

Growing Poetry

Grade Level: 4-6

Approximate Length of Activity: One or two class periods

Objectives

Teacher

1. Help students improve their vocabulary.
2. Teach students about Michigan agricultural commodities.

Students

1. Define "commodity."
2. Learn that corn, soybeans and other commodities are grown in Michigan.
3. Practice poetry skills using Michigan commodities.

Michigan Content Standards: (Language Arts) R.CM.04.01; W.GN.04.02; W.HW.04.01; R.CM.05.01; W.GN.05.02; W.HW.05.01; R.CM.06.01; W.GN.06.01; W.HW.06.01

Introduction

Michigan is a major producer of a wide range of agricultural commodities. Commodities are goods that are produced. Michigan agricultural statistics in 2004-2005 indicate that Michigan produces over 257 million bushels of corn, 760 million pounds of apples, 6.3 billion pounds of milk and 2 million acres of soybeans each year. Other Michigan products include hogs, wheat, oats, pumpkins, vegetables, Christmas trees and sheep! More than 27 percent of the land in Michigan is farmland -- that's 10.1 million acres!

Crops are produced in different areas of the state because of varying temperatures, precipitation and physical features of the areas. For some of these same reasons, livestock are raised in certain parts of the state. Fruit trees and berries grow on the west coast of the state near Lake Michigan because the temperatures and frost dates are more appropriate for the crops.

Corn is a major feed grain grown by farmers in Michigan. Corn is planted in the spring and harvested in the fall. A corn seed weighs about one-hundredth of an ounce, yet can produce a corn plant that will grow seven to ten feet tall and produce between 600 and 1,000 seeds. The seeds of a corn plant are the kernels you find on an ear of corn. Kernels are arranged in rows along the ear with as few as eight or as many as thirty-six rows. The number of rows is always even. Corn is a major component in many foods such as cereal, peanut butter, soda pop, flour and snack foods. Corn has many industrial uses such as ethanol, degradable plastics and starch for recycled paper.

Michigan has 41,000 acres of farmland used for apple production. Some apple producers grow apples commercially while some grow them non-commercially. Apple producers who grow apples commercially own or manage their orchards and then sell the fruit to the consumers. Apple producers prune the trees, apply fertilizers and herbicides, control rodents, mow the orchard, use machinery for harvesting and hauling the fruit, and advertise and sell the crop. Those who grow apples non-commercially may have a few trees in their yard and grow the apples for personal use.



Farmers using milking machines milk dairy cows two to three times a day. The machines milk the cows using a suction system. When farmers milked cows by hand, they would spend two and one-half hours milking 20 cows. Now a farmer spends only 15 minutes milking 20 cows. When the cows are milked, the machines transport the milk at a lower temperature. A dairy plant sends a refrigerated truck to the dairy farm every few days to transport the milk back to the plant where it is pasteurized, killing bacteria. Some of the milk is packaged into jugs or cartons and distributed to stores where it is sold. The rest of the milk is used to make butter, cheese, yogurt, whipped cream, ice cream and other dairy products.

Soybeans are grown for human consumption, consumer and industrial products, and livestock feed. One bushel of soybeans, weighing 60 pounds, produces 11 pounds of soybean oil. About 90 percent of the oil is used in the preparation of food products. Soy inks, plastics, biodiesel fuels and biodegradable building materials are a few of the industrial uses that have been developed using soybean oil instead of petroleum. Soybeans are used in salad dressings, baking mixes, candy and more.

Today's producers raise pigs that gain weight more efficiently and yield more lean meat than ever before. Sows, or female pigs, give birth to litters of piglets twice a year. Each litter usually has seven to ten piglets. Giving birth to piglets is called farrowing. Some pork producers have "farrow to finish" farms, which means the pigs are bred, born, and fed on the farm until they are taken to market. Pigs are weaned from their mother when they are two to four weeks old. Farmers feed their pigs a well-balanced diet of ground-up corn, soybeans, wheat and grain sorghum twice a day. Pigs are usually taken to market when they weigh 220 to 260 pounds at about five to six months old. Bacon, pork sausage, pork chops and ham as well as 500 different by-products all come from pigs. Some examples of by-products are fertilizers, glass, china, floor wax, chalk, crayons and medicine.

Other commodities produced in Michigan include fruits such as pears, cherries, peaches, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, grapes and melons, as well as vegetables such as sweet corn, pumpkins, peppers, asparagus, onions, cucumbers and potatoes. Other animals raised in Michigan include fish, turkey, chickens, beef cattle, sheep, horses, swine, ducks, pheasants and honeybees. Michigan's specialty crops include herbs, mint, sunflowers, barley, mushrooms, maple sugar, popcorn and trees. Traditional crops like wheat and oats are also Michigan grown.

Materials Needed

- Heartland by Diane Siebert, ISBN 0-06-443287-4 or Harvest Year by Cris Peterson, ISBN 1-56397-571-8 (optional)
- Books and reference materials

Activity Outline

1. Begin a discussion about Michigan commodities with the class. Explain what a commodity is and talk about what commodities are grown in Michigan. You may want to read *Heartland* by Diane Siebert or *Harvest Year* by Cris Peterson.
2. Instruct students to choose a commodity grown in Michigan and write a poem about it. Take the students to the library to look up books or encyclopedia articles about their chosen commodity.
3. After the students have done a little research on their commodity, have them choose what type of poem they want to write. Students can choose from a cinquain, a haiku, or a rhyming poem. The teacher should write these three types of poems on the board and list the format of each.

Cinquain (5 lines)

Noun
Two adjectives
Three "ing" verbs
Short phrase
Noun (synonym for title)

Haiku (3 lines)

5 syllables
7 syllables
5 syllables

Rhyming (as many lines as desired)

Words in different lines must rhyme with each other

4. After the students have written their poems, have them share the poems with the class.

Discussion Questions

1. What is a commodity?
2. What are some fruits produced in Michigan?
3. What types of vegetables are produced in Michigan?
4. What is the format of a cinquain?
5. What is the format of a haiku?

Related Activities

1. Assign one commodity to each student for further research. Have them give either an oral or a written report.
2. Put the students' poetry in a book to share with other classes.
3. Make a commodity map of Michigan showing where various commodities are grown and raised.