Choosing a Sustainable Salsa

Key Questions
How can we make sustainable decisions when purchasing foods or products given the limited information available?

Overview
During this lesson students will learn about how to best make sustainable decisions. They will use the Three Pillars of Sustainability as a guide to evaluate products based on criterion in each category. Students will work in groups to create graphics that will aide in making sustainable decisions.

Objectives
Students will be able to:
- Become familiar with trade-offs.
- Draw conclusions.
- Use information to make a balanced decision.
- Rationalize their decisions.
- Understand the perspectives of others.
- Develop criteria and data to quantify their decisions.
- Draw connections to their lives.
- Standardize criteria to evaluate their products.

Materials
Per student group
- Salsa Narratives
- Sustainability Evaluation Worksheets

Technology
- Computer and Projector
- Choosing Sustainability Slides

Teacher Preparation
Organize student materials. Select student groups. This lesson should follow “Choosing a Sustainable Grocery Bag” so that students are already familiar with the term sustainability, the Three Pillars of sustainability, and how to rate a product using a Sustainability Score and Triangle Graph.

Background Information
Sustainability is commonly defined as: “Meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Bruntland Report, 1987). In order to determine if something is sustainable, three elements must be considered: environment, society, and economy. These are known as the Three Pillars of Sustainability.

Environmental factors might be (but are not limited to): air quality, water quality, impact on biodiversity, wildlife preservation, nature conservation, carbon emissions, ecological footprint, soil degradation.

Society is affected by factors that include: diversity, equal opportunity, exploitation of labor, impact on people’s health and well-being, lifestyle
Vocabulary

Sustainability: "Meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations" (Bruntland Report, 1987).

Society: The community in which people live, work, and interact. This includes family, friends, neighbors, and so on.

Environment: The combination of external physical conditions that affect and influence the growth, development, behavior, and survival of organisms.

Economy: The wealth and resources of a country or region, especially in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services.

Trade-off: A balancing of factors all of which are not attainable at the same time.

Some economic factors are jobs, work environment, profitability, human hours, prospects for growth, efficiency in supply chain (is there a lot of waste?).

This lesson provides a narrative for each of three types of Salsa. The descriptions of the salsa brands were composed using web-site information and personal emails. In some instances, it is difficult to get full disclosure from the company concerning their practices; therefore, the descriptions for the brands may have gaps in the information. As a consumer, you have to make decisions based on the available knowledge, even if that knowledge is not complete. This lesson is a practice in conscious consumerism and the trade-offs associated with attempting to make the most sustainable decision.

Recommended Procedures

1. Engagement: This activity will focus students on the topic

Slide 2: Review the previous activity (Choosing a Sustainable Grocery Bag). Ask students to recall how they went about determining which bag was most sustainable.

Slide 3: Review the Three Pillars of Sustainability. Ask for examples of human needs that fall under each pillar.

Students should already be familiar with the idea that sustainability means being able to meet the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. They should already know that basic human needs relate to the Three Pillars of Sustainability: the Economy, Environment, and Society.

Slide 4: Review how to rate a product using the Sustainability Score, and how to create a Triangle Graph for each product. Remind students that the larger the triangle graph, the more sustainable the product is.

Slide 5: Review the term “Trade-off.” Students should understand that any choice we make includes some trade-off between factors that are important to sustainability.

For example, we might buy LED light bulbs which are more energy efficient and better for the environment, but these can be very costly. Or we might choose to ride a bicycle to school or work everyday. This reduces the fossil fuels we consume, but may make our commute much longer.

Ask students to think about what kinds of trade-offs might be involved in buying foods, like salsa.

2. Exploration: A student-led activity with guidance

Slide 6: Explain to the students that they will be using the Sustainability Score and Triangle Graph as a tool for making decisions. Split the class into 3 groups and give each group a different salsa brand to analyze (organic to one group, conventional to another and local to the third group). Pass out the corresponding handouts. These groups will be analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of their assigned salsa using the criterion on the student implications, and others.
The students are given three criterion for each sustainability category with which to rate their salsa.

Pass out the Sustainability Evaluation Worksheets to each salsa group. Within their salsa groups, the students will discuss the criteria and as a team rate each criteria for their salsa, recording their values on the worksheet.

After all criteria have been rated, average the rating for each category. These averages are the Sustainability Scores for the salsa.

Once a product has been given a Sustainability Score, these values will be charted on the Sustainability Triangle Graph (left, bottom). The Economy Sustainability score will be charted on the orange line, the Environment Sustainability score on the green line, and the Society Sustainability Score on the blue line.

3. Explanation: Students discuss their understanding of the concept
Slide 6: A representative from each group can share details about their salsa brand with the class, discuss why they scored their salsa as they did, and complete their Triangle Graph on the board.

Which one has the largest area? Which salsa is the most environmentally sustainable, economically sustainable, or socially sustainable?

Which salsa is most sustainable? Which salsa is least sustainable? Encourage students to support their ideas with evidence from the narratives.

4. Elaboration: Students apply the idea in a new context
Engage students in discussion about how the activity went. Did they get the results they expected? Have them think about how they can use the skills they learned here in their everyday lives. Ask them to give examples of times they may want to make a decision based on sustainability.

5. Evaluation: Students assess their knowledge, skills, abilities
Each student should complete the Exit Ticket for this activity. Review the exit tickets for student comprehension, and revisit and redirect as needed.

Extensions
If you want to further challenge your students with this lesson, you can have them create their own Sustainability criteria with which to rate a new product. When allowing the students to create their criteria, you can split them into the 3 E’s groups (for example: allow the Environmental group to agree upon environmental criteria that all the salsa groups are going to be using).

Additionally, students could create their own salsa brand. In creating their salsa, they need to think about how it can achieve 6’s in all three of the sustainability categories. Possible questions for the students to think about are: How is the salsa produced, where is it produced, with what products, by whom, what are the working conditions, what is the cost of the product, what is the profit margin, how is it going to be marketed?
Amy’s Salsa (Organic)

Company History
Amy’s Kitchen is a family business… with every member of the family taking part. The company was started in 1987, when Amy was born. Her mom and dad, Rachel and Andy Berliner, carefully nurtured the company as well as the child, paying constant attention to every aspect of its day-to-day activities.

We didn't set out to become the nation's leading natural frozen food brand. All we wanted to do was create a business that would allow us to earn a living by providing convenient and tasty natural vegetarian meals for people like ourselves, who appreciated good food, but were often too busy to cook "from scratch."

We started on a "shoestring," using our own house and barn as headquarters. The founding meetings were held in the same room where we were married and where our daughter Amy was born. This was in 1987, before the idea of "organic" food had become well known, and when there were very few frozen meals available for vegetarians to eat, either in health food stores or supermarkets. We were, however, very fortunate in being in the right place at the right time. The number of vegetarians had increased dramatically, as had consumer awareness of the harmful effects on their health and the environment of chemicals in the food supply.

Amy’s has created over 88 frozen meals. In 1999, we introduced a grocery line that now includes canned soups, beans and chili as well as jarred pasta sauces and salsas. Our foods are carried by natural food stores, supermarkets and some club stores in the United States, Canada and abroad.

Both Andy and Rachel like to keep in touch with the needs and interests of the company's more than 1,600 employees and with Amy’s customers. In spite of the fact that many companies now produce similar products, Amy’s is still #1 in popularity and sales. Our total commitment to quality has made the difference.

Production
At Amy’s we value the notion of creating communities. One of the ways we do this is with the farmers who grow our fruits and vegetables. We know most of our growers by name and have been working with some of them since our humble beginnings.

Amy’s is fortunate to be nestled into one of the world’s premier growing regions for many crops. Over fifty percent of our vegetables are grown within 200 miles of our “kitchen”. Our onions are sourced from 15 local organic growers. Most of these are family farms that have been with us for many years. The onions are delivered to Amy’s fresh, and a small group of people from our kitchen peels them by hand. Organic leeks are another crop that is grown by local family farmers, just a few miles to the west of Amy’s. Our produce managers will visit the farms throughout the growing season and discuss ideas for new crops and new ways of using fresh ingredients in our food. This is truly a “sustainable” approach to the community.
Salsa Timoteo (Local)

Company History
Timoteo was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona. All through high school and college, Timoteo worked in the restaurant business specializing in Mexican Food. After Graduating college and getting trabajo (work) in the medical field, Timtoeo still held on to his passion of cooking and started "Tim Willhite Foods" featuring "Salsa Timtoteo". Timoteo has always had a dream of opening up his own Mexican Food Restaurant some day so he can share his many recipes with the customers he serves.

Now living in Glendale, Arizona with his Senorita Julia, together they continue the family tradition of "Salsa Timoteo". Hopefully someday Timoteo and Julia will make enough Pesos to open up "Timoteo's" and their hijos (kids) will be able to carry on Timoteo's legacy.

Production
Prepared in Tempe, Arizona, Salsa Timoteo contains real tomatoes, fresh green chiles, onions, jalapenos, cilantro, and a multitude of spices that are a family secret. Salsa Timoteo contains no artificial colors, flavorings, or chemicals. The salsa is canned in the same way that grandma used to make salsa.

Salsa Timoteo is made by Timoteo and his wife Senorita Julia. They have no other employees so you can be sure that every jar is made with special care by the founders of this company. They do not have a separate production factory; the salsa is made in their home kitchen. When you buy the salsa, you are purchasing it from local Phoenicians, not from a company or factory (this could help funnel money back into the local economy). The label and graphics for the salsa jar were also made by a local Phoenician; a close friend of Timoteo.

Salsa Timoteo is shipped to retailers (grocery stores) in Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Tucson. Salsa Timoteo is AJ’s Fine Food’s best selling salsa! Due to their success, they have even diversified to tortilla chips. If you are not in the Phoenix area, you can order Salsa Timoteo online and they will ship it directly to you. When you buy the salsa, you are purchasing it from local Phoenicians, not from a company or factory (this could help funnel money back into the local economy). They also attend special events, where you can meet Timoteo and buy the salsa directly from him!

Salsa Timoteo is a truly local product. However, Salsa Timoteo is made from non-organic food products and therefore contributes to some environmental degradation associated with the use of petroleum-based chemicals. But because of the small, local scale of the product, Timoteo did not have to buy large processing equipment or build a factory to produce the salsa so that saves both land, materials, and energy. Additionally, the glass jars are made in the United States.
Pace Picante Salsa (conventional)

Company History
In 1947, a young Texan named David Pace had a passion for producing the freshest tasting picante sauce. Determined to create a product that lived up to his expectations, David experimented with ingredients and bottling techniques. The final product became Pace Picante Sauce. After WWII, David went into business creating the first commercially available picante sauce.

In 1990, Pace Foods sent 2,000 bottles of their Pace Picante Sauce to U.S. troops in the Saudi Arabian desert. "Many of the soldiers complain about their bland C-rations," said president Rod Sands. In 1991, Mexican sauces famously overtook ketchup as the top-selling condiment in the United States in total dollar sales, with Pace salsa and Picante sauce leading the trend.

For years, Pace and its major rival brand, Old El Paso, had legal battles over marketing and packaging. When David Pace died in 1993, his invention claimed a 27 percent share of the salsa market, with Old El Paso at 21 percent.

Kit Goldsbury, David Pace's former son-in-law, had bought out the Pace family's interest in the business and was its chief executive officer in November 1994. That's when Campbell, a company dating to 1869 with more than 44,000 employees, announced it would buy the Pace picante brand for $1.1 billion. Closure of the sale in 1995 gave Pace the soup company's marketing power and helped get the salsa to more stores on the East Coast. Pace reported $250 million in sales in 1996, up from $13 million in 1982.

In 1998, Campbell announced it would move production of the salsa from San Antonio, Texas to Paris, in East Texas, where it already had about 1,000 employees producing Prego spaghetti sauce and other products. About 370 local Pace workers were left without jobs, but given severance deals that included four weeks' pay, plus one week for each year with the company, the Express-News reported.

Currently, Americans consume nearly 170 million pounds of "Pace" salsas each year and one-quarter of U.S. households have a bottle of "Pace" picante sauce or chunky salsa in their homes.

Production
Today, Pace Foods still uses David's original recipe. Pace uses over 25 million jalapeños a year to make the Pace Picante Salsa. These jalapeños are produced across the Southern U.S. and Mexico. The jalapenos, tomatoes, onions, and other ingredients in Pace Salsa are grown using pesticides and synthetic fertilizers (both derived from petroleum products). Pace products are shipped throughout the globe.
Choosing a Sustainable Salsa

The Three Pillars of Sustainability are Economy, Environment, and Society

Economic factors might be (but are not limited to): jobs, work environment, profitability, human hours, prospects for growth, prospects for success into the future (long-term economic viability).

Environmental factors might be (but are not limited to): air quality, water quality, impact on biodiversity, wildlife preservation, nature conservation.

Societal factors might be (but are not limited to): diverse populations, equal opportunity, exploitation of labor, impact on people’s health and well-being, lifestyle implications.

Use the information provided in your salsa Narrative to evaluate the sustainability of your salsa brand.

Rate each variable on a scale of 0 to 6 as follows:
- 6 – Meets all of the criteria
- 5 – Meets nearly all of the criteria
- 4 – Meets most of the criteria
- 3 – Meets some of the criteria
- 2 – Meets few of the criteria
- 1 – Meets almost none of the criteria
- 0 – Meets absolutely none of the criteria

Calculate the average score of the four variables in each category, chart your Sustainability Score, and create a Triangle Graph.

| Economy |
|---|---|---|
| Criteria | Supporting Data | Score |
| The company is profitable. *For a 6, this company should be one of the best sellers in the market and has the potential to keep up its success.* | | |
| This company shares their monetary success with the employees. *For a 6, when this company is successful, all the farmers, manufacturers, laborers share in the benefits and profits of the success.* | | |
| This company’s economic success benefits the local community. Statistically speaking, less money from the sales of global businesses gets filtered back into the local economy. *For a 6, this company would have to buy ingredients locally, sell their product locally, and employ only local workers.* | | |
| Average Score | | |

[Group:]

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## Environment

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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Supporting Data</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carbon Neutrality: Examine transportation distances in order to infer carbon emissions. Greater transportation distances are likely to lead to greater carbon emissions. <em>For a 6, the company should be Carbon Neutral.</em></td>
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<td>No harmful effects on water quality. Examine the pesticide and chemical use involved in making this product in order to infer the impact on water quality. <em>For a 6, the company would not use any pesticides, chemicals, or synthetic fertilizers.</em></td>
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<td>Producing this salsa does not negatively impact land use. For this criteria, look at the waste stream. Land-fills require that natural/wildlife areas be transformed into a storage area for garbage. <em>For a 6, the packaging is composted (not land-filled) and there is minimal waste involved with the production.</em></td>
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Average Score

## Society

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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Supporting Data</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All the workers involved in producing this salsa are paid a living wage and have a comfortable work environment. <em>For a 6 rating, all the farmers, manufacturers, producers, suppliers are paid fairly for their work and are not exposed to harmful chemicals during work.</em></td>
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<td>This product is accessible to the consumer (not overly expensive) and does not negatively impact the health and well-being of the consumer. <em>For a 6, this product would be inexpensive, widely accessible, and healthy to eat (ie. Not high in fats and artificial ingredients).</em></td>
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<td>All the employees and laborers involved in making this salsa are seen as valued parts of this company and are in no way disposable and the community is seen as a valued part of the company. <em>For a 6, this company treats the employees as part of their family and is concerned and involved in the community at large.</em></td>
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Average Score
Your Salsa:

Triangle Graph

Sustainability Score

- Society: 3
- Environment: 3
- Economy: 3

Your Salsa:
Exit Ticket

Name:

1. Give an example of a trade-off you might encounter when choosing a sustainable salsa.

2. How would you encourage a local restaurant to use a more sustainable salsa?