Who Gets Fed?

Food production and access in England, 1500 to 1900

WG.5.3 "Describe how and why the ability of people to use Earth's resources to feed themselves has changed over time."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three changes in how people produced or obtained food, and circle words that explain how each change affected food access. Number two details that show why some people could still go hungry.

From Shared Fields to Distant Grain

1. In a farming village in England around 1500, most families relied on grain grown nearby. Farmers planted strips in large shared fields, while some households also gathered fuel or grazed animals on common land. Rain, soil quality, and the length of the growing season shaped the harvest. A wet year could spoil grain, and moving a large supply of food over rough roads cost too much for many villages. Families stored part of a good harvest for lean months, but stores could run out. Access to land and a successful local harvest strongly affected who ate well.

2. From the 1700s into the 1800s, some English landowners enclosed shared fields and commons to create larger, privately controlled farms. Many farmers also used new crop rotations, planting crops such as turnips and clover instead of leaving fields unused for a season. Those crops helped support livestock, whose manure improved the soil. Together with improved tools, these changes could raise food production and support a growing population. Yet enclosure often took away grazing rights from poorer households. Some people found wage work on farms or in towns, but they now needed cash to buy much of their food.

3. During the 1800s, railways and steamships changed what a village could eat. Faster, cheaper transport carried grain from distant farms to English towns, including wheat grown overseas. When a local harvest failed, imported grain could help fill the gap, making people less dependent on nearby fields. But the food still had to be purchased, and prices could rise when supplies were disrupted. A factory worker with steady wages might buy imported bread, while an unemployed neighbor could go hungry beside a full shop. By 1900, technology and trade had expanded food supplies without guaranteeing equal access to them.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did enclosure change a poorer household's ability to get food, even if farms produced more?

2. How could crop rotation help farmers feed more people?

3. How did railways and steamships change what happened when an English town's local harvest failed?

4. Compare a risk to getting food around 1500 with a different risk around 1900. What caused each risk?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine an inland English town gains a rail line in 1880, then its local harvest fails. In four sentences, compare how a paid rail worker's household and a landless household with no wages might get food, explaining one benefit and one limit of the new transport.

Who Gets Fed?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three changes in how people produced or obtained food, and circle words that explain how each change affected food access. Number two details that show why some people could still go hungry. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did enclosure change a poorer household's ability to get food, even if farms produced more?	**Enclosure could remove the household's grazing rights. Without access to common land, it might depend more on wages to buy food.**
2	How could crop rotation help farmers feed more people?	**Turnips and clover supported livestock, whose manure improved the soil. Along with improved tools, this could raise food production.**
3	How did railways and steamships change what happened when an English town's local harvest failed?	**They carried grain from distant farms more quickly and cheaply, so imported food could help replace a poor local harvest.**
4	Compare a risk to getting food around 1500 with a different risk around 1900. What caused each risk?	**Around 1500, a failed local harvest could exhaust a family's stores because transporting food was costly. Around 1900, a person without wages might be unable to buy food even when shops had it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The rail line could bring grain from distant farms after the local harvest fails. A paid rail worker's household could use its wages to buy bread made from that grain. A landless household with no wages might see the same bread in a shop but be unable to buy it. Transport would reduce dependence on local fields, but it would not give every household money for food.

Accept other passage-supported explanations that connect a change in land use, farming, or transport to food access. For Your Turn, look for a plausible difference between the two households, not a claim that the rail line guarantees food for everyone.