

# FROM FARM TO FORK

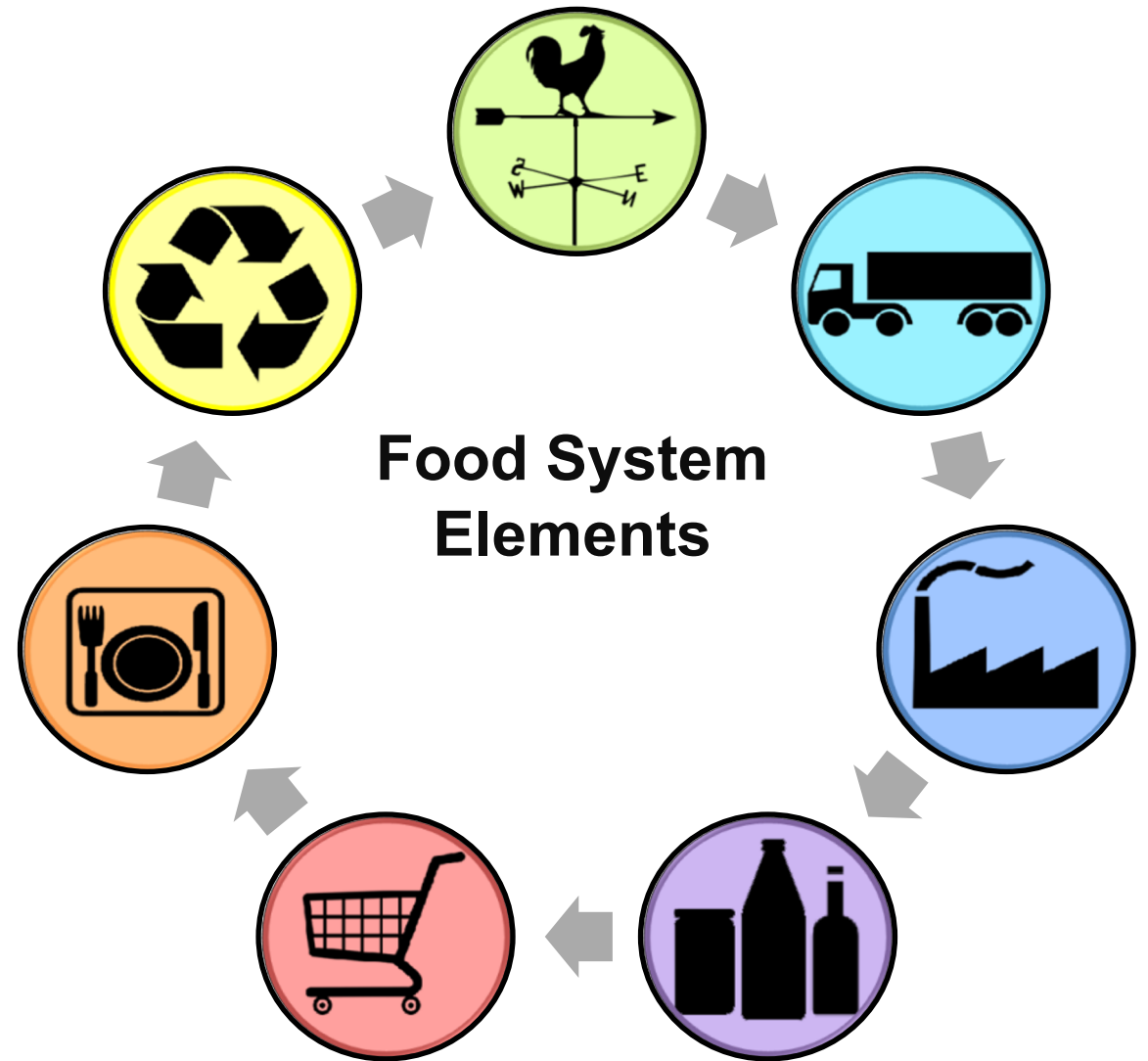
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The Sweetpotato  
Food System



# FOOD AS A SYSTEM

- Food Production
- Distribution & Aggregation
- Food Processing
- Marketing
- Purchasing
- Preparation & Consumption
- Resource & Waste Recovery



Adapted by Christy Shi, from Cornell University, *Discovering the Food System; A Primer on Community Food Systems: Linking Food, Nutrition and Agriculture.*



## FOOD PRODUCTION: FARMS THAT GROW SWEETPOTATOES

- North Carolina is the #1 producer of sweetpotatoes in the world!
- Approximately 50% of all the sweetpotatoes grown in the US are from NC. We have many varieties, grown mostly in the eastern plains
- Sweetpotatoes are a tropical, long-season root vegetable that needs long, hot summers and at least 90-120 frost-free days
- The sweetpotato growing season is from May to October

# CURING SWEETPOTATOES

After sweetpotatoes are harvested, most are cured. Curing converts some starch to sugar (making it even sweeter!) and increases the storage life of the sweetpotato.





## DISTRIBUTION & AGGREGATION

- Distribution involves the transport of sweetpotatoes from the farm directly to market OR for further processing
- Most large NC sweetpotato producers also pack and ship their own product, even distributing to international markets like Europe!
- Packers purchase sweetpotatoes from several small farms, sometimes growing their own, in order to fill the needs of their customers.
- Small farmers without packing lines sell their sweetpotatoes to packers, who aggregate from multiple farms for distribution.

# FOOD PROCESSING

- Food processing involves turning the sweetpotato in its raw form into the thousands of different sweetpotato products that are available today!



## Examples:

- Cooked & pureed sweetpotatoes may be turned into baby food, canned puree, or further processed into pie filling
- Sweetpotatoes may be cubed and packaged into microwave steamer bags, sometimes with seasonings included
- Finely milled and dehydrated sweetpotatoes added to other dry ingredients to make sweetpotato pancake mix, quick bread mix, etc.
- Thinly sliced and deep-fried sweetpotatoes become sweetpotato chips
- Sweetpotatoes sliced into fries and frozen, then packaged into bags

# MARKETING



- Involves branding, packaging, and advertising
  - Do fruit and vegetable products have the same marketing as fast foods or other grocery items?
- North Carolina SweetPotato Commission supports growers through promotional activities and educational endeavors
- Got to Be NC: regional branding from the NC Dept. of Agriculture
- Producers/packers of sweetpotatoes often have their own branding or logos
- Food processors have their own branding, marketing, and advertising programs

# PURCHASING

- Sweetpotatoes may be purchased by consumers at grocery stores or farmers' markets
  - There are over 300 farmers' markets in North Carolina!
- Restaurants and institutional food service companies like schools and hospitals may also purchase sweetpotatoes to serve to customers
  - The North Carolina Farm to School program supplies school cafeterias with locally grown NC produce







## PREPARATION & CONSUMPTION

- After purchasing, consumers can prepare and enjoy countless recipes using the healthy and delicious sweetpotato!
- What influences consumers to choose sweetpotatoes?
  - Nutrition
  - Taste
  - Culture
  - Convenience

Did you know...  
Many other cuisines around the world feature the leaves and flowers of the sweetpotato plant?



# RESOURCE & WASTE RECOVERY

What happens to the wasted sweetpotatoes produced in other parts of the system?

- **Production:**
  - too small: “Petites” now sold in stores due to consumer demand
  - too large: used for processed, canned, French fried, dehydrated, or pureed products
  - misshapen, discolored or damaged sweetpotatoes: used to feed livestock
- **Processing:** scraps from cutting sweetpotatoes into smaller pieces
- **Purchasing:** unsold sweetpotatoes in grocery stores & markets
- **Preparation & Consumption:** uneaten leftovers

# WAYS TO USE SWEETPOTATO WASTE

- **GLEANNING:** volunteer groups harvest the rejected sweetpotatoes to prevent waste
- These gleaned sweetpotatoes may be donated to food banks or pantries
- Gleaned sweetpotatoes have not been cured



- Grocery stores may also choose to donate excess sweetpotato products
- At home, you can compost sweetpotato waste!