SYSTEMS THINKING IN FOOD SYSTEMS: HOW A BALL OF STRING CAN RESHAPE THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT OUR FOOD.

Session: A, Breakout Room #3
Krista Einarsson*, @KristaEin1, Program on the Environment, University of Washington
Site Supervisor: Hallie Sykes, Oxbow Farm and Conservation Center
Faculty Advisor: Eli Wheat, Program on the Environment, University of Washington

The food system (FS) is a complex system made of many interconnected working parts. We are reliant on these different parts successfully working together in order to get food from the field to our plate. Often the FS is thought of in a linear model from harvest to consumption that fails to address the environmental, social, economic, and political subsystems that shape it. In order to solve environmental and social injustices within the FS we must learn how to look at all factors and subsystems involved. The goal of this project aims to address any gaps in what kids know about the FS while working to implement systems thinking as a tool to deepen their understanding. My internship at Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center focused on creating a journal prompt and systems thinking lesson plan that was implemented during their summer camp for 10-14 year olds. I used the journal prompt as a pre and post assessment to analyze how the systems thinking lesson plan affected children’s knowledge of the FS. Through my research I found that kids have a basic understanding of a linear FS model. Introducing concepts of systems thinking allowed kids to have a deeper understanding of the interconnected systems and issues within the FS. If we educate young people about the negative drawbacks of our FS while providing them with the tools to apply solutions through systems thinking, we can help create educated consumers that use critical thinking to reform the FS to be sustainable and resilient.