

FACTORS THAT IMPACT FOOD CHOICES

While everyone has food and eating in common, we also know that everyone eats different foods and that there are multiple cultural, economic, environmental, and practical reasons for doing so.

For **every person**, food choices are determined by:

- **Availability and Economics** include both the price of food and access to it. People with more money often have more choices than people with less because they can spend more money if they want something, and they can often drive different places to get it.
- **Traditions** include cultural and religious reasons for eating, or not eating, certain foods (e.g., Muslims not eating pork)
- **Exposure** describes familiarity with food.
- **Living arrangements.** Small and large families may have different meal definitions and times for eating. For example, a large family might have set meal times more often than a person living alone.
- **Preparation.** Preferences in preparation techniques determine whether certain foods are eaten or not. For example, things like whether vegetables should be cooked until they're soft or served slightly crisp.

For **some people**, food choices are determined by:

- **Environmental concerns.** Some people are concerned about the impact different farming practices have on the earth
- **Health/nutrition.** If a person feel strongly that they should only eat “healthy” foods that impacts what they are willing to consume.
- **Food politics.** Some people have strong beliefs about what food comes from, how it is grown, etc.
- **Level of acculturation.** If a recent immigrant has family that has been here for some time, they may be introduced to new foods more quickly than if they did not.
- **Comfort with shopping.** People just arriving in a community may only shop at ethnic markets because of their comfort level.
- **Family ties.** Family members nearby that have lived in this culture for a time may offer help in the acculturation process

These factors help shape the role certain foods take in a culture – whether a food is enjoyed as a staple, during times of celebration, for comfort, or is associated with status. Ask your participants how they feel about various foods and how they use them at home. Use these discussions as a way to choose recipes that are relevant in their lives.