

## Farm to Early Care and Education

### WHAT IS FARM TO ECE?

*Farm to Early Care and Education (farm to ECE) is a movement that promotes serving local food; gardening; and food, nutrition, and agriculture education in early care and education settings.*

### BENEFITS OF FARM TO ECE

- ✔ Supports healthy eating in children.
- ✔ Increases children's knowledge of seasonality, where food comes from, gardening, and agriculture.
- ✔ Supports local farmers and producers.
- ✔ Increases the amount of healthy foods served in participating child care sites.

### INCLUDING FARM TO ECE IN YOUR CHILD CARE

There are many ways to add elements of farm to ECE into your child care setting. Here are some ideas to get you started:

#### BUYING LOCAL OR REGIONAL FOODS

While purchasing all foods from local or regional sources may not be feasible, featuring a few local foods is a great way to incorporate farm to ECE principles.

- ✔ **Taste Test Local Foods:** If your area is known for a certain agricultural product use it as an opportunity to provide a fun activity and lesson on that food followed by a taste test.
- ✔ **Visit a U-Pick Farm:** Take the children on a field trip to a local U-Pick Farm for a fun agricultural lesson. Try making a recipe using your harvest for snack!
- ✔ **Celebrate:** Apples are grown locally in Michigan and Illinois. Join in on the fun by celebrating the annual Great Lake's Apple Crunch in October and crunching into a local apple. Check your respective state for registration information.
- ✔ **Shop at Farmers Markets:** Visit a local farmers market or check for signage at grocery stores to find local and regionally produced foods.

#### GARDENING

- ✔ **Start Small:** An herb garden is an easy way to start gardening! Herbs are easy to maintain, can be grown indoors, and can be easily added to meals and snacks served at child care homes or centers.
- ✔ **Grow in Containers:** If there is not enough space to garden in the ground, consider growing in containers. Certain varieties of vegetables, herbs, and fruits can be grown successfully in containers. Consult with your local garden center or University Extension office for more information.
- ✔ **Visit a Learning Garden:** If you are not able to support a garden, see if any neighbors who garden would be willing to let the children visit. There are also a variety of community gardens and learning gardens that may support garden visits from community members.



## FOOD, NUTRITION, AND AGRICULTURE EDUCATION

- ✓ Include books about cooking, nutrition, farming, or gardening at story time.
- ✓ Take the children on a field trip to the farmers market for a scavenger hunt.
- ✓ Play a fruit and vegetable card game matching names to pictures.
- ✓ Teach a lesson about a different fruit or vegetable each month and let the children taste it.
- ✓ Bring the children into the kitchen and let them help with simple kitchen tasks.

## FARM TO ECE RESOURCES

If you are looking for more ways to get involved or have questions, check out these available resources.

### ILLINOIS FOCUSED

#### Illinois Farm to School:

[www.illinoisfarmtoschool.org](http://www.illinoisfarmtoschool.org)

- Farm to ECE toolkit
- Harvest of the Month Program

#### University of Illinois Extension:

[www.extension.illinois.edu](http://www.extension.illinois.edu)



### MICHIGAN FOCUSED

#### Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems Farm to ECE:

[www.canr.msu.edu/michigan-farm-to-ece](http://www.canr.msu.edu/michigan-farm-to-ece)

- Local Food for Little Eaters: A Purchasing Toolbox for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

#### Michigan State University Extension:

[www.canr.msu.edu/outreach](http://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach)

### DID YOU KNOW?

October is National Farm to School Month!

### NATIONAL RESOURCES

- Great Lakes Apple Crunch: [www.cias.wisc.edu/applecrunch/](http://www.cias.wisc.edu/applecrunch/)
- Small Bites Adventure Club: [www.smallbites.club/](http://www.smallbites.club/)
- National Farm to School Network - Farm to ECE: [www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/early-care-and-education](http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/early-care-and-education)
- Grow It, Try It, Like It! Fun with Fruits and Vegetables
  - Family Child Care: [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it-homes](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it-homes)
  - Child Care Centers: [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it)

Sources: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/f2s/FarmtoPreschool.pdf>, <http://illinoisfarmtoschool.org/getting-started/>, <https://www.canr.msu.edu/michigan-farm-to-ece/index>

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