

# LABELS, PRICE & GROCERY DECISIONS

**75 MINUTES**  
+ TAKE HOME  
ASSIGNMENTS  
HFN10/20, HIF10/20

A high school lesson plan provided by the University of Guelph

In this lesson plan, students will learn about grocery shopping and how price, nutritional content, convenience and what we value combine to affect our food purchases. Students will explore research which explores how effective nutrition warning labels are influencing consumer behaviour. This podcast also introduces students to a pay-what-you-can pricing scheme and some of the socioeconomic underpinnings of our food choices.

This lesson plan surrounds Episodes 14 of The Why and How Podcast [“How do labels and price affect our grocery decisions?”](#) podcast looks to answer big questions in agriculture, food, and the environment through casual conversations rooted in research. It is hosted by undergraduate students and published by the Ontario Agricultural College of the University of Guelph.

## Curriculum Alignments and Expectations

- Identify the components of food security (e.g., availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability, sustainability)
- Canada’s Food Guide: demonstrate an understanding of the nutritional and health recommendations in Canada’s Food Guide including describing the key messages and recommendations in Canada’s Food Guide and appropriate serving sizes
- Interpret the information on the labels of a variety of packaged foods
- Explain the differences between nutrient- dense foods and empty-calorie foods and their effects on health
- Describe the elements of a healthy diet, and demonstrate the practical knowledge and skills required to prepare healthy meals and snacks

## Learning Objectives

- Learn about the factors that affect food purchasing decisions.
- Explore the purpose and potential effects of food labels.
- Talk about the nutritional components of certain foods.
- Learn the economic theory that drives food purchase decisions.

## Assessment Strategies and Success Criteria

- Take-home activities
- Group and class discussions
- Internet exploration
- Reflection and debriefing

## Cross Curricular Links

- Exploring Family Studies- Demonstrate an understanding of practical skills and knowledge needed to safely and effectively perform day-to-day tasks that help to meet their needs
- Career Studies - Identifying Possible Destinations and Pathways

## Materials

- At least two brands of up to five different types of prepackaged food items or photos of prepackaged food items
- Paper and drawing utensils



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## TEACHER NOTES

### Pre-Lesson Discussion

1. Before playing the podcast, have a discussion with students to discover their current level of understanding and perceptions of grocery shopping, price disparities and nutrition.

- *What are some things that you think people consider before purchasing food?*

*Nutrition label*

*Price*

*Brand name*

*Store specials*

In partners, have students think of as many factors as they can that would affect consumer behaviour in grocery stores. Have them rank these factors in terms of what they think influences people's decision to purchase or not to purchase an item (1 – most important factor).

Select a few pairs to share their ranking list. Briefly discuss the nature of food shopping as being a multifaceted process, with many influential factors that could dictate our actions.

### Take-Home Work

2. Assign students the task of listening to the podcast as their homework (38 minutes) and to define the following terms discussed in the episode. Some terms may require additional online research to provide a definition.

- Calorie dense

- Consumer utility
- Front-of-package labels
- Food desert
- Agricultural economics
- Health halo
- Socioeconomic variables
- Sliding scale pricing strategy
- Willingness-to-pay

Ask the students to browse the [Canada Food Guide](#) website and make notes on their findings and personal observations of the food groups, portions, and food items. Encourage students to look at [using food labels](#), [tips for healthier grocery shopping](#), and [limiting highly processed foods](#) pages.

### In-Class Lesson

3. In a class discussion, review the differences between terms your students researched as part of their pre-discussion take-home work.

Break class into smaller groups of approximately four students per group. Assign the following discussion questions.

- *How have your perceptions of food labels and grocery shopping changed since listening to the podcast?*
- *Has the discussion on this podcast made you aware of any habits people have when shopping in grocery stores?*

Findings from Canada's Food Guide:

- *How closely do you think that most people follow the recommendations in Canada's Food Guide?*
- *What are some shopping tips people*



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- can follow to improve their shopping?*
- *Do you think the tips & recommendations on Canada's Food Guide are realistic? Why or why not?*

## 4. Activity 1: Food Purchasing Decisions

Required Materials: At least two brands of up to five different types of prepackaged food items or images of food labels (examples – two brands of crackers, cookies, chips, canned vegetables)

*Note: make sure at least one of the brands have special labeling like gluten free, low sodium etc.*

Starting with one type of food product, show students each brand. After showing both brands of the first product, show the next food product. Continue present each brands of each type of prepackaged food. Tell students to assume the price was the same and ask them which product they would purchase and why to reveal purchase behaviour when price is held constant.

Reasons for choices may include:

- Appealing product label and packaging
- Brand name product
- Item that is regularly purchased in their household

After each round, ask students how strongly label and packaging influences their decision on a 1-10 scale.

## 5. Activity 2: Nutrition Label Design

Required Materials: Paper and drawing utensils

In small groups, have students design and draw a nutrition food label that they think would be effective. Give them 5-8 minutes to design their labels. As an example, [here](#) are the labels that Laura used in her study. Don't show these to the students until after they've drawn their own.

Once they're done, debrief the students on their designs. Have each group present their design and explain why they did what they did. Point out some important considerations – it should be black and white for readability, must include English and French, should be plain language, must be small, and needs to include a source.

## 6. Activity 3: A Discussion on Purchasing Decisions

In small groups, ask a series of open-ended questions about grocery shopping and food purchasing decisions:

- *Do you think front-of package nutrition warning labels will be an effective tool to inform buyers of nutritional content, and influence purchase behaviour? Why or why not?*
- *Think about the ways in which Laura's research could impact the following groups:*
  - Households/individual consumers*
  - Government/Policy makers*
  - Farmers (primary producers)*
  - Food processors*
  - Grocery stores/food retailers*
  - Nutritionists/dieticians*



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## 7. Debrief and Reflection

Hand out small pieces of paper and ask students to anonymously write one thing they are taking away from the podcast or accompanying activities. Collect the responses and read a few of them aloud.

### Additional Resources

- [Podcast Episode Transcript](#)
- The University of Guelph's [Department of Food, Agricultural & Resource Economics](#)
- Visit us by registering for an [on-campus experience](#)

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