

Rich farmland, poor farmers / more crops, less healthy food

Level: Intermediate (B1–B2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes (plus extra time for research and extended discussion)

Business topics: agriculture, farming methods, supply and demand, the consequences of not updating historical and out-dated food production policies

Business language: useful business vocabulary, phrases and expressions

Activities: providing opinions, key words, understanding the text, business language, research and discussion

Groups: whole class, one-to-one, small groups

Overview: This article discusses the way food is produced on a large scale in the US, why this is no longer sustainable, and what difficulties farmers and farming communities are currently facing.

1. Warmer

- Students talk about what they think the business practice of 'Pile it high, sell it cheap' involves. Then they find the expression in the article (paragraph 11) to check their answers.
- They decide which of types of businesses and industries are most likely to use this system by ticking the ones in the box and thinking of other examples.

Key:

All the mentioned businesses apart from the high-end designer boutique, farmers' market sellers and the health food shop

2. Key words

Key:

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. tough | 7. inflation |
| 2. source | 8. scale back |
| 3. components | 9. harvest |
| 4. consolidation | 10. subsidised |
| 5. commodity | 11. reserves |
| 6. fertiliser | 12. domestic |

3. Understanding the article

- Students decide which statements are true and which are false, and rewrite those that are false. You could turn this into a 'closed book' task by asking students not to look at the article again but instead to simply discuss their answers with a partner.

Key:

- False. The article is about industrial-scale crop / cereal farming in the US.*
- True*
- True*
- False. A large percentage of the crops grown in the Midwest is used to feed cattle (to provide meat and dairy products).*
- True*
- False. Just under 2% of US workers work on farms. The agricultural sector as a whole is slightly over 10%.*

4. Business language

Key:

- price spike / gouging*
- urban dwellers*
- corporate greed*
- disenchanted population*
- empty promises*
- labour force*
- raw commodity*
- price spike / gouging*

Key:

1. urban dwellers	6. empty promises
2. raw commodity	7. disenchanted population
3. price spike	8. corporate greed
4. price gouging	
5. labour force	

5. Business language

Key:

1. *overfed yet undernourished*
2. *in the black*
3. *hedge and hoard*
4. *supply and demand*
5. *boom and bust*

6. Discussion questions

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

7. Wider business theme – food production

- a. Divide the farming styles up among (pairs of) students so that all of them get researched. Set a time limit for the research and then bring the group back together for a class discussion and debate about farming and food production.