



Community Nutrition's Farm to ECE

IN A NUTSHELL

What is Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE)

Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE) is a natural extension of farm to school that offers increased access to healthy local foods, gardening opportunities, and food-based activities to enhance the quality of the educational experience in all types of ECE settings (e.g., preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, programs in K-12 school districts).

Farm to ECE activities are a natural fit for the 0-5 age group and offer extensive benefits in these formative years. Children are developing taste preferences and eating habits that will impact their health for a lifetime. Farm to ECE activities not only integrate seamlessly with the learning styles of young children but are also an evidenced-based approach to meeting educational standards and improving the quality of ECE environments. In addition to promoting health, wellness, and high-quality educational opportunities in ECE settings, Farm to ECE expands healthy food access and family engagement, provides additional market opportunities for farmers, and supports thriving communities. Farm to ECE is truly a win for kids, families, farmers, and communities. [National Farm to School Network](#)

Getting Started

[Getting Started with Farm to ECE](#)

This resource from the National Farm to School Network provides an overview and outlines the initial steps for starting a Farm to ECE program.

[Digging into Farm to ECE](#)

Learn how Farm to ECE can help you enhance health and the educational experience of your children through local food purchasing, hands-on learning, gardening, and family engagement!

Find a Farmer

Many ECE settings want to start serving local foods in their programs but are unsure of where to purchase them from. The below links will help you locate numerous producers and growers in your area. Remember you must still follow USDA procurement regulations when purchasing local foods!

[Local Harvest](#)

Use this website to find farmers' markets, family farms, and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area, where you can buy produce, grass-fed meats, and many other goodies.

This website can be used to locate farmers markets, family farms, and other sources of sustainably grown food in a specific area. It provides a convenient way to purchase fresh produce, grass-fed meats, and variety of other locally sourced goods.

[Wisconsin Farm Fresh Atlases](#)

These regional food guides include farms, farmers' markets, restaurants, stores, and other businesses that sell local food and use sustainable production and business practices. The Atlases cover most regions of Wisconsin.



Farm to ECE Procurement

CACFP institutions must procure all goods and services using the procurement regulations found in [7 CFR 226.22](#) and [2 CFR Part 200.317-326](#). Additional guidance on procurement can be found in [FNS Instruction 796-2 Rev. 4](#) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's [Guidance Memorandum 4: Procurement and Vendor Agreements](#).

[National Farm to School Network - Farm to Early Care and Education, Local Procurement for Child Care Centers](#)

[USDA: Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs](#)

Across the country, an increasing number of child nutrition program operators are sourcing local foods and providing complementary educational activities that emphasize food, agriculture, and nutrition. While interest and enthusiasm for buying local foods has grown across the country, uncertainty about the rules for purchasing locally grown products persists. This resource is designed primarily for school food professionals operating a National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program. However, the many lessons for identifying and procuring locally grown and produced food are broadly applicable to operators of various federal child nutrition programs, such as the Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Farm to ECE Food Safety

One of the largest concerns most Food Service Professionals have with serving local food is food safety. With proper planning and training, you can safely serve local food in your child care setting! Whether you are starting a garden or bringing in a small sample for children, the below resources should prepare you for a food safe environment.

[Best Practices: Handling Fresh Produce in Schools](#)

From USDA and the Institute of Child Nutrition (formerly the National Food Service Management Institute), these Food Safety Best Practices are applicable to Farm to ECE settings.

These food safety best practices, provided by the USDA and the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN), are applicable to Farm to ECE settings. They offer guidelines to ensure the safe handling, preparation, and serving of food in environments where young children are served.

[Food Safety Tips for School Gardens](#)

From the Institute of Child Nutrition (formerly the National Food Service Management Institute), – School gardening tips regarding site selection, materials, and water use; chemical, fertilizer, compost, and manure use; growing and harvesting; and serving school garden produce through school meal programs. Many of the tips in this resource apply to Farm to ECE.

This resource from the ICN provides school gardening tips covering site selection, materials, and water use, as well as guidance on the use of chemicals, fertilizers, compost, and manure. It also includes best practices for growing, harvesting, and serving produce from school gardens. Many of the tips outlined in this resource are applicable to Farm to ECE programs.

Farm to ECE National Resources

Farm to ECE is happening all over the United States and there are plenty of national organizations to learn from, including the USDA, Growing Minds, and the National Farm to School Network.

[USDA- Grow it, Try it, Like it!](#)

Grow it, Try it, Like it is designed to help CACFP operators provide garden-based nutrition education for children ages 3 to 5 years old in family child care settings.

[Growing Minds](#)

This toolkit includes lesson plans that are developed to make exploring food and farms fun with young learners. It also includes take home information for parents and families that highlights recipes and gardening tips.

[National Farm to School Network](#)

This guide helps child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start and programs in K-12 educate students in local food sourcing, school gardens, and food and agriculture education.

Other Farm to ECE Resources

[Color Me Healthy](#)

Resources to get kids excited about eating smart and moving more, including teacher's guide, parent newsletters, posters, and recipes.

This resource is designed to get children excited about eating smart and staying active. It includes a teachers' guide, parent newsletters, posters, and recipes, all aimed at promoting healthy habits and encouraging a more active lifestyle.

[Early Sprouts](#)

Early Sprouts Institute includes gardening and nutrition curriculum for early care and education settings and trainings for early childhood educators.

The Early Sprouts Institute offers gardening and nutrition education specifically designed for ECE settings. It also provides training for ECE educators to help implement Farm to ECE.

