

Agriculture in the Midwest



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Grade Levels: 3-5

Purpose:

This lesson will give students a close-up view of how agriculture is practiced in Illinois and the Midwest; Agriculture makes up a large part of the region's economy and way of life. This lesson plan is designed to fit well in a unit devoted to the economy and culture of the United States. By listening to first-hand accounts from farmers, students will be able to gain a better understanding of what farming is like in Illinois, and how it has changed in the last 100 years.

Objectives: Upon completing the activities presented in this Resource Guide, students will:

- Understand the importance of farming to the Illinois economy
- Explain what a farmer does in general terms, as well as;
- Identify several specific things that farmers grow or raise.

Materials:

Internet access, audio equipment for listening to and watching interview clips, projector or printed copies of photos.

Illinois State Learning Standards:

Early Elementary School

SS.17.C.1a: Identify ways people depend on and interact with the physical environment (e.g., farming, fishing, hydroelectric power).

SS.17.C.1b: Identify opportunities and constraints of the physical environment.

Late Elementary School

SS.15.A.2a: Explain how economic systems decide what goods and services are produced, how they are produced and who consumes them

SS.17.C.2b: Describe the relationships among location of resources, population distribution and economic activities (e.g., transportation, trade, communications).

SS.17.D.2b: Identify different settlement patterns in Illinois and the United States and relate them to physical features and resources.



3rd grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 3 topic or subject area*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.9

Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.

4th Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 4 topic or subject area*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.9

Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

5th Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 5 topic or subject area*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6

Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.



Background Information:

The Oral History Program at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library has interviewed scores of people who work in agricultural fields as part of its *Agriculture in Illinois* project. The interviewees featured here grew up on a family farm. They touch on the themes of rural communities - education, business, technology, the future, and the relationship between the government and agriculture. Because agriculture continues to be a very important part of the economy and culture of Illinois, learning about farming techniques, traditions, and innovations is key to understanding Illinois's history and current events.

Activity:

The question students will be considering while listening to the Oral History excerpts is “**How has farming changed in the past 100 years?**” As an opener, have a snack that comes from Illinois farms (something with soy, or local produce, etc.) and talk about where the food comes from.

Refer to one of the websites listed in the additional resources section below to give the students a factual overview of farming in Illinois. Once a foundation is established, have the students create (either as a class or individually) a diagram or thought web of what kinds of things they think of when they hear the word “Farming.” Once students have explored what farming is on their own, have them listen to the excerpts below and add to their thought web as they listen, adding at least one word or phrase from each interview. Refer to the discussion questions to encourage students’ thought. Then, as a class, work together to break the thought webs into two: one for farming now, and one for farming then.

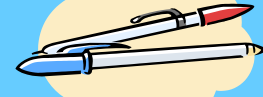
Assessment: At the end of the class, have the students write a paragraph about the lesson, including answers to some of the discussion questions below, and using evidence from the interviews they listened to. Have them use their thought web as a reference.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is farming important in Illinois?
2. What is life on a farm like?
3. What are some of the jobs or chores that farmers have to do?
4. What kinds of things are grown on an Illinois farm?
5. What kind of animals do farmers have?
6. Do you know anyone who lives/works on a farm?
7. How has farming changed in the past 100 years?

Additional Resources:

- Background information on farming in Illinois: <http://www.agr.state.il.us/about/agfacts.html>
- FAQs on Illinois farming: <http://www.watchusgrow.org/faq>
- Illinois farming fact sheet: <http://www.agclassroom.org/kids/stats/illinois.pdf>



Tips and Suggestions:

- Visit the additional resources websites for valuable background information about the importance of farming in Illinois.
- Pause for a minute in between interviews to allow students to record their thoughts.
- As part of a larger unit on the economies of different regions of the United States, assign these interviews to a group of students to research the Midwest.
- Accompany this lesson with a trip to a local farm, farmer’s market, or have a local farmer visit the classroom to talk about his or her experience.



Vocabulary Words:

- Agriculture
- Livestock
- Silage
- Heifer
- Sow
- Stanchions
- Dairy
- Harvest
- Crops
- Silo

Interviews:

Matthew Hughes:

Matthew (Matt) grew up on the family farm during the 1960s and 70s. In this excerpt he talks about the chores he did compared to the chores his son does now.



Matthew, aged 4, with his little sister Ann in front of their new tractor.

Interview:

[Growing Up \(2:51\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About growing up on the farm in the 60s-70s.

[Chores Today \(1:18\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About the difference between farm chores then and now.

Orion Samuelson

Orion Samuelson grew up on the family's dairy farm in the 1940s. In these clips, the WGN Agribusiness Director, talks about life on the farm in the 1940s-1950s, and the introduction of electricity to the family farm.



Orion as a toddler with his father riding a horse.

Interview:

[Farm Life \(3:43\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About growing up on a farm in the 40s-50s

[REA \(2:34\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About the introduction of electricity to his family farm.

[GPS \(4:17\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About the impact of GPS on farming.

Doug Parrett

Doug F. Parrett grew up on his father's farm in rural Champaign County near Mahomet. In the 50s-60s. In these excerpts, he talks about his chores growing up and the innovation of animal tracking.



Doug Parrett showing his champion Hereford steer at the Champaign County fair in 1969.

Interview:

[Growing Up \(0:58\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About growing up on a farm in the 50s-60s.

[Tracking Animals \(5:40\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About innovations in feeding and tracking animals at ISU.

Charles Hartke

Charles 'Chuck' Hartke grew up on the Hartke family farm in rural Teutopolis, Illinois in the 1940s-50s. Chuck grew up in a large family with five sisters and four brothers.



Chuck in the farrowing barn.

Interview:

[Feeders \(2:48\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About innovation of stainless steel pig feeders.

[Disease Tracking \(2:31\)](#)

Transcript: [Click Here](#)

About the importance of tracking the movement of animals and plants to root out harmful disease.