FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION POSITIONS BRIEF

Photo Credit: Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools
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Introduction

About Farm to Early Care and Education

Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) is an innovative, evidence-based approach that gives young children increased exposure and access to local produce, opportunities to learn about nutrition and agriculture, and hands-on learning through gardening. Farm to ECE strategies promote benefits for children, early care educators, farmers, and broader communities.

Core Benefits

**SHAPING HEALTHY HABITS FOR LIFE.**
Farm to ECE activities, like taste tests, cooking lessons, and gardening, offer repeated exposure to new, healthy foods, promoting lifelong healthy food preferences and eating patterns.

**FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.**
Gardening and food-related activities are popular among families and create more opportunities for meaningful family engagement.

**STRENGTHEN THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM.**
Purchasing local products creates market opportunities and promotes local and regional food systems, while food-based learning educates teachers and educators about healthy habits and their local food system.

**EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION.**
Farm to ECE enhances the learning environment with hands-on learning, helping achieve early learning standards and supporting appropriate cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

Photo Credit: Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools
CORE ELEMENTS OF FARM to EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Farm to ECE implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following:

- General Introduction to State Positions

Several states have significant and growing state-level farm to ECE programs. State-level programs commonly offer:

- Professional development training for ECE educators
- State-specific resources for educators, farmers, and families
- A diverse state farm to ECE coalition
- A state-specific database or website for farm to ECE
- Farm to ECE technical assistance for educators

As the recognition of farm to ECE as an effective health intervention has grown, more states have also designated state-level individuals to supervise and coordinate state farm to ECE.

With a position solely focused on farm to ECE, states commonly create state-specific resources, make farm to ECE easier to access and implement, sustain larger and more diverse coalitions, and implement policy, systems, and environment changes that can sustain farm to ECE. State farm to ECE positions have the potential to propel other state-level approaches, such as advancing health equity by emphasizing and advocating for equity within farm to ECE reach, approach, implementation, and coalitions. Much like the State Farm to School Positions Guide generated by NFSN in 2019, this guide can help more states create farm to ECE positions and learn from the tools and resources developed by states with current positions so that farm to ECE continues to grow.
Funding

NFSN conducted a survey on farm to ECE positions in the spring of 2023. Responding state partners indicated that support for state-level farm to ECE positions came from a variety of sources. Among respondents, the majority of funding for farm to ECE positions came from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Program, and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Maternal and Child (MCH) Block Grant. Additional support for farm to ECE positions were provided by private foundations.

Federally funded programs, such as SNAP-Ed, provide evidence-based programming and support to teach families important food, nutrition, and health cooking practices through state and local organizations around the country. Funding has helped multiple states to continue advancing their initiatives to improve nutrition in children. Among respondents, 42% reported applying SNAP-Ed funding to farm to ECE positions, assessment tools, resources, and success story development and dissemination. For a deeper dive into the activities these positions oversee and how these positions are funded, please check out the ASPHN: 2023 Farm to ECE State Recognition Program report and ASPHN’s resources for Leveraging Farm to ECE to Achieve SNAP-Ed Goals.
Prevalence of Farm to ECE Positions

In the spring of 2023, the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) surveyed state farm to ECE advocates across the U.S. about state farm to ECE positions. Among the 57 respondents representing 29 states, there were 48 positions at the time of the survey.

Positions were not necessarily titled “farm to ECE” coordinators but had at least a percentage of their time dedicated to farm to ECE. To stay updated, please check out NFSN’s Network map to learn of emergent state farm to ECE efforts around the country.

Of the 48 Farm to ECE Positions:

- 50% are based in State Agencies
- 19% are based in University Extensions
- 27% are based in nonprofits.
- 4% are based in other organizations.*

*Not all survey responses clarified where positions were sponsored. The data above is based on the information NFSN had at the time of publication.

Farm to School Coordinators Taking on Farm to ECE

81% of these positions are considered full-time, and 19% are part-time.

*Not all positions have listed FTE. This data is based on the information NFSN had at the time of publication.
## States With Agency Positions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept. of Public Health and/or Human Services</th>
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<th>Dept. of Agriculture</th>
<th>Dept. of Social Services</th>
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## States With University Extension Positions

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<td>North Carolina (5)</td>
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<td>North Carolina (7)</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
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## States With Nonprofit Positions

- North Carolina's farm to ECE position is now based in the [North Carolina Division of Child and Family Well-Being](#).
- Vermont supports Farm to ECE through Vermont Agency of Education.
- Vermont supports farm to ECE through Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.
- North Carolina supports farm to ECE through [North Carolina State University Extension](#).
- Hawaii supports farm to ECE through consultant position funded by the [Hawaii State Department of Health](#) and Kamehameha Schools.
- North Carolina supports farm to ECE through the [Growing Minds NC Farm to Preschool Network of Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project](#).
State Agency Position Descriptions for Department of Agriculture

Vermont

**Position:** Farm to Institution Program Manager  
**Agency:** Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets  
**Year Created:** Serving a K-12 audience since 2008, expanded to also serve ECEs in 2017  
**Description:** The Farm to Institution Program Manager plays a key role in expanding equitable access to farm to ECE across Vermont. The primary scope of this position is managing grant programs, funded by the Vermont State Legislature, to develop and sustain farm to school and early childhood activities at schools and early childhood education programs in Vermont. In collaboration with the Farm to Early Childhood Network Manager at Shelburne Farms, the position co-facilitates a statewide Farm to Early Childhood coalition with diverse stakeholders including practitioners, decision-makers, and public and private partners.

**State Agency Position Descriptions for Department of Public Health and/or Human Services**

Colorado

**Position:** Farm to Colorado Specialist  
**Agency:** Department of Public Health and Environment  
**Year created:** 2022  
**Description:** The original purpose for the position was to advance farm to ECE with licensed and unlicensed child care providers and all institutions serving children under the age of five. The position carried over duties to ensure the completion of applicable USDA Farm to School Grant activities. The position has continued with funding from different federal sources such as the MCH block grant and CDC SPAN grant funding. This position serves as Colorado’s Farm to Child Collaborative leader, working to engage state agency partners and build county level networks of support. The position exists to provide training, resources, skill building, effective communication, evaluation, and monitoring of farm to ECE.
University Extension Position Descriptions

Iowa

Position: Education Extension Specialist I - Farm to School and Early Care Programs
Agency: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
Year Created: 2022
Description: This position supports the Food Systems Team’s farm to school and early-care programming, bringing specific expertise to develop farm to early care resources, implement farm to early care learning collaboratives, and lead statewide farm to early care initiatives.

Nonprofits

Hawai‘i

Position: Farm to ECE Coordinator
Agency: Hawai‘i Public Health Institute
Year Created: 2022
Description: This position is designed to increase access to healthy local foods in ECEs by expanding farm to ECE capacity, coordination, and planning across the state and to help implement farm to ECE education, gardens, local food procurement, and culturally adaptive resources.

Example Farm to ECE Job Descriptions

View this link for examples of several farm to ECE position job descriptions from different states.
Details for statewide farm to ECE positions reveal valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of such positions. The following case studies highlight successful strategies, innovative approaches, and lessons learned. These examples offer a deeper understanding of how farm to ECE positions can contribute to healthy eating habits and food access.
Development

In 2016, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation granted the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children funding that led to a temporary farm to ECE coordinator position. By 2022, the state recognized the importance of farm to ECE, and a farm to ECE coordinator position was established permanently at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Funding

Grant funding, including funding from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (2022-23), Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, and the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.

Successes

The Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coordinator has helped Iowa build a strong coalition and program with diverse partnerships. The farm to ECE coordinator position includes an emphasis on understanding Iowa's food system, leading the coordinator to partner with the Iowa Farmers Union. This partnership has helped the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care create initiatives that benefit educators, food producers, and communities.

In 2021, Iowa created the Iowa Food System Coalition and a statewide food system plan.

Over 225,000 children and youth have participated in Iowa Farm to School and Early Care initiatives, and $800,000 has been invested in Iowa farm to ECE programs.

In 2022, Iowa's farm to ECE coalition released a series of three trainings on ECE gardens, local food sourcing, and food & agriculture education.

Iowa is now creating a mentor farm to ECE program and building farm to ECE learning collaboratives that will host connections with educators to farmers and food hubs.

Challenges, Barriers, and Recommendations

Despite the value of farm to ECE initiatives, ECE educators commonly don't have the capacity or funding for scratch cooking. This, along with fluctuating funding streams, can interfere with farm to ECE and sustained efforts.

Iowa’s advice is to build relationships and secure a group of stakeholders that support farm to ECE to create a coalition built on strong collaboration and community engagement. They also emphasize the importance of placing power in the communities that are impacted by the decisions made at the state-level.
Development

Since 2021, the California Department of Social Services Farm to Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) initiative has supported all CACFP operators, including ECE providers, purchasing locally sourced foods, providing nutrition education, and offering hands-on learning in a garden.

Funding

The USDA Child Nutrition State Administrative Expense Fund supports three positions administering California’s farm to CACFP/ECE initiative. Two positions are nutrition education staff spending 5-10% of their time on farm to ECE activities, and the third position is supervisory.

Successes

Once California established the farm to CACFP initiative, the staff created a California Farm to CACFP website and surveyed CACFP operators who identified barriers, support, and resources needed for a successful program. In addition, the team created farm to CACFP tip sheets for each program type and presented at several state-wide conferences to raise awareness of the farm to CACFP initiative.

Challenges, Barriers, and Recommendations

Challenges have included identifying what resources are already available, and what gaps need to be filled to ensure all the CACFP program types are supported.

California recommends connecting with similar programs to learn and collaborate with as many state and local partners as possible, emphasizing the importance of a strong support network.
Development

In 2012, nutrition staff within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), together with outside partners, had the support of leaders to begin addressing farm to ECE in state level programs (CACFP and CDC funded SPAN) and to assist in state-level efforts. This included reallocating staff time in two positions (~.10 FTE each) to focus on farm to ECE. State-level efforts of these staff and other important partners included the formation of a coalition that eventually (2015) was named the NC Farm to Preschool Network.

In 2016, the staff person in SPAN moved to another NCDHHS program (Whole Child Health) and was able to continue contributing to this work (contributing ~.10 FTE). In 2022, another nutrition staff in NCDHHS, funded by CDC SPAN funds, joined the NC Farm to Preschool Network and its leadership team (contributing ~.10 FTE).

Funding

North Carolina’s CACFP Nutrition Program Consultant position is 100% funded through USDA CACFP funds which are administered through the Community Nutrition Services Section, Division of Child & Family Well-Being (DCFW), NCDHHS.

The Nutrition Program Consultant position, which is housed in the Whole Child Health Section, Division of Child & Family Well-Being is 100% funded through DHHS/HRSA MCH Block Grant Funds. The Nutrition Program Consultant position which is housed in the Community and Clinical Connections for Prevention and Health Branch, Division of Public Health, NCDHHS is 100% federally funded through the CDC SPAN grant.

North Carolina also has additional farm to ECE “statewide” positions (both with varying FTEs dedicated to farm to ECE) at the non-profit Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS). CEFS is a partnership of North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Successes

Each of the North Carolina farm to ECE positions has successes that are both specific to their program and funding and also collaborative through their leadership and active involvement in the NC Farm to Preschool Network Advisory Committee. The NC Farm to Preschool Network has been recognized as being one of the oldest (2012) and most active farm to ECE statewide coalitions in the US. Partner organizations serving in a leadership capacity for the Network have celebrated many successes as they've pulled together collective resources, staffing, funding, and partners to move this work forward at a state and local level. Examples of this work can be found here: NC Farm to Preschool Network.
The CACFP Nutrition Program Consultant position notes these successes: developing the North Carolina farm to CACFP website, increasing awareness of using CACFP funds for local foods and facility gardens, creating CACFP resources that inspire CACFP providers to serve local and seasonal foods, such as seasonal menus, and collaborating with state partners to promote the North Carolina Crunch and develop the farm to ECE Policy Strategic Plan supporting statewide farm to ECE initiatives.

The Whole Child Health Section Nutrition Program Consultant notes these successes: contributing to the long-term success and outcomes of the NC Farm to Preschool Network Advisory Committee through assisting with the formation and leadership of the Network since 2012. Increasing the Network’s focus on policy, systems, and environmental change work and increasing awareness about the benefits of farm to ECE with leaders and to cross-pollinate this work through other Section programs focused in the ECE space.

The Community and Clinical Connections for Prevention and Health Branch Nutrition Program Consultant notes these early successes: forming partnerships that will further the reach of farm to ECE. The farm to ECE Policy Strategic Plan that was developed in 2023 for the NC Farm to Preschool Network. The plan will help streamline the focus of the farm to ECE work in North Carolina by providing the farm to ECE community with strong goals to work towards and create new and more powerful collaborations for the future.

Challenges, Barriers, and Recommendations

A major challenge that all the Consultants noted were time constraints when balancing different projects and roles since these positions are not solely focused on farm to ECE. Other barriers include lack of additional state/federal level funding that could complement programming.

North Carolina advises ensuring that management is engaged and invested in this work by showing progress being made as positions are formed or reformulated, and then on an ongoing basis. They also suggest working to build and maintain strong partnerships among state agency staff in broader ECE roles to help build the case for why farm to ECE should be considered a priority for ECE programs and the children they serve.

Additionally, once farm to ECE positions (even partial) are established, ensure the integration of farm to ECE language into what normally may have been a generic job description.
The farm to ECE movement is gaining momentum, thanks in part to the growing number of dedicated positions supporting state-wide efforts. This report demonstrates the successes achieved thus far by appointed statewide farm to ECE positions.

While this report offers a glimpse into the emergent themes of the farm to ECE movement, the data presented is not meant to be comprehensive but rather, a snapshot of some of the current efforts.

As more states recognize the importance and benefits of farm to ECE, it is vital to prioritize dedicated policies, resources, and positions to advance the movement.

Together we can ensure that young children and their families have access to healthy, local foods while fostering a connection to agriculture, the environment, and their communities by growing and strengthening farm to ECE across the U.S.

Acknowledgements
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Photo Credit: Mississippi Farm to School Network
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