

Have you ever wondered where your food comes from, and how long it might take to reach you? This is an article from the newspaper First News about food miles.

# What are food miles?

**Have you ever thought where your food comes from? The cupboards in the kitchen maybe? Or your local supermarket? In this special report, we take a closer look at our everyday groceries to find out exactly where they are grown. You might be surprised at just how far they travel!**

## ***Food miles explained***

The idea of food miles is really simple – the clue is in the name! Food miles refer to the distance that our food has travelled to get from the place where it was grown, to landing on our plates in the UK. Although this might sound like an easy thing to calculate, it's actually rather tricky.

Food passes from the farmer to a processor, distributor and retailer, and often makes multiple journeys back and forth between these different people. Our food travels more than we ever could; sometimes a product might make a round-the-world expedition before it arrives in our freezers! We consume faraway foods from a wide variety of places on a daily basis, racking up an incredible number of food miles every year. For example, bananas take 4,560 miles (7,340km) to get from Jamaica to London, and prawns can travel a mighty 7,306 miles (11,760 km) from Indonesia!

## ***Why are food miles important?***

Food miles are a useful way to judge how much impact we have on the environment. Food and packaging is transported in lorries, boats and aeroplanes. These forms of transport run on fossil fuels, like petrol and diesel. When these fuels are burned, they release gases that contribute to global climate change. Transporting food around the UK represents nearly 25% of all journeys made by lorries, which also run on fossil fuels.

## ***Why do we import foods from abroad?***

While it's easy to suggest that we should always buy foods that are grown or raised locally, sometimes it's just not that simple. An important study carried

out by DEFRA, the Government department in charge of food and farming, claims that it is more environmentally friendly to grow and transport tomatoes from Spain than it is to produce them locally in the UK. That's because it needs a lot of electricity to heat up greenhouses in milder British weather. In other cases, buying certain foods from poorer countries will create lots of food miles but might help develop the economy of those countries. That's not to say that we should stop trying to be responsible shoppers. Food miles force us to question where our food actually comes from, so we might make better choices when we visit the shops.

## ***What can you do to help?***

Eating fresh fruit and vegetables that are not covered in packaging – which adds an often unnecessary stage to food production – is an important step. Farmers' markets sell food when it is in season, so it does not need to be imported from warmer countries – so it's a good idea to shop at these markets. Or visit a local farm or garden centre that allows you to pick your own for a small price when their crops are in season.

The best way to reduce your food miles impact is to grow some of your fruit and vegetables yourself. Be your own farmer! Maybe your parents have a spare area in the garden that they might let you turn into a vegetable patch? Or perhaps you have an allotment or a collective growing space at your school? Think seasonally and sow seeds in advance so they're ready for picking in the right months.

***Before chewing down on your next meal, have a think about what exciting places your food might have come from!***

# WHAT ARE FOOD MILES?

Name: ..... Class: ..... Date: .....

Look at the section headed "**Food miles explained**".

**1** What definition of "*food miles*" does the writer give us?  
.....  
.....

**2** According to the writer, working out food miles can be complicated. Why?  
.....  
.....

**3** The writer describes a number of steps that take place between farmer and shopper. The first and last steps are given below – fill in the steps in between.

Steps	People
1	farmer
2	
3	
4	
5	shopper

Look at the section headed "**Why do we import food from abroad?**"

**4** a) What are the **two** main reasons given for importing food?  
.....  
.....

b) Can you think of any other reasons why we might choose to import food from abroad?  
.....  
.....

**5** The writer uses the term "*responsible shopper*". What do you think is the difference between an ordinary shopper and a responsible shopper?  
.....  
.....

Look at the section “**Why are food miles important?**”

- 6** According to the writer, food is transported by land, sea and air.  
**a)** What fuels are used in the process?

.....

- b)** How does this damage the environment?

.....

- 7** What percentage of lorry journeys in the UK are used to carry food?

.....

Look at the section “**What can you do to help?**”

- 8** The writer lists **four** things that we can do to reduce food miles. List them in the box below.

	What can we do to help?
1	
2	
3	
4	

- 9** Overall, what would you say is the writer’s main purpose in this article? Tick **one** and give reasons for your choice.

to inform

to instruct

to explain

to persuade

I think this because .....

.....

- 10** Look at the introductory paragraph.  
 What does the writer set out to do, and how successful are they at doing this?

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