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GETTING STARTED WITH FARM TO PRESCHOOL

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GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing and food and agriculture education into school systems and preschools.

What is farm to preschool?

Farm to preschool is a natural extension of the farm to school model, and works to connect early care and education settings (preschools, Head Start, center-based, programs in K-12 school districts, and family child care programs) to local food producers with the objectives of serving locally-grown, healthy foods to young children, improving child nutrition, and providing related educational opportunities.

Getting started

Farm to preschool offers multiple strategies to improve the health of children and communities. This list provides some easy first steps to develop a lasting farm to preschool program in your community:

- 1 Assess where you are and where you'd like to be.**
Are your goals centered on:
 - Purchasing local foods to be served in meals or snacks?
 - Establishing a garden?
 - Implementing other farm to preschool activities (field trips to farms or farmers' markets, cooking lessons, etc.)?
 - Engaging families in local food access and education?
 - All of the above?
- 2 Form a team and collaborate:** Teachers and administrators, parents, Child Care Resource and Referral staff, local farmers, community organizations, and even local colleges/universities can play important roles in establishing a sustainable farm to preschool program.
- 3 Establish one or two attainable goals to get started.** Some ideas include:
 - Create a planning team that includes potential collaborators such as parents and teachers.
 - Identify snack or meal items that you would like to transition to local.
 - Find a farmer, farmers' market, grocery store, or wholesaler to connect you to local foods. Ask your local Cooperative Extension (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>) for help making these connections!
 - Plan a local foods meal, snack, day, or event.
 - Reach out to a local nursery or hardware store for donations or other support for starting an edible garden.

FARM TO PRESCHOOL IN ACTION

Many programs exist across the country—here are two examples:

In-home providers create farm to preschool through a backyard garden

In Los Angeles, Ethan and Friends Family Child Care owner Shaunte Taylor has transformed her modest inner-city backyard to include raised beds, a compost bin, multiple fruit trees, and a chicken coop. Now, children plant seeds, amend the soil while investigating worms and insects, water plants, and harvest and prepare simple recipes using their garden produce.

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WHY FARM TO PRESCHOOL?

KIDS WIN

Farm to school provides all kids access to nutritious, high quality, local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Farm to school activities enhance classroom education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition.

FARMERS WIN

Farm to school can serve as a significant financial opportunity for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers by opening the doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.

COMMUNITIES WIN

Buying from local producers and processors reduces the carbon footprint of food transportation while stimulating the local economy. Educational activities such as school gardens and composting programs help to create a healthy environment around the school community.

The National Farm to School Network has compiled resources on this topic and others as well as contact information for people in your state and region who are working on farm to school programs. Find more information and join our network: www.farmtoschool.org

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Learn from others. If you are running into an obstacle, it is likely that there is someone out there who has run into it before! Some places to connect and learn from others include:

- The farm to preschool website (farmtopreschool.org). Find information and case studies that are specific to early care settings, and sign up for an e-newsletter to receive regular communication about news and resources.
- The National Farm to School Network (farmtoschool.org). Find abundant resources and contact information for people in your state and region who are working on farm to school and farm to preschool.
- Your county or state's Child Care Resource and Referral agency. Many of these agencies can provide ways to learn about and connect with other early care programs that are implementing farm to preschool activities. Find local agencies at usa.childcareaware.org
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) staff in your state. Learn how CACFP can help you make local food more economical and free up resources for other farm to preschool activities. CACFP state agency contacts can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/contacts/statedirectory.htm

FARM TO PRESCHOOL IN ACTION

Oregon Child Development Coalition works directly with local farmers to procure food for meals

Early care centers have proven to be an ideal market for La Esperanza Farm, an incubator farm for local organic and sustainable Latino farmers in Forest Grove, Oregon. Working closely with the Oregon Child Development Coalition's USDA Food Services Specialist, Head Start centers now receive deliveries of local produce for meals, nourishing both children and their community.



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Promote farm to preschool in your community. Ideas include sharing information and recipes in parent newsletters, posting garden or field trip photos to a web or social media site, or inviting local media to your activities.

School districts versus early care settings

There are a few important distinctions between school districts and early care settings:

- Local foods procurement: Preschools and family child care programs tend to purchase at smaller volume and generally do not offer a la carte choices or multiple meal options. Small purchasing volumes can be a good fit for small farmers who may not have enough volume to work with an entire school district.
- Class size: Preschools and family child care programs tend to have smaller numbers of children, and their schedules can vary (child care might be for only a few hours, or it could be up to half or full days). Smaller groups of children provide greater flexibility, while shorter days can limit some activities.
- Curriculum: Common Core is the standard for K-12, while experiential education is highly encouraged in preschool. This is a great fit with many farm to preschool activities such as gardening, cooking, and taste tests.
- Parental involvement: parental involvement tends to be strong during the preschool years, which can be a huge asset for farm to preschool programming.