



& the Rural Church Support Network

Bringing Food to the Table_ Harvest resources for connecting urban and rural communities



Introduction_

Bringing Food to the Table provides resources for harvest that aim to connect urban and the rural communities. It includes ideas for worship, prayer and meditation that challenge some of the divisions between town and country.

The contribution of the local church to the life and well being of the rural community has long been recognised. With a presence in every rural community the church is a focus for community life and activities. Support from the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber (CRC) and the Countryside Agency has enabled the Rural Church Support Network (RCSN) for Yorkshire and the Humber to develop a programme of support for small rural churches seeking new ways of sustaining an effective Christian presence in their villages. The church is one of the few bodies with a community of interest across the urban/rural divide and the RCSN has been exploring ways in which churches can encourage greater understanding between town and countryside which includes this harvest pack.

The harvest pack has been produced by an interdenominational group of urban and rural Christians including Leslie Morley, Rachel Parkinson, Elizabeth Clark and Kathryn Fitzsimons, to celebrate at the harvest season a shared joy in creation, food, and mutual commitment to trade justice.

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CRC's Rural Task Group Convenor

Copies are available to download free from the CRC website www.crc-online.org.uk or tel 0113 244 3413.

Theme_

Eating food is one of the few things common to all human experience. What type of food we consume, and how readily available it is to us, may vary widely. But we all eat. In our society, the meals on our table will have been brought there through the contribution of many different people working in a variety of environments. This "food chain" typically involves farmers or fishermen, processors, retailers and those who purchase and prepare the food to eat.

A harvest service is an opportunity to offer to God the contribution we make in bringing food to the table; to give thanks and pray for others in the chain upon whom we are dependent; and above all to praise God who starts off each chain by creating the sun's radiance and giving life to all living things.

Preparation_

Identify which contributions to the food chain your congregation will make. What is in your local area – farms or allotments, food factories, markets and supermarkets? What is missing? On whom are your congregation dependent for their food or, if they are farmers or fishermen, their income? Don't forget the international dimension of food production.

Ideas for worship and harvest supper_

- Base your harvest display on the idea of the food chain, e.g. incorporate a toy tractor, a food processor, a basket borrowed from a supermarket, a saucepan.
- Interview a member of the congregation about their contribution in bringing food to the table. Congregations who don't have members who are farmers, factory workers or shop assistants will still have people who buy and prepare food for the home!
- Relationships in the food chain can become strained through unfair trading or through environmentally damaging practices which fail to respect God's contribution as Creator. If you hold a harvest supper, try to use local, seasonal produce. Look out for the little red tractor symbol (below) which shows produce has been produced to an assured British Farm Standard, and for the Fairtrade mark on tea and coffee.
- Challenge the congregation to use the five finger prayer before each main meal for the next week.



Visit www.redtractor.org uk

The Five Finger Prayer



Before you eat your main meal, count off your fingers, giving thanks for all those who together brought the food to your table:

1. God the giver of life
2. farmers who brought the harvest from land or sea
3. food processors who added variety and longevity
4. distributors and retailers who made it available
5. the person in your household who shopped for and prepared the food

A prayer about the Urban Rural Divide

Loving and Eternal God

We know that in your sight there is no division between urban and rural, for all the world is one to you.

Forgive our short-sightedness and help us to remember our connectedness, and need of each other.

For city dweller and villager, consumer and producer are all one in your sight all are precious to you.

Help us to build bridges of understanding so that together we can enjoy your creation

The Frozen Chip - An address suitable for all age worship

Chips are bound to be mentioned in a survey of a congregation's favourite food. One third of chips eaten in the UK will have been produced by McCains, a firm based in this Region. Illustrating the journey a McCain chip makes should be an accessible way of presenting the food chain.

- God provides the light, water and soil necessary to grow potatoes as well as the spark of life in the seed potato.
- Farmers running traditional mixed farms are the main suppliers of potatoes to McCains. Many of them are based in Yorkshire. All the potatoes are grown in the UK. In Winter the ground is prepared for planting and stones are removed. In early Spring, seed potatoes are planted in rows with a mechanical planter. Until the harvest, farmers must water, fertilise and protect the growing plants from infection. In early Autumn the green tops are removed before a harvesting machine gently lifts the potatoes from the ground.
- The McCain chipping factory in Scarborough is the largest local employer. 1,200 tonnes of potatoes (that's the weight of 200 elephants) arrive at the factory each day. Their skins are blasted off with steam. Then they are forced under

high-pressure water through a grid of blades which cuts them into chips before being fried and frozen.

- 364 days of the year, lorries are delivering packets of frozen chips to distribution centres all over the UK. There they are redirected to individual shops where they sit in the freezer section just waiting for you to come along and buy them.
- Chips used to be cut in the home from raw potatoes. Today, out of every 100 chips eaten in the home, 74 are cooked in the oven and six come out of the microwave.
- In prayer give thanks to God the creator. Pray for farmers dependent on the climate and on obtaining a good price for their crop; for workers in food factories, especially those working long hours and in cold conditions; for delivery drivers and shop workers, especially those who have worked through the night and will be at work even as you pray; for those whose work is in the home, that it may be valued and supported.

For more background information, visit www.mccain.com, or www.potato.org.uk

Loving Creator God

The whole earth proclaims your glory.

Everywhere we look we see your handiwork.

Help us to enjoy the earth gently and to work so that all may be fed.

We pray for those who work the land both nearby and in distant countries

May they receive a just reward for their labour

And may their work both as food producers and stewards of the land be honoured.

In Jesus Name AMEN

The story of Joseph.

Depending on your congregation, you may need to briefly recount the story of Joseph, concentrating on those parts relating to food. A suitable extract from the story is Genesis 41 v46-49, 53-57.

- In Jacob's household it was Joseph's brothers who did the lion's share of the work in bringing food to the table. It is they who drive the flocks that make the difficult journey north to Shechem in the dry season in search of new pasture. Joseph leads a far more comfortable life in his father's tents near Hebron (37:12-14). He is consumer rather than producer. But later in the story, through his different gifts of foresight and strategic planning, Joseph brings food to his family's table in time of famine (42:25). Stereotypes and prejudice abound in the relationship between urban and rural populations. We are quick to dismiss each other's talents. Yet without the rural the urban would starve and without the urban the rural would not find markets for its produce. It is often in times of crisis that we finally realise our dependence on one another. A good example is the way people worked together to feed the nation during WW2.
- The Egyptian famine reminds us that all harvests are vulnerable. In this country, BSE, foot and mouth and a wet harvest season last year remind us of this fact. In some African countries, a failed harvest can still bring famine. Joseph's actions spread beyond Egypt to "all the world" (41:57). Our concern should be that, through international co-operation, food is brought to

every table of the human family.

- As the famine reaches its height, Joseph uses the power this gives him to determine future conditions of trade (47:13-26). Concentration of power in the food chain can lead to injustice. In this country supermarkets are in the strongest bargaining position and our farming industry is in crisis. On the world stage it is rich countries who determine international trade rules. The God of Amos and Micah demands justice in all trade relationships.
- Whilst Jacob erred in showing favouritism, nevertheless he loved and grieved over all his sons (43:14). God's love is for all – rich and poor, urban and rural. God grieves over our divisions and injustice. At the end of the story of Joseph there is family reconciliation. Can we use harvest- a symbol of God's generosity and faithfulness- to be reconciled across the urban/rural divide, recognise our common humanity, value our different gifts, and face the local and global issues around food production together?

For more information, see leaflets *Food Awakening* and *Farming lives!* Available free from the Arthur Rank Centre, Tel: 024 7669 6969. Or visit www.christianaid.org.uk/campaign/

The wedding feast at Cana

This passage, (John 2 v1-11), may seem an unusual choice for harvest, but it is full of rich imagery which can help us focus on how God brings food (and drink!) to our tables.

- God's provision is marked by staggering generosity. Jesus provided the equivalent of about 900 bottles of wine – no mean gift to a wedding feast already part way through. God's generosity as creator could leave all human tables groaning under a staggering profusion of gifts that serve not only to feed but to astound with their beauty and variety. That some tables are empty and people are starving is our responsibility – not God's.
- God calls on us to play our part. Jesus performed a miracle, yet he chose to involve others in its enactment (v5-8).
- Whether we plough a field or stack a supermarket shelf, we are working with God's good gifts. When we understand the holiness of our task, then important questions about how our society organises work, and how we use the land, take on greater significance.
- Finally, the table God furnishes is set for a party. If we accept food and drink as God's good gifts then it is churlish not to enjoy them, albeit responsibly. The simplest meal, prepared with love and eaten with thanks, can be a source of great joy. The joy is multiplied when food is shared. Perhaps as churches we need to rediscover the fellowship that can flow from shared meals.

Loving God

As I gaze around the supermarket at rows and rows of fresh produce, what colours crowd my sight; red shiny apples, acid yellow lemons, orange carrots and purple aubergines.

If I close my eyes and sniff, my nose is filled with the rich smell of coffee, or the comforting smell of freshly baked bread.

Here Lord are the fruits of your creation gathered in abundance, and telling of your boundless generosity.

Here too is the work of human hands as some have ploughed and sowed, nurtured and harvested in all weathers to harness the miracle of your creation, others have processed packed and distributed around the clock to bring food to our tables.

So let us this Harvest time give thanks to our Creator for the gifts of creation.

Let us remember with gratitude the hard work of women and men all over the world that brings us this rich bounty.

As we celebrate let us also remember those whose plates are empty, those whose crops have failed.

May we learn to work together, so that all God's children may enjoy the fruits of creation. AMEN