



Illinois EPA and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Introduce New Curriculum Unit for Fifth-Sixth Grade Educators

August 5 2020 1:20 PM

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Director John J. Kim announced that the Agency has again partnered with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Office for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education (MSTE) to create a new science curriculum unit for fifth and sixth grade educators: *Where Does My Food Go?* The unit helps students to explore the everyday occurrence of food waste and guides them through the process of what happens to food that is thrown away. Students then explore the environmental and social issues of food waste and what better solutions can be implemented. The entire curriculum is free and available online to teachers and parents at <https://pathways.mste.illinois.edu/>.

"We have been fortunate to partner, once again, with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office of Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education to bring another installment of our Environmental Pathways curriculum," said Director Kim. "This in-classroom/at-home unit provides students with a valuable lesson on the very real issue of food waste and its impacts, both socially and environmentally. We look forward to fifth and sixth grade educators and parents introducing this STEM curriculum to students in the coming school year."

Where Does My Food Go? will help students investigate food waste in the school cafeteria and its greater environmental impact. It follows a storyline model that is driven by student questions. The unit is aligned to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for formal classroom use. It is also suitable for informal use. The new curriculum includes take home activities that can be used as a standalone lessons for at-home learning, including a contest for families and a printable matching game: <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/Pages/Environmental-Education-Materials.aspx>.

“My fifth graders were lucky to have participated in the food waste unit and I feel their knowledge and compassion about the food waste problem was taken to heart. The lessons and expectations were very clear and aligned well with the standards,” said Lisa Schweska, science and social studies teacher at Sandburg Elementary School in Springfield, IL. “The students were excited and thoughtful as we prepared to share our information with family and other students. The most important lesson learned was about how one person can make a difference in our world. This project really encouraged both classes of fifth graders to think through solutions to the problems - and we had quite a few great ideas. I think the number one activity (after the waste audit) was the waste sorting activity.”

This is the second unit that has been developed through a partnership with the Agency and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The first unit, *Why is the Pond Green?*, focuses on surface water and algae. The new curricula are an update to the Agency’s existing curriculum *Environmental Pathways: Youth Investigating Pollution Issues in Illinois*.

More information about Illinois EPA’s Environmental Education outreach may be found at <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/Pages/default.aspx>