Background: Focusing on groups or individuals that make a difference in how we treat the environment is central to this class. One such group is Food Works, which began with the vision and organization of Dayna Conner in 2008, as a community based initiative to connect local farmers, consumers, and community representatives to the Southern Illinois Farming Network. Food Works offers the Southern Illinois Farm Beginnings program which assists in connecting beginning and established farmers to the resources and skills needed to proceed in a local foods business, through classroom sessions, field days, and farm mentorships. The main goals are to educate growers in the 3 facets of sustainable agriculture; people, planet, and profit. They are a 501c3 charitable organization that receives funding from federal and state grants, private foundations, and local citizens’ donations.

Methods: I created a survey of local food knowledge, similar to that of the reality TV show, Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution and a thesis paper by Jane Plum at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The survey asked 2 questions about 4 different foods; a peach, a tomato, honey, and french fries. I included a Preschool Class, 2 Kindergarten classes, a first grade and a fourth grade, totaling 72 students. The teachers gave the survey so as to get better responses and work alongside the curriculum. I personally asked the questions in the preschool, which was a great learning experience for myself and the children.

Hypothesis and Purpose of Research: I proposed that due to our Farmer’s Market, local wineries, CSAs and U-picks, that the students’ results would be more positive than those in Huntington Virginia. I project my efforts will:

• assist in the goal of obtaining more local foods in Carbondale schools,
• get students thinking about the sources of their food and,
• get the educators thinking about how to work local foods into the curriculum. I am also creating a separate poster for Food Works to display this data at tabling events and the local food subcommittee hearings.

Results: The sources listed in the graphs show the acceptable answers. The food images are the actual images displayed on cards for the children. My choice of the particular honey image was because children tend to associate honey with bears when presented with the classic “honey bear” image. No child responded with bears as a source for honey. The responses show that food knowledge increases with grade level in all foods, except for peaches. Also, food identification is higher, while knowledge of the food source is lower for all the foods except peaches. Children seem to know that peaches come from trees. A common mistake was identifying the tomato as a potato. This may be due to the similarity in the sound of their names. The peaches proved to be the most foreign food for the students. The most surprising result was that no one guessed that peaches come from a can. 97% of the children were able to identify french fries, while only 22% identified the source as potatoes. The majority (53%) responded with “McDonald’s.” Compared to the study done by Jane Plum and the questions asked by Jamie Oliver, Carbondale students fare better on food knowledge. However, these results have much room for improvement.

Acknowledgements / Future Research: This survey could be completed at a larger scale and possibly presented to the school board. Special thanks to Dr. Duram for her help, and to all the teachers who participated.