CRITICAL FOOD LITERACY COMPETENCIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

What is Food Literacy?

Food literacy is a spectrum of food related knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enhance health and well-being. It is "a collection of inter-related knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare and eat foods to meet needs and determine food intake" as well as "the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities or nations to protect diet quality through change and support dietary resilience over time".*

Why do we need Food Literacy?

The ability of people to maintain health and well-being through food and nutrition has paradoxically become difficult in recent decades due to an increasingly complex food landscape.

* Vidgen HA, Gallegos D. Defining food literacy and its components. Appetite. 2014; 1(76):50-9.

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FOOD AND NUTRITION LITERACY

FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Confidence & Empowerment with Food

Have basic nutrition knowledge:

- Understanding food groups and portion sizes.
- Understanding the link between dietary choices and health.
- Understanding the role of nutrients in the body.
- Understanding the nutrition composition of different foods.
- Understanding energy balance.
- Understanding nutritional needs at different life stages.
- Understanding different eating "lifestyles" (e.g. vegetarianism).
- Understanding nutrition claims about food.
- Being able to use technology to find credible nutrition information.

Have food safety & hygiene knowledge:

- Understanding food safety risks associated with food storage and preparation.
- Understanding hygienic food handling practices.

Have food budgeting skills:

- Being able to develop a food budget.
- Being able to select healthy foods within a budget.

Be able to successfully navigate the grocery store to make healthy and economical food choices:

- Being able to compare food costs to make economical choices.
- Being able to compare foods to make healthy food choices (by interpreting food labels and packaging).
- Being able to stock a pantry with staple ingredients.

Have knowledge of where food comes from:

- Understanding food origins.
- Understanding seasonality of food.
- Understanding where to access food.
- Understanding the impact of food systems on the environment and local economy.

Have food preparation skills:

- Being able to prepare meals with basic ingredients.
- Being able to use basic kitchen equipment and tools.
- Being able to read/follow a recipe.
- Being able to plan for food/meals ahead of time.
  - Being able to cook with and for others.
    - Being able to use technology to find appropriate recipes.

Have a healthy food relationship:

- Having positive attitudes around food and eating.
- Understanding the relationship between body weight and health (e.g. body weight does not equal health).
- Having healthy body image and self-esteem.
- Understanding that all foods can have a positive role in our diets.

Be able to think critically about and act on food and nutrition issues:

- Being able to advocate for the availability of healthy foods in the community.
- Understanding food and weight loss/supplement industry interests and marketing strategies.
- Understanding media reports on food and nutrition.

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RELATIONAL COMPETENCIES

Joy & Meaning through Food

Have a positive relationship with food:

- Enjoying food and eating.
- Making food choices that promote well-being.
- Engaging in mindful eating practices.
- Preparing food in a fun and enjoyable way.
- Enjoying preparing new and diverse foods.

Enjoy cultural foods:

- Passing on family food traditions through celebrations, cultural foods, and family recipes.
- Appreciating foods from different cultures.
- Being able to access foods particular to one's culture.

Value local food systems:

- Appreciating the role of local foods for community well-being.

Experience new and varied foods:

- Being open to eating new and diverse foods.
- Enjoying cooking new and diverse foods.

Recognize the importance of preparing and eating food with/for others:

- Valuing sharing food with others.
- Valuing everyday family meals.
- Valuing preparing food together.
- Valuing preparing food for others.

SYSTEMS COMPETENCIES

Equity & Sustainability for Food Systems

Understand aspects of environmentally sustainable food systems:

- Being able to think critically about the link between food origins and sustainability.
- Understanding how food systems can be more sustainable and equitable.
- Understanding the impact of food production on the environment.
- Understanding the impact of food waste.
- Choosing and preparing foods to support sustainable eating.
- Understanding food production and distribution systems (farming, fishing, harvesting, shipping, processing, marketing and distribution).

Understand social justice issues in the food system:

- Understanding food security issues at individual, community, and global levels.
- Understanding ethical issues in food production.
- Recognizing farming as a career option.
- Understanding social justice implications of food choices.

Understand the influence of food corporations and lobbying interests:

- Being able to think critically about the influence of food corporations, lobby groups, and media on food choices.

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Slater, J. et al. "Food Literacy Competencies: A Conceptual Framework for Youth Transitioning to Adulthood." International Journal of Consumer Studies 42.5 (2018): 547–556.

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