

Many students have no idea where food comes from and how it is made

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A surprising number of Americans believe chocolate milk comes from brown cows. Photo from Pixabay.

The Innovation Center of U.S. Dairy did an online survey recently. It is a group that supports dairy farmers and companies that sell milk and dairy products. The survey asked the same questions to people all over the country. Their answers may surprise you. About 7 out of 100 American adults have the wrong idea about chocolate milk. They think it comes from brown cows.

That means 16.4 million people are wrong about chocolate milk. That is more people than the whole population of Pennsylvania state. And all of these people do not know that chocolate milk is milk, cocoa and sugar.

For many years, people who pay attention to agriculture, nutrition and education have been worried that people don't understand where food comes from. Agriculture is the science and work of farming. Nutrition is the science of how to eat the right kind of food in order to be healthy. Many Americans don't know where food is grown, or how it gets to stores. In the case of chocolate milk, they don't even know what's in it. This lack of knowledge might mean they don't eat in a healthy way.

The United States Department of Agriculture, or USDA, did a study in the early 1990s. They found that nearly 1 in 5 adults did not know that hamburgers are made from beef. Many more were not familiar with the basic facts about farming.

Kids Aren't Learning About Where Food Comes From

Experts in agricultural education do not think much has changed since the 1990s.

"At the end of the day, it's an exposure issue," said Cecily Upton. Upton is the co-founder of the nonprofit FoodCorps. The group brings agricultural and nutrition education into elementary schools. Upton says kids don't learn in school where food comes from before it gets to the store.

A team of researchers interviewed fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders at a school in a California city. More than half of those students didn't know pickles were cucumbers. They did not know that onions and lettuce were plants. About 4 in 10 students didn't know that hamburgers came from cows. And 3 in 10 didn't know that cheese is made from milk.

The kids remembered the names of vegetables and other raw foods. Most knew foods were grown on farms or in gardens. However, they did not know how those items became packaged foods.

But Orange Juice Isn't A Fruit!

Ann Vileisis says this lack of knowledge is not surprising. The writer and historian wrote a book called "Kitchen Literacy."

She says that as more Americans moved into cities in the mid-1800s, fewer people were involved in producing food. Even fewer people worked to make food as transportation and factories improved. These things made it easier to ship foods in different forms. It could be sent over great distances, too.

Today, many Americans only see their food as a product. It doesn't look much like the original animal or plant. The USDA says orange juice is the most popular "fruit" in America.

In the past 20 years, some people have been trying to reverse this trend. Agriculture and nutrition groups are working to get agricultural education back into classrooms.

Helping Kids Eat In A Healthier Way

FoodCorps worked with slightly more than 100,000 students this year. Groups like the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization and the American Farm Bureau Foundation are actively working with K-12 teachers across the country. They are helping them add nutrition, farm technology and agricultural economics to lessons in social studies, science and health.

Nutritionists and people who want to improve our food system say these basic lessons are important for kids. They can help them learn to eat in a more healthy way. This could help fight problems like heart disease and being unhealthily overweight.

"We still get kids who are surprised that a french fry comes from a potato, or that a pickle is a cucumber," Upton said. "... Knowledge is power. Without it, we can't make informed decisions."

Quiz

- 1 Which detail from the article helps explain WHY people do not know much about where their food comes from?
- (A) About 7 out of 100 American adults have the wrong idea about chocolate milk. They think it comes from brown cows.
 - (B) For many years, people who pay attention to agriculture, nutrition and education have been worried that people don't understand where food comes from.
 - (C) Ann Vileisis says this lack of knowledge is not surprising. The writer and historian wrote a book called "Kitchen Literacy."
 - (D) She says that as more Americans moved into cities in the mid-1800s, fewer people were involved in producing food.
- 2 Based on information in the article, which of the following statements is TRUE?
- (A) All of the teachers in the country have been teaching about agriculture and nutrition for some time.
 - (B) All of the people in the state of Pennsylvania got confused about where chocolate milk comes from.
 - (C) Many Americans see their food as a packaged product, and they do not know how it gets to stores.
 - (D) Many Americans did not know chocolate milk contained sugar, and they are upset that it is unhealthy.

3 Which two of the following are MAIN ideas of the article?

1. *The results of a survey showed that many students did not know what certain food products were made of.*
2. *Experts have formed groups to teach students lessons about agriculture, nutrition and healthy eating.*
3. *The USDA reported that Americans chose orange juice as the most popular "fruit."*
4. *Many students were surprised to find out that french fries come from potatoes and pickles come from cucumbers.*

- (A) 1 and 2
(B) 1 and 3
(C) 2 and 4
(D) 3 and 4

4 Read the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4].

For many years, people who pay attention to agriculture, nutrition and education have been worried that people don't understand where food comes from. Agriculture is the science and work of farming. Nutrition is the science of how to eat the right kind of food in order to be healthy. Many Americans don't know where food is grown, or how it gets to stores. In the case of chocolate milk, they don't even know what's in it. This lack of knowledge might mean they don't eat in a healthy way.

Which sentence BEST supports the MAIN idea of this paragraph?

- (A) Not knowing how to farm properly can lead to a shortage of nutritious food.
(B) Not knowing about agriculture and nutrition can have negative effects on people's health.
(C) Nutrition experts have been trying to teach people about healthy food, but people are still confused.
(D) Nutrition experts have been working with farmers to produce healthier food.