

Making Sense of Wisconsin Agriculture

Diverse Specialty Crop Production in Wisconsin

Wisconsin farmers are known for their wide range of food production, and they cultivate over 7,000 specialty crops used for food, medicine, and landscaping. Crops grown across the state vary based on the unique geography, soil, and water of each region. In the presentation, "Expedition Wisconsin Agriculture with Alice in Dairyland," you were introduced to some of Wisconsin's specialty crops.



Map Image courtesy the Wisconsin State Historical Society.



Snap Beans



Sweet Corn



Peas



Carrots



Cranberries



Blueberries



Tart Cherries

One of these crops was NOT part of our expedition. Circle the specialty crop that was not in the presentation.

Whether you purchase them at a grocery store or grow them in your backyard, we often do not consume freshly picked produce. Have you ever considered why your favorite foods look different when they are sold in stores compared to when they are harvested straight from the farm?

Understanding Food Processing: From Farm to Table

Most foods that are not freshly picked have been processed. Food processing is a crucial part of the journey from field to table, often involving the transformation of food from its natural state.

Food processing can be as simple as washing and cutting produce to as complex as using advanced techniques such as fermentation, preservation, and irradiation. These techniques are used to enhance texture, flavor, and nutritional value, and to ensure food safety.

Preservation techniques such as canning, freezing, and drying are used to extend the shelf life of foods like fruits, vegetables, and meats. Irradiation is a process that uses radiation to kill bacteria and other pathogens, making food safer to eat.

While food processing has its benefits, it also has its downsides. Highly processed foods often contain added sugars, salt, and unhealthy fats, which can contribute to health problems like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. It's important to strike a balance between convenience and nutrition when making food choices.

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Using our senses to understand Farm to Table with Wisconsin specialty crops.

Delve into the unique tastes and textures of seven of Wisconsin's specialty crops with this sensory exploration. Follow these simple steps:

1. Clean your hands thoroughly before beginning.
2. Collect samples of each food item and obtain a copy of the Sensory Recording Sheet from your instructor.
3. Record the name of each sample on the Sensory Recording Sheet.
4. Examine and sketch each sample. Compare it to the picture of the crop on the previous page. What differences do you observe? What could have caused these changes?
5. Assess the texture and scent of each sample as you touch and smell it.
6. Take a bite and slowly chew the sample, noting any flavors or aftertastes. Record your observations.
7. Listen to the sound made when biting into the food. Is it crispy or soft? Does it make any sound?
8. After completing the observation and tasting, rate each sample on a scale of one to five stars – one being the lowest and five being the highest. Record your score.
9. Once you've completed the taste test, review your notes and select your favorite sample. Record your choice at the bottom of the Sensory Tasting Sheet.
10. Clean up your work space and dispose of any remaining samples.

Lastly, reflect on your favorite specialty crop that you observed in this activity. What sets it apart from other crops and makes it special to Wisconsin? Write a statement about your favorite specialty crop, including how you think your favorite sample was processed.
