

FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION GROWING HEALTHY EATERS



Early care and education (ECE) programs can use farm to ECE to help children learn better.

Farm to ECE includes purchasing and serving local foods in meals and snacks, as well as experiences like gardening with children and other educational activities related to food, nutrition, and agriculture.

Children and families eat more local fruits and vegetables when ECE programs offer farm to ECE.

Farm to ECE can be beneficial in any setting, including:

- Licensed family child care homes
- Unlicensed family child care homes
- Child care centers
- Head Start or Early Head Start programs
- Privately funded preschools
- State-funded preschools
- Preschool or child care based in K-12 schools/districts
- Tribal child care programs

Why use farm to ECE?

- Improve children's eating behaviors, including their willingness to try new foods
- Develop children's awareness and knowledge of healthy eating, where food comes from, seasonality, gardening, and agriculture
- Serve more healthy foods in early care and education settings
- Connect with community partners to increase resources such as garden supplies, food vendor sources, and buying capacity
- Support local farmers and food businesses
- Deepen family engagement through gardening opportunities, sharing family recipes and food preferences, and influencing healthy eating in families

Five steps to grow your farm to ECE program

1) Get Started

- Learn about seasonality and what grows in your area
- Find places in your menu to use local foods, substitute local products when in season, or introduce new recipes at snacks or meals

2) Build Community Connections

- Connect with farmers and vendors near you: www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets
- Build a farm to ECE team and connect with other local organizations

3) Prepare to Purchase Local Foods

- Develop a procurement plan for your program
- Gather information about potential vendors

4) Choose Foods and Vendors

- Ask local vendors about their products, practices, and prices
- Discuss food safety and logistics with farmers and vendors

5) Purchase Local Foods

- Engage in conversations, taste tests, and other activities around new foods
- Keep records of your purchases

For more information, visit:
www.mifarmtoece.org

For general inquiries: EXPLORE: foodsystems.msu.edu
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Email addresses and phone numbers for individual staff members can be found on the people page of our website.

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Find the right purchasing options and resources for your programs

Small family child care homes and centers

- Purchase from a local farmers market or farm stand: www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets
- Purchase a CSA (community supported agriculture) share: www.localharvest.org/csa/
- Start a garden on-site. Contact your local Extension Educator for information and resources: <https://nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory>

Large child care centers

- Purchase directly from a farmer: www.localharvest.org
- Find local, seasonal foods from a distributor or food hub. Learn more with www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-directories
- Ask your food provider or food service provider for a list of local products

Finding funding for farm to ECE

USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funds can be used to purchase local foods and gardening supplies to help you serve fresh, healthy foods in child care settings.

Learn more at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-day-care-centers>.

The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems advances regionally-rooted food systems through applied research, education, and outreach by uniting the knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders with that of MSU faculty and staff. Our work fosters a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the nation, and the planet by advancing systems that produce food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable. Learn more at foodsystems.msu.edu.

