**POTATO**

In the Andes Mountains of South America indigenous people, including the ancient Incas, survived on potatoes for the past 7,000 years. After the Spanish conquistadores arrived in South America in 1531, their sailors recognized the potato’s nutritional value and adopted it as a food source for long voyages. By 1600 farmers in Spain were planting crops of potatoes and by 1800 the potato had become one of the most important foods in Europe due to its combination of essential vitamins, minerals and fiber and its easy adaptation to different climates. The potato was so productive and easy to grow in rocky soil that the people of Ireland developed an exclusive dependence on potatoes as a primary food source. The lack of alternative foods led to the Irish Potato famine when a potato blight began in 1845. This precipitated a mass emigration to the United States where current Americans consume more potatoes than any other vegetable, mostly in the form of French fries. **What was the social impact of famine in Ireland?**

1. **What were the social implications of thousands of Irish immigrants in the eastern United States in the late 1840s?**

**SUGAR**

Sugar cane, though native to Polynesia, was first refined into sugar in India in about 700 BC. It made its way west for the next couple thousand years and finally, in the Middle Ages, to Europe, which had previously relied on honey for sweetener. Sugar is unnecessary to the human diet, and even becomes harmful in excess and addictive, but was prized for its medicinal use inmaking herbal concoctions more palatable. In 1400 it was still a very expensive commodity due to small production, and Europeans were just beginning to learn to grow sugar cane outside of the tropics. The Spanish had planted sugar cane in the Canary Islands, where Columbus acquired it for his second trip to the Americas in 1493.

Sugar cultivation is very labor-intensive and the Spaniards set about enslaving the native inhabitants of Hispaniola to grow and process sugar for growing markets in Europe. In 1516 the first shipment of sugar arrived in Europe which fueled demand for sugar, especially among the British, as a sweetener for tea, coffee, and chocolate. Meanwhile the enslaved indigenous labor force in the Caribbean was dying off due to the introduction of “Old” World disease so sugar producers turned to Africa to supply labor. These producers cleared large swaths of land with slash-and-burn techniques, to great ecological detriment, to build plantations which depended on slavery to produce an adequate supply of sugar to satisfy the demand of the European upper classes. Some 12 million Africans were transported to the Americas as slaves between 1450 and 1900 as part of the triangular trade system. Demand for sugar remains high all over the globe, and causes tooth decay, digestive disease, and addictive dependence.

1. **What are the social costs in terms of human lives caused by demand for sugar?**
2. **What rich cultural traditions remain in the Americas as a result of the African slave trade?**
3. **What environmental problems have ensued from sugar plantations, particularly monocropping?**

**CORN**

Corn, or as the indigenous Americans called it, maize, is native to the area around present day Mexico City. It was first cultivated 7,000 years ago and rapidly spread from Mexico throughout the Americas to become a staple of the Mayan, Aztec and Incan civilizations. These people relied heavily on corn for a primary source of energy and prepared it by boiling the ears or grinding the kernels into meal which helped preserve it through the winter. The Spaniards who arrived in the Caribbean saw corn growing everywhere but had never seen it before, since it was unknown in Europe, Asia, or Africa.

Columbus introduced corn to Europe where it spread widely and then on to Turkey, Africa and Asia. Many Europeans did not develop a taste for the grain but they used it to feed livestock which increased

the availability of protein sources throughout the continent. Corn continues to play a vital role in the Americas and it reigns supreme in the Midwestern U.S. where 40% of the world’s corn is grown. Most of our corn is not eaten but fed to livestock and used to make a variety of products, including explosives, paint, and gasoline additives. Plus, cornstarch processed into syrup (high-fructose corn syrup) has surpassed sugar as a sweetener and can be found in soda and almost every processed food.

1. **What are the environmental and social implications, in terms of world hunger, of growing so much corn and feeding most of it to animals?**

**COFFEE**

This shrub with red berries that can only grow in tropical climates originated on the mountainsides of

Ethiopia under rainforest canopy, although it’s now more commonly associated with Central America and the South Pacific isles. The demand for coffee began as a medicinal drink (prescribed at various times as an enema, aphrodisiac, nerve calmer and life-extender) for the elite but soon became a working-man’s pickme-up.5 In the 1870s industrialization of roasting technology and railroads facilitated the global spread of coffee consumption, though it has always been more popular in the West, as peoples in the East generally maintain a preference for tea. Coffee is the second most widely exported legal commodity (second only to petroleum) and Americans consume more coffee than any other nation.



Over 20 million people in the world produce coffee, over fifty percent of them small, family farmers who mostly live in poverty, subject to the whim of constantly fluctuating commodity markets or large plantation owners who clearcut rainforest. For example, coffee production in the hands of society’s elite has lead to the continued subjugation of Mayan Indians in Guatemala. Now consumers can buy coffee that has been certified as ‘fair trade’ which means farmers are paid a fair market price for their coffee and thereby ensured a sustainable future.

1. **What has been the ecological cost of clear-cutting rainforests for coffee plantations in Brazil and Central America?**
2. **What kind of biodiversity is lost when coffee is planted in open fields instead of under rainforest canopy?**

**TOMATO**

The Aztecs deserve the credit for introducing the world to the tomato, not the Italians as many people assume. The Spanish first encountered this fruit during their conquest of Mexico in 1519. The Aztecs ground tomatoes with chilis to make salsa to accompany a wide array of dishes. Though the Spanish in Mexico enjoyed tomatoes, many Europeans considered them poisonous upon arrival because they belong to the same family as the deadly nightshade. It wasn’t until the early 1800s that the poisonous myth was debunked and the tomato was adopted in Europe, particularly Italy, for its versatility in sauces and soups. Today the tomato is one of the most popular fruits or vegetables across the globe, and the U.S. is the largest commercial producer of tomatoes in the world. Americans consume 12 million tons of tomatoes annually, both fresh and, most often, in processed foods like ketchup.

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Columbian Exchange Ad: Plan Sheet

You will create an advertisement for one of the foods you read about on the **back of this sheet**.

**Circle your choice: Potato Sugar Corn Coffee Tomato**

Your ad should include information from the back of this sheet and this plan sheet, and should make your food seem ***exciting***! Your goal is to entice someone to trade for or buy your item. You do not need to include every piece of information in your ad… pick and choose the parts that would make a consumer interested.

**\_\_\_How did your food get here?/Where did it come from?**

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**\_\_\_ What was it used for? Any special uses?**

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**\_\_\_ What does it look like? Taste like?**

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**\_\_\_ What will it be used for in the future?**

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**\_\_\_ How did it/does it improve the life of humans?**

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**\_\_\_ Any other information that you know about this food you can use to spice up your ad**

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**\_\_\_ Colorful designs, illustrations, and text (spelled right, correct punctuation)?**