Farm to Early Care and Education: Resources and Best Practices for Comprehensive and Sustainable Programmatic and State Level Initiatives

April 2019 – Farm to ECE Mini - CoIIN
Presentation Overview

• Introduction to the National Farm to School Network
• What is Farm to Early Care and Education
• Digging into the Core Elements: Key Approaches
• State Level Initiatives: Building for Sustainability
• Why Farm to Early Care and Education: Impacts of a Comprehensive Approach
INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK
OUR NETWORK

- Advisory Board
- Core Partners
- 20,000+ Network Members
- Supporting Partners
- National Staff
OUR CORE FUNCTIONS

A hub for:

- Information
- Networking
- Advocacy

Connecting people to:

- Resources
- People
- Policy
WHAT IS FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION?
Farm to Early Care and Education

• Group of strategies and activities that offer:
  – increased access to healthy, local foods
  – gardening opportunities and
  – food, nutrition and agriculture education activities

• Targets children ages 0-5

• Adapts to all types of ECE settings and geographic locations

Photo Credit: Ali Stone for Gardeneers
WHAT IS FARM TO ECE?

CORE ELEMENTS OF 

FARM to ECE

EDUCATION

GARDENS

PROCUREMENT
2018 National Farm to ECE Survey

We heard from:

serving

2,030 ECE sites

255,257 young children

in

46 states

And learned that farm to ECE is reaching far and wide:

- 49% of respondents are already participating in farm to ECE
- 34% of participating sites serve more than 50% low-income children
- 33% of participating sites have been practicing farm to ECE for 5+ years

Learn more at: farmtoschool.org/ece

NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Center for Regional Food Systems
DIGGING INTO THE CORE ELEMENTS
Education

• Farm and garden books
• Cooking activities
• Taste tests
• Sensory exploration

Photo Credit: Fairyland Family Childcare and YMCA of Madison, WI
Education (cont.)

- Field trips – farms, gardens, farmers’ markets.
- Special visitors - farmers, chefs
- Learning how food grows and where it comes from
- Math, science, literacy lessons
Curriculum Resources

HARVEST for HEALTHY KIDS

Asap
Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities
Key Approaches for Education

• Frame within existing structures and activities
• Align with learning and programmatic standards
• Build provider knowledge and confidence

Photo Credit: Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation
Gardening

- Containers
- Raised Beds
- In ground gardens
- Hydroponics
- Vertical gardening
Key Approaches in Gardening

- Start small
- Create a team
- Identify resources and supports
- Clarify goals
- Connect to education and curricula
Local Foods

• Meals
• Snacks
• Taste Tests

Photo Credit: Fairyland Family Childcare, IATP Farm to Head Start
Local Food Opportunities in ECE

- Flexibility of purchasing
  - Varying class and program sizes
  - Year round programming

- ECE Priority Areas
  - Experiential learning opportunities
  - Family style meals

- Best Practice in CACFP
Local Foods in the CACFP Meal Pattern

Local foods, gardening experiences, and food and nutrition education support:

• Fruit and vegetable variety
• Increased whole grains
• Reduced sugar in snacks and beverages
• Acceptance and enjoyment of healthy foods.

Photo Credit: Little One’s Learning Center
Local Foods Resources

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Local Purchasing for Family Child Care Providers

To promote healthy and active lifestyles among children, local foods, healthy food and local foods programs that encourage healthy eating practices in early care and education settings are highly valued. Local foods, healthy foods, and healthy eating can be promoted through activities such as cooking classes, taste tests, lessons, nutrition education, and field trips. These activities not only provide important hands-on educational opportunities but also help children develop healthy eating habits.

Options for Purchasing Local Food

1. **Your Local Farmers’ Market:** Visit your local farmers’ market to purchase fresh produce directly from farmers. Markets are a great way to support local farmers and learn about the origin of the food you are buying.
2. **Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA):** Join a CSA by purchasing a share of the harvest season. CSAs provide a way for families to support local farmers and receive fresh, seasonal produce throughout the growing season.
3. **Local Food Co-ops:** Participate in a local food co-op to purchase bulk items directly from local farmers. Co-ops offer affordable and convenient access to fresh, locally grown produce.
4. **Online Marketplaces:** Many online marketplaces offer fresh, locally grown produce delivered straight to your doorstep. These platforms help you connect with local farmers and support sustainable agriculture.

Local Procurement for Child Care Centers

Fruits, vegetables, and other fresh foods are an important part of a healthy and balanced diet for children. Procuring locally grown produce can help child care centers meet their nutritional goals and support local farmers.

Sources of Local Food

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National Farm to School Network

The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy, and networking hub for communities working to bring local fresh food sourcing and food and nutrition education into school systems and early care and education settings.

NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

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Local Foods Resources
Key Approaches in Local Foods

- Build on existing systems and partners
- Know the audience – barriers and assets
- Start with dialogue
- Identify flexible approaches

Photo Credit: Ali Stone for Gardeneers
STATE LEVEL STRATEGIES
STATE FARM TO ECE CAPACITY BUILDING

Strategies:

Networks

Positions

Policies
State Farm to ECE Networks

6 Seeds of a Successful State Farm to School Network

- Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders
- Establishing a Robust Network Structure
- Setting a Strategic Vision and Direction
- Raising Awareness
- Advocating to Advance and Institutionalize the Movement
- Developing Shared Metrics and Evaluating Impact
State Farm to ECE Positions
State Farm to ECE Policy

• Legislative Policy
  – Positions
  – Programs
  – Reimbursement
  – Working groups/task force

• Leveraging Administrative Policy
  – QRIS
  – Licensing
  – Preschool Development Grants
  – Head Start
WHY FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION: IMPACTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
WHY FARM TO ECE?

KIDS WIN

FARMERS WIN

COMMUNITIES WIN
alignment with ECE priorities and goals

Family and Community Engagement

Enhanced Educational Experience

Program and Learning Standards

Health and Wellness

Advancing Equity
Health and Wellness

• Early development of eating pattern and physical activity habits and preferences
• Rely on parents/caregivers to create food/activity environments
• Increase availability, acceptance, and consumption of healthier foods
• Increase knowledge and improve food choices of parents and caregivers
The CDC’s Spectrum of Opportunities Framework for State-Level Obesity Prevention Efforts Targeting the ECE Setting
CDC Spectrum of Opportunities for Obesity Prevention in the ECE Setting

1. Organize stakeholders statewide to develop access initiatives
2. Launch or strengthen statewide Farm to ECE initiative
3. Develop guidance, tools, and incentives for central kitchens
4. Strengthen fresh food procurement and distribution chains
Enhanced Educational Experience

- Experiential education is the norm
- Enhanced learning environment
- Supporting school readiness and appropriate development
- Alignment with ECE standards and systems
Meeting Programmatic and Early Learning Standards

Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education: Considerations for Programs in YoungStar

This guide offers considerations on how to support children in developing a positive connection to food while strengthening the health of children, families, teachers, and staff through farm to ECE activities.

Wisconsin Farm to ECE increases access to local, nutritious foods and increases the supply for quality education in all types of ECE settings through:

- facilitating hands-on learning and play in nutrition, food, and agriculture;
- buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals and snacks;
- building on-site edible gardens or container gardens; and
- engaging families and caregivers in health and wellness efforts.

Programs participating in YoungStar (Wisconsin’s Child Care Quality Rating and Improvement System) work to improve the quality of care and education for children and engage with families. While the farm to ECE concept is new to some, many providers are already incorporating it into their daily activities. Specific ways to integrate farm to ECE in your program will be identified throughout this resource as relevant sections of the 2019/2020 YoungStar Evaluation Criteria are considered.

Thanks to Bridget Cullen and Kelly Etter for their review of this piece. This project is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.

Questions? Get in touch:
Beth Hanna, Farm to School Director, beth@cgroundworks.org
Jill Carlson-Groenly, Farm to ECE Trainer, jill@cgroundworks.org
Deb Moses, Farm to ECE Trainer, deb@cgroundworks.org
Phone: 608-240-0409

NC Farm to Preschool Network

Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool:
Aligning Early Childhood Rating Scale (ECERS) with Farm to Preschool

Growing Head Start Success with Farm to Early Care and Education
Aligning Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Early Learning Outcomes Framework with Farm to Early Care and Education Opportunities

Network Facilitators:
ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project)
NC CAREF (Child and Adult Care Food Program)
Family Engagement and Farm to ECE

• ECE serves the whole family
• Influence multiple settings (ECE site and home)
  – Children as agents of change
• Emphasis on family engagement
  – Most successful parent engagement actively engages with experience and feedback
• Connect to community, culture, and heritage
Family Engagement Best Practices

• Include the whole family
• Communicate frequently and in different ways
• Provide opportunities for different levels of engagement
• Capitalize on drop-off and pick-up times
• Cultivate an environment that promotes health
• Support parents in playing an active role in learning
Family Engagement Opportunities

• Family dinners
• Family taste tests
• Cooking classes
• Story time
• Garden days
• Field trips
• Community supported agriculture (CSA)
How can farm to ECE advance equity?

- Increasing quality of ECE settings
- Supporting just and equitable food systems
- Farm to ECE as a mirror and a window for children, families, and providers

Approach is everything
Equity Resources

Programs and Policy
Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool

This resource is intended to help the National Farm to School Network (NFNS) identify its racial and social equity priorities. In addition, this tool will help NFNS staff assess the implications of specific programming and policy advocacy on advancing racial and social equity, ensuring these opportunities are being reached.

Context
This tool is meant to complement the work that NFNS is already doing to define racial and social equity terms and to understand NFNS work in the context of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism. NFNS staff should remove the (context) to find NFNS’s definition of racial and social equity terms. Staff should use the Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool after they have reviewed and understood these definitions.

Table of Contents

Guide For the Reader
The first section of this assessment, “Set Outcomes with Staff and Key Stakeholders,” is meant for NFNS to use to define racial and social equity goals. This section should only be completed once by all staff members. The second section, “Food System Specific Questions,” is meant to analyze the impact of specific program and policy proposals. The third section, “Equity Programs and Policy Analysis,” should be filled out for all programs and policies. The second section should only be completed for NFNS-specific program and policy.

Finally, the Equity Programs and Policy Analysis should be completed for all programs and policy proposals.

Set Outcomes with Staff and Key Stakeholders

- “Buy-In” Questions about Stakeholder Equity Engagement
- “Buy-In” Questions about Staff and Network Priorities
- Food System Specific Questions
  - Questions for Embracing Policies and Programs Carried Forward by Partners
  - Questions for NFNS Policies and Programs

Equity Programs and Policy Analysis

- Determine Benefits and/ or Burden of Program or Policy
- Identify Policy “Holes”
- Examine Sustainability and Accountability

Acknowledgements

Appendix A
Lacy Stephens, MS, RDN
Program Manager
National Farm to School Network
lacy@farmtoschool.org
816-914-0597