

## ***Activity:* Agriculture—The Center of an Economic Web**

### ***Activity Level:* Advanced**

Source: Adapted from Virginia Ag in the Classroom: [www.agintheclass.org](http://www.agintheclass.org)

#### **Purpose**

Understand the interdependence of producers and consumers.

#### **Example Topics It Supplements**

General economic principles/relationships; roles within the economic system

#### **Activity Snapshot**

1. Organize and Prepare Supplies
2. Read Background Information
3. Interest Approach
4. Conduct Activity  
Students take on a role of part of an economic system (producer, marketing, consumer, etc.). Information about their role is included on a web tag they wear around their neck. Students stand in a circle and toss a ball of yarn to a person who has a role they depend upon, creating a web within the circle.
5. Ask follow up questions and make the connection to agriculture.
  - What are the connections between producers and consumers?
  - How does the web show us the importance of the connections?
  - What can we conclude about the importance of everyone in our economy?
  - What can we share with others about what we learned today?

#### **State Standards It Supports**

SS 4.2.1—Students will recognize prices are what consumers pay when they buy a good or service.  
SS 4.2.12—Students will recognize and explain specialization and why different regions produce different goods and services.

#### **Materials**

- Interdependency Web Tags, hung on string/yarn to wear around neck—1 per student (*Each Interdependency Web Tag has an icon of a role in the economic system and description on the front. When printing, fold paper in half and description of other roles will be on back. Staple or tape to secure. Secure string/yarn to each corner so tag can hang around students' necks. Optional: laminate cards*)
- Ball(s) of yarn—1 per group

#### **What's the Connection to Agriculture?**

The food we eat and products we use and wear are grown on farms and go through a process of production, processing, distribution, and consumption. There is an interdependency between each one—they work together and depend on each other. We have the things we need and want because we depend on others and others depend on us. This makes everyone in our economy important. Students will make a difference in the future of our economy based on career choices they make and the goods and services they value.

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**PROCEDURES:**

1. Organize and Prepare Supplies  
See “Materials” on cover page.

2. Background Information

Most students believe that food they eat and clothes they wear are made and bought at the grocery store, supermarket, department store, etc. They are not aware of the fact that foods and products grow on farms and go through a process of production, processing, distribution, and consumption. It is important to explain to your students what these steps mean and the time that goes into them.

*Production* is the growing of food or product. For example, growing cattle for the production of meat. There is often some specialization at this level; a farmer or producer usually focuses on a few goods they produce—they don’t try and produce every food or product. Farmers are experts in what they produce. Factors include geography, climate, facilities, markets, etc.

*Processing* is the step beef goes through when it is processed into meat cuts, products, and by-products.

*Distribution* is when meat and by products arrive at the stores and markets to be purchased.

*Consumption* is when consumers come to the store and buy the food or products they want. It is important to explain to students how the process that goods go through can be seen as a cycle because the consumers buy the products so that producers can continue to grow them. The farmer cannot afford to grow beef cattle if the consumer doesn’t buy hamburger, etc. The consumer cannot get a steak if the farmer doesn’t produce the beef. The farmer cannot sell his cattle to the processing plant if distribution trucks do not do their job of processing and transporting the meat products.

3. Interest Approach

Have students brainstorm all the places they get the goods and services that they need and want. Record on writing surface. *Expected responses: grocery store, convenience store, mall, online, etc.*

- a) Pose the question: “How do these goods and services get to the stores we shop at?”
- b) Discuss how producers usually focus on the production of a few goods. Connect the concept of being an expert in products with the term “specialization”.
- c) Pose the question: “Is a farmer able to do everything needed to make his beef cattle into what the consumer wants to buy at the store?” *Expected response: no, farmer has to rely on processing plants, distribution via trucks, etc. to get product into stores.*

4. Conduct Activity

- a) Have students stand in a large circle. Explain they will be taking on a role within beef production in Nebraska. *Note: can do multiple groups depending on class size, or have multiple roles in one large group.*
- b) Distribute the Interdependency Web Tags to the students and have them read over the card independently.
- c) Explain that one person will receive a ball of yarn. Their job will be to hold onto a piece of the yarn and then toss the ball of yarn to someone else in the group that they depend on to

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be successful at their job. They identify those people who help by reading the back of their tag. As the student tosses the yarn, he/she should tell one reason why the role is dependent. (i.e. Producer tosses to Distributor and says something like, “Carries the goods from producer (me) to processor”) Give the ball of yarn to one student and let the process begin.

- d) Once everyone has received and tossed the yarn, discuss how producers and consumers and everyone in between depend on each other for things needed and wanted. The web created demonstrates how we are all connected. This can best be described as interdependency.
- e) Pose the question: “What would happen if one of the people in our circle no longer existed?”
- f) Instruct students that those representing the producers should drop their yarn. Have students observe what happens to the web. Then have another group of students drop their yarn and observe what happens.

5. Ask Follow-Up Questions and Make the Connection to Agriculture

- What are the connections between producers and consumers?  
*Many steps and people involved—from producer, beef is taken to processing (by distributor), then it needs to be marketed, and distributor also must take it to the supermarket for the consumer to purchase.*
- How does the web show us the importance of connections?  
*Physically shows the connection between all the steps in beef production to the consumer. When one component (i.e. marketing, distribution, etc.) is missing, there is a breakdown in getting beef to the consumer.*
- Based on what we have seen in this activity, what can we conclude about the importance of everyone in our economy?  
*Everyone has an important role and depend on one another to produce, distribute, and market agricultural products to consumers.*
- What can we share with others about what we learned today?  
*The food we eat and products we use and wear are grown on farms and go through a process of production, processing, distribution, and consumption. There is an interdependency between each one—they work together and depend on each other. We have the things we need and want because we depend on others and others depend on us. This makes everyone in our economy important. Students will make a difference in the future of our economy based on the career choices they make and the goods and services they value.*

# PRODUCER



**Producers are the foundation of almost every industry. Producers make, raise, or grow the good we rely on in our everyday lives. Producers have a very important role in the future of our lives and our economy.**

**Stores** and markets are where the goods that the producer raises and grows are sold to the

wants or needs.

**Producers** make decisions about the goods they raise or grow based on what the consumer, in other words,

**Consumers** drive the decisions that producers make about their goods.

The **marketing** industry creates advertisements for the goods raised or grown by the producer. This helps the producer's goods sell.

to the stores and markets.

**Distributors** carry the goods from the producer to the processor and then from the processor

**Producers** send their goods to **processors** who make sure that the goods are packaged appropriately, preserved, and at their freshest for the consumer.

# STORE/MARKET



**Stores are where we get the goods we want and need. Consumers rely on stores and markets to provide them with the freshest product at a location that is convenient.**

What would stores do without **producers**? Stores/markets rely on producers to provide them with the goods to sell to the consumer. Likewise, producers rely on stores to sell their goods to the consumer.

**Processors** provide stores and markets with goods that are fresh and ready for the consumer. **Distributors** deliver the goods that stores need to sell from their shelves and counters.

**Consumers** are grateful for stores. Without stores conveniently located where consumers can quickly and easily shop for items, the consumer would have to do a lot more work to get the goods they need and want. Likewise, stores and markets are grateful for consumers. Consumers are the ones who buy the products and keep a store in business.

The **marketing** industry helps stores advertise the products they are selling to the consumer. With attractive marketing, consumers are drawn to purchase products from certain stores.

# COMMODITY WHOLESALER



**Commodity wholesalers often sell agricultural commodities in bulk to the processor. It is the link between producer and processor. Grain elevators are an example of a commodity wholesaler.**

**Consumers** get their final products because wholesalers can move large amounts of commodities to processors. Wholesalers are great at logistics!

**Distribution** happens when wholesalers sell contracts of grain and other commodities to processors.

**Producers** are linked to the processor via wholesalers. The wholesaler buys contracts of grain or commodities from the producer and sells it to processors.

**Processors** buy contracts and commodities from wholesalers. By cleaning, packaging, and preserving goods, processors provide products that can be marketed and sold.

**Stores** rely on wholesalers to bring commodities to market.

# MARKETING



**Marketing agencies spend a great deal of time coming up with creative ways to tell consumers about products. The marketing industry can help or hurt the sale of a certain good or service.**

**Stores** and markets definitely depend on the marketing industry to make their store a success! By promoting the goods that are sold in a store, more consumers will shop in the store.

product.

**Processors** help create a product that is easy to market. By cleaning, packaging, and preserving goods, processors provide marketing agencies with many ways to sell the consumer on a

**Producers** rely on the marketing industry to make their goods appealing to the consumer. The more a good is marketed, the more it will sell and earn the producer money.

**Distribution** vehicles can sometimes be used for advertising.

**Consumers** trust marketing agencies to provide them with information about goods and services that will help them make informed economic choices.

# CONSUMER



**Consumers are an important part of our economy. Consumers buy the goods and services that producers make or grow. Based on the wants and needs of the consumer, important decisions are made about how goods are produced, processed, and sold.**

**Producers** rely on the consumer to buy the goods they raise or grow. It is the consumer that determines how a producer grows the goods they produce.

**Distributors** bring goods to the consumer so they don't have to travel far and wide to get the goods they need and want.

The **marketing** industry helps sell goods and services to the consumer. Through advertisements and marketing campaigns, consumers learn about products so they can make informed economic choices. Labeling products is also essential so consumers know what they are purchasing.

**Processors** make sure that goods are cleaned, packaged, and preserved just the way the consumer likes it! The processing of goods make them more appealing to the consumer.

**Stores** and markets are where the goods that the producer raises and grows are sold to the consumer. Consumers spend a lot of money at stores!

# DISTRIBUTOR



**Distribution is a crucial step in bringing goods and services to the consumer. Trucks, planes, trains, and ships can all transport goods from the producer to the processor and then to the consumer.**

**Consumers** are grateful for distributors. Without the distributor, consumers would have to go directly to the producer or processing plant to get the goods they want or need.

**Stores** depend on distributors to bring them the products they sell.

**Processors** rely on distributors to carry goods from the farm and then to the consumer.

**Producers** rely on distributors to carry goods from the farm to the processing plant and from the processing plant to the consumer.

# PROCESSING



**Processing is an important part of making goods ready for customers. Processors provide the consumer with goods that are clean, fresh, and conveniently packaged.**

**Stores and markets** rely on processors to prepare goods in a way that is appealing to the consumer. After all, appealing to the consumer helps a store sell more and make more money.

**Marketing agencies** help create the design that appears on the packaging that processors use.

**Producers** trust that processors will take their goods and prepare them for market. This can help the producer sell more of the product because it will be more appealing to the consumer.

**Distributors** help bring goods from the producers to the processing plants and then carry goods that have been processed to stores and markets.

**Consumers** want to spend their money on goods that are clean, fresh, and conveniently packaged. Processors help prepare goods to satisfy the consumer.