

5

Food Education

Changing the food you eat is one part of the equation; changing the way you think about it and talk about it is equally important. Food offers a wonderful starting point for diving in to Jewish tradition, and some of our ancient Jewish texts and practices offer remarkably relevant insights into the way we eat today.

It's amazing how Jewish tradition can come to life when you have a hands-on learning experience. In this chapter we offer you a variety of different educational programming ideas, including movie nights, field trips, cooking classes, and speakers. We invite you to explore the possibilities of Jewish food education!

Go on a field trip

Getting out of the synagogue/community center and going to a different location automatically makes something more exciting. Taking a field trip to a local farm, or even a museum, is a great way to get people thinking more about the outside world and less about their computer screens, homework, and day-to-day tasks.

- **Go to a local farm or farmers' market.** This is a great way to see a sustainable food system in action, as well as munch on some yummy snacks.
- **Go to a food processings facility.** If there's a big factory in your city/town, find out if they offer tours. This can be a great way to see industrial food production first hand and learn about what is in your "backyard."
- **Go to a museum exhibit.** Visit a museum about local food history, farm workers, economic justice, or other food-related topics. See if you can arrange for a special guided tour for your group by one of the docents.

Invite a speaker

Bring in someone from your community (or outside your community) to teach about food justice issues, sustainability, or some other topic that you think your community members would find interesting. Sample topics include:

- **Sustainability.** Talk about ways to improve sustainability both at home and in the community.
- **Food justice issues.** Talk about the Farm Bill, ethical kosher meat, or hunger in your community.
- **A farmer's perspective.** Have a local farmer talk about the work that she/he does.

Host a *Beit Midrash* / Learning Series

Hosting a *beit midrash* (literally, "house of study" – in practice, a one-time or multi-week series of learning classes on a given topic) is a great way to get people talking about food, faith, and agriculture. Having a text in common is an excellent way to get a conversation going, while also having a framework around which to center the discussion. A number of organizations have assembled collections of texts on these topics, including Hazon's "Food For Thought: Sourcebook on Jews, Food & Contemporary Life." For a full list, see the Resources section in the Appendix.

Cook together!

Bringing people together for a cooking demonstration, or to cook a meal together, serves as a great opportunity to talk about the importance of using local /organic/sustainable ingredients, the benefits of cooking at home, and new, exciting ways to make old and familiar dishes.

- **Cooking demos.** Host one at your community CSA. Even if you don't belong to a CSA, cooking demos are great ways to showcase a new and interesting food. Bring in a chef from outside or just have someone in your community share one of their favorite recipes!
- **Potlucks.** Interact as a community in a fun way through a potluck. Have everyone bring a dish for a picnic/dinner and make sure to encourage people to share what ingredients they used/where they came from.
- **DIY Food Preservation.** Give people the skills to eat locally year-round by teaching pickling, canning, fermenting, and preserving!

Meet your Meat: Organizing an on-farm *shechita* (slaughter)

The do-it-yourself food movement is growing: people are braiding challah and making pickles in numbers not seen for at least three generations. Learning these new-old skills is a way to connect to older generations—and also a way to take back some control over the food we eat, which is increasingly grown, produced, and packaged behind closed doors or in places too far away for us to ever see. Learning about how Jewish tradition prescribes the transition from living animal to meat is a something that few people ever imagine to see, but more and more people are yearning for. “If I’m going to eat meat, I ought to be able to look the animal in the eye before it dies on my behalf,” said one participant at the chicken slaughter before the 2009 Hazon Food Conference.

This is a feeling shared by many, and an educational *shechita* actually gives people access to see the process— from the cut of the knife through the plucking of feathers and soaking and salting (part of the process of making kosher meat). Viewing an educational *shechita* can be a very powerful experience for participants.

For logistical reasons, we recommend organizing a poultry *shechita*, rather than a larger animal. Cows, lamb, and goats must have their lungs checked after slaughter, and there is a 30-70% chance that this will reveal that animal is unfit for kosher consumption. Even if the animal is kosher, only the front half is

used for kosher meat in the United States, so you will have at least half an animal (if not the whole thing) that will need to go to non-Jews. The infrastructure requirements for butchering a cow or lamb are very complex as well. For these reasons, we suggest you stick with chickens!

There are several organizations that can help you organize a chicken *shechita*:

- **Grow and Behold Foods** (New York area) www.growandbehold.com
- **Loko (“Local Kosher”)** (Boston area) www.lokomeat.com

Hazon may also be able to connect you with individuals in your area with some experience in this kind of project, who can help you. Contact foodguide@hazon.org for more information.

Slaughtering, plucking, eviscerating, and butchering a turkey is disgusting.

No, it’s not. It’s beautiful. If animal meat makes you squeamish, go see the Bodies exhibit or find yourself an illustrated anatomy book. Our lives depend on our intricate series of tubes and containers, a central distribution system, waste collection... the “*asher yatzar*” (bathroom blessing) comes to mind: if but one of these openings or hollows was closed where it should be open, or open where it should be closed, we could not function. Ditto with animals. Putting my hand inside the carcass of a dead turkey and pulling out the still-warm entrails was an AWE-some experience. Meat comes from a living animal, and if you can’t hear that – you shouldn’t eat meat.”

– Anna Hanau, after the turkey *shechting* at the 2008 Hazon Food Conference