that multiculturalism was already reflected in 19th century Canada in the ubiquity of imported ingredients such as tea, sugar and molasses. The same interviewee also observed that Canadians are less involved in the cooking and growing of their own meals today. A reliance on processed foods, recipes and restaurants has replaced a daily commitment to food preparation that relied on the senses. As author Michael Pollan suggests in his 2007 book *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, "the immigrant's refrigerator is the very last place to look for signs of assimilation."

Discussion Questions

1. As a newcomer, do any of the stories featured in this module resonate with your own experience? Why or why not? Have you had to make any changes to what you eat since coming to Canada?
2. Write and share your favourite family recipe with your community. This can serve as an excellent English language learning exercise, as well as promote cultural understanding.
3. Examine the food labels on a variety of food products available at the local grocery store. What information is communicated? Is this information useful? Is there information you feel is missing?
4. Host a potluck, where each person brings a dish from their country of origin. Be sure to ask about dietary restrictions and allergies in advance.
5. What role does food have on special occasions, both in Canada and in different countries?
6. What foods are commonly grown and produced in Canada? What factors contribute to the availability of these foods?

Related Resources

Gardening:

Allotment gardens are yearly permits available through the City of Toronto.

www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=aa16c0e9f7301410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnnextchannel=0a4adada600f0410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD

The Global Roots Garden at the Stop Community Food Centre has plots devoted to eight different ethnic communities with large populations in Toronto. The plots are tended by seniors and youth who meet once a week to tend the plots, socialize and cook.

thestop.org/programs/fight-hunger/urban-agriculture/global-roots-garden

Nutrition and food safety:

Canada's food guide provides guidelines for food selection and promotes the nutritional health of Canadians.

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) helps consumers understand food labelling.

www.inspection.gc.ca/food/labelling/food-labelling-for-consumers/eng/1400426541985/1400455563893

Community cooking programs:

Newcomer Kitchen at The Depanneur invites groups of Syrian refugee women to use their kitchen to cook traditional Syrian dishes in a fun, social setting. Meals are prepared, packaged, and then sold online to pay for the ingredients and to provide an honorarium for the cooks.

thedepanneur.ca/about/newcomerkitchen

Food access:

FoodLink has friendly volunteers who provide information about local low-cost food programs, including food banks, Good Food Box stops and community gardens.

foodshare.net/program/foodlink

Mobile Good Food Markets offer a low cost place to buy quality food in neighbourhoods where grocery stores cannot be accessed easily by public transit or are too expensive.

foodshare.net/program/mobile

Dietary restrictions:

www.anewlife.ca/halal-food

www.cor.ca/view/683/the_abcs_of_kosher.html