

COOKIE CONCERNS

The world's population increases by about 160 babies/minute. More people need more resources. But resources are limited -- just like the cookies in this activity.



In the last forty years, the human population has doubled from 2.5 billion people to over 5 billion people. The growing human population affects plants and animals around the world, directly and indirectly. More people clear more land to make room for houses, roads, shopping malls, and other developments, which means less land for plant and animal homes. More people generate more waste, which takes up space (e.g. landfills) and can pollute the environment. And more people place more demands on limited resources such as energy, food, and water.

The problem of limited resources is compounded by the fact that resources are not always fairly and effectively managed. Rich western countries, with only 20% of the world's population, use 70% of the world's energy. Many wealthy countries get more food than they need, while poorer countries often don't get enough. Population growth is greatest in poorer countries in Asia, South America, and Africa; they can least afford to support more people. Some farmers in poorer countries grow "cash crops" -- coffee, tea, cotton, bananas, tobacco -- to sell to wealthy countries instead of growing much needed basic food crops. Poor farming practices in poorer countries can turn good land into desert and worsen the effects of drought.

Topics: Resources; Decision-Making.

MATERIALS: One cookie for each person.

DOING IT:

1. Start with two cookies and two people. How much cookie should each person get? Add two more people. How much of the two cookies should each of the four people get? Add four more people. How much cookie should each of the eight people get? How does this example relate to the world's growing population? How should the cookies be divided up? What's "fair"?
2. People form two groups: one group is made up of two people and the other group is made up of everyone else.
3. Make two equal piles of cookies (total number of cookies equals total number of people). The group of two people gets one pile and the other pile goes to the other group.
4. Is the distribution "fair"? How do people in each group feel? Compare the cookies to world resources, like food or energy.
5. How does the large group want to divide its cookies? What might the larger group do to get some of the smaller group's cookies? What can the small group do to more fairly distribute the cookies (e.g. sharing, bartering, breaking cookies apart)? Does the small group want to share its cookies? Why or why not? Does anyone think it's a good idea to save some cookies for a snack later? Why or why not?
6. People should work together to decide on a "fair" cookie distribution -- and then eat away!

