















Similarly, William Woys Weaver takes on another difficult and rather nebulous issue: food and “place.” He provides examples from his own research in Pennsylvania as well as discussion of other work that studies how place and foodways are connected historically, geographically, and ideationally. Central to this question is the appropriate establishment of boundaries in both place and time. Also essential is knowing the right questions to ask to understand how something as seemingly insubstantial as a sense of place can inform food use, and how food can help to create culture from location.

Rachel Black tackles yet another difficult issue, that of food and the senses, and describes how one can study such connections and use them to teach about food, culture, and perception. Sensory anthropology requires ethnographers to use their senses just as surely as they query how others experience their world through sensory input. The differing senses—sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing—all play important roles in food production, processing, and use, so exploring how people operate within their sensory worlds can reveal much about their culture and food systems. Black concludes with examples from her research and teaching that demonstrate how sensory input can be used to explore various meanings in food and consumption.

In the following chapter, Catherine Tucker explores food commodity chains or value chains, defined as “the set of processes and linkages that connect disparate activities and relationships, and build value that culminates in a final product.” This farm- (and even “before-the-farm-”) to-table approach traces all of the processes, materials, and human connections that a food item requires, up to—and beyond—ingestion. She points out the special challenges of following a chain in a globalized world and outlines methods used to bridge space, time, and language barriers to understand how our food arrives on our plates.

Finally, Andrea Wiley and Janet Chrzan describe many of these methods in their chapter on the study of single foods. Such an issue—a single food item—ranges across time, meaning, and space. One of the most critical elements in writing about a single food, they contend, is choosing an approach and following it thoroughly. Studies of single foods can be inductive (stemming from a description of the food and its relation to other areas of cultural life) or deductive (starting with an issue and then following how the food relates to the problem). These approaches are not exclusive, and when they interact can provide a “thick description” of food use and culture. Such an agenda allows for a four-field methodology but can lead to an overload of information. The authors discuss how they covered their own single food studies—of milk and alcohol—using an explicitly biocultural perspective to link cultural actions to biological and health outcomes. In many ways, the study of single foods illustrates the plethora of theoretical and methodological approaches available to food studies because it allows for interdisciplinary research across cultures, time, and space.