



Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education

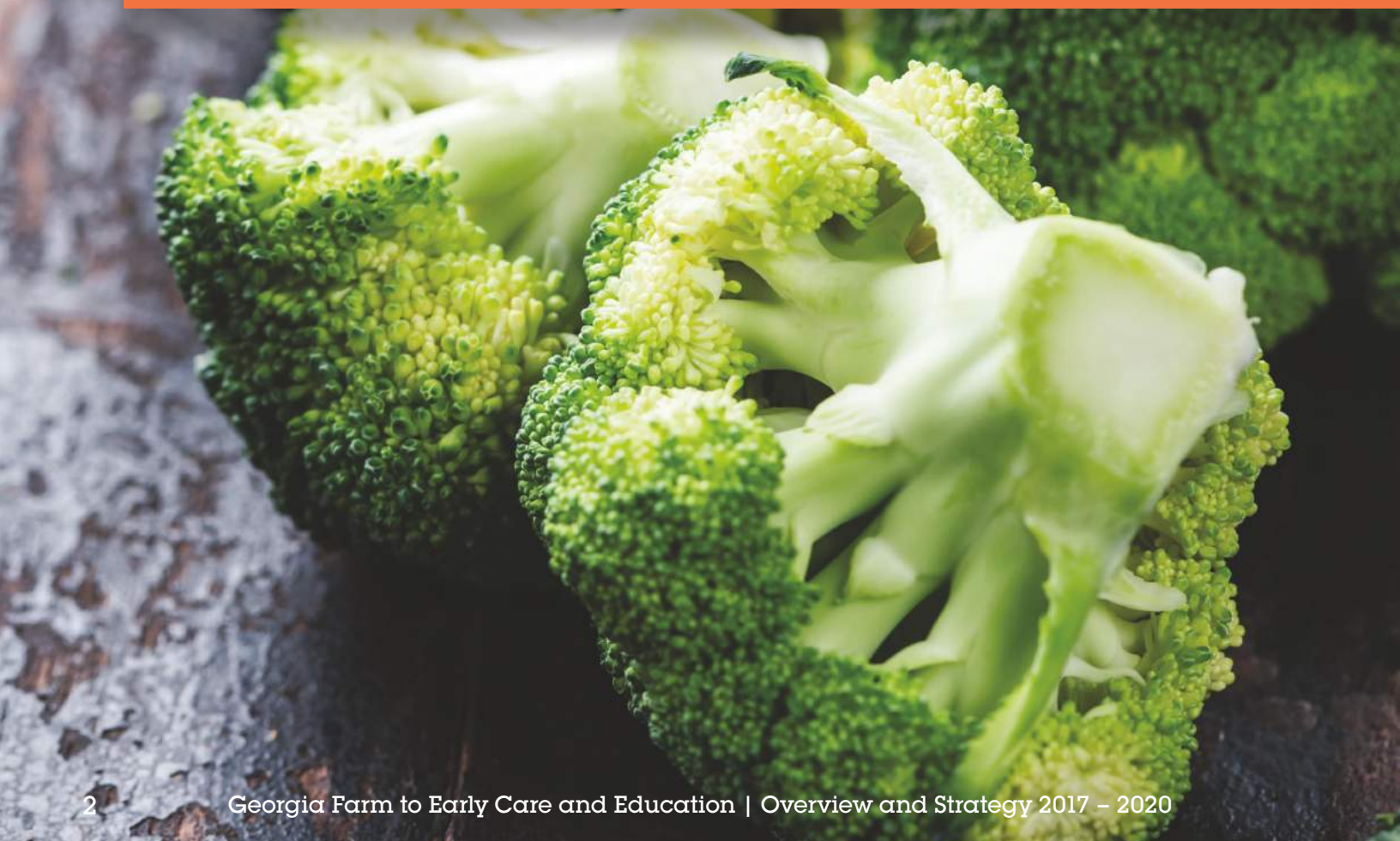


Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education

Overview
and Strategy
2017 - 2020



Prepared in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Shape, and Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, December 2016



The purpose of the Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Overview and Strategy report is to provide a:

- General overview of Farm to Early Care and Education national and state goals and status
- Review of the “Spectrum of Opportunities” for Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education
- Three-year strategy for the Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition

Farm to Early Care and Education (farm to ECE), formerly known as “Farm to Preschool”, describes food-based activities and strategies that support healthy development and learning goals in all types of early care and education (ECE) settings (e.g., preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start and programs in K-12 school districts).

Farm to school activities are a natural fit for the 0-5 age group and offer extensive benefits in these young years. Students are exposed to healthy, local foods through meals and snacks, taste tests, lessons, cooking activities, gardening, field trips, farmer visits and more.

Farm to school activities not only integrate seamlessly with the learning style of young children, but are also an evidenced-based approach to meeting educational standards and improving the quality of early care and education environments. In addition to promoting health, wellness and high quality learning, farm to school expands healthy food access for our most vulnerable children, encourages family engagement, provides additional market opportunities for farmers and supports thriving communities.

The objectives of Farm to ECE are to:

- Increase access to locally-grown, healthy foods
- Provide gardening opportunities and experiences
- Enhance the quality of the ECE experience
- Promote and enhance family and parent engagement
- Create a culture and model of health and wellness in ECE settings

Special thanks to Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Shape, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, National Farm to School Network, Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition members, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, The Food Trust, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Diane Harris, Ph.D. and many others.

*This report was compiled by Erin Croom, M.S. and Georgia Organics.
Kenna Ho served as the Project Intern.*



Farm to Early Care and Education

Overview

Farm to Early Care

Farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) offers increased access to local food sourcing, school gardens and food and agriculture education to enhance the quality of the educational experience in ECE settings. Farm to ECE is on the rise nationally and in Georgia. Surveys conducted by the National Farm to School Network found that 48 states and Washington, D.C. have farm to school programs in early care and education sites, up from 39 states in 2012. The 2016 USDA Farm to School Census found that 63% of Georgia school districts participating in farm to school are also reaching pre-K students, and Georgia ranks 2nd in the nation of school districts reaching pre-K. In 2014, Georgia hosted the first “Farm to Preschool Summit” in the nation with over 200 participants.

The Need

The early childhood population faces a number of significant challenges. Almost a quarter (22.8%) of children ages two to five are currently overweight or obese, placing them at higher risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and social and emotional problems. Obese children are also more likely to become obese adults, further contributing to the likelihood they will face obesity related health complications.³ At the same time, food insecurity – a challenge faced by 23.7% of households with children under age four – is a strong contributing risk factor to overweight and obesity in children, as well as a predictor of delayed cognitive and emotional development. Young children consistently exposed to poor quality environments are less likely to be prepared for school and may have delayed social and emotional development.⁵

With 8 million children spending an average of 33 hours per week in early care and education settings, farm to ECE has the potential to set up a significant number of young children for success with healthy habits and high quality learning environments.⁶

1 Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Flegal KM. (2015) “Prevalence of childhood and adult obesity in the United States, 2011-2012.” J Amer Med Assoc. Retrieved at: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24570244

2 Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Childhood obesity causes & consequences. 2015. Retrieved at www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/causes.html.

3 Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Childhood obesity causes & consequences. 2015. Retrieved at www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/causes.html.

4 Child Trends Databank. Food insecurity. (2014.) Retrieved at: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=food-insecurity.

5 American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care. Quality early education and childcare from birth to kindergarten. *Pedi.* 2005; 115(1), 187-191. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2004-2213

6 Results from the 2013 Georgia Farm to Preschool Survey, Memorie Nichols



“Strategies to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables among young children are needed for many reasons, including weight management, prevention of chronic diseases, establishment of healthy eating patterns, and provision of important nutrients. Farm to ECE may serve as one of these strategies as it circumvents issues such as household food insecurity, food deserts, and household income or fruit and vegetable preparation capacity that may act as barriers to children’s availability of and access to fruits and vegetables.”⁷

Current Programs in Georgia

The 2014 Georgia Farm to Preschool survey of early childhood care and education centers reports that “94% percent of 859 centers reported that they had conducted some type of farm to ECE activity within the past year, with the most frequently conducted activities being: 1) educating children about food, nutrition, or where food comes from, 2) cooking or preparing food with children, and 3) serving meals or snacks with at least some locally grown food.”

The top activities in which facilities reported interest in adding or expanding were 1) educating children about food, nutrition, or where food comes from; 2) serving meals or snacks with at least some locally grown food; 3) cooking or preparing food with children; 4) inviting a farmer to visit children; and 5) planting or working with children on an edible garden. The most frequently reported motivations for wanting to add or expand farm to ECE activities included teaching children about where food comes from and/or how it is grown (70.2%); improving children’s health and nutrition (66.3%); and providing children with experiential learning opportunities (50.0%).

To grow farm to ECE in Georgia, programs identified the following needs:

- Networking events to share ideas between centers
- List of available Farm to ECE curricula
- Trainings for staff on how to implement curriculum and how to engage children
- List of local farmers and chefs
- List of local farm to ECE experts to reach out to and other available resources

The results of the National survey can be found below, and are similar to Georgia’s results. (www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/ECESurvey_Factsheet.pdf)

7 Results from the 2013 Georgia Farm to Preschool Survey, Memorie Nichols

Examples of Statewide Farm to ECE Networks and Strategies

Farm to ECE is still a new movement, but several states have established working coalitions, state-sponsored programs and initiatives. The following are a few examples.

North Carolina: The North Carolina (NC) Farm to Preschool Network was established in 2015. The purpose of the NC Farm to Preschool Network is to connect and educate, as well as develop and share resources between community and state partners, farmers, early childhood educators and families to spark the local foods movement in early childhood education environments. Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) and the North Carolina Child and Adult Care Food Program (NC CACFP) brought together organizations from across the state to discuss farm to early care and education in North Carolina. Since that time, ASAP, Dept. of Health and Human Services and NC CACFP have convened monthly conference calls, defined farm to preschool for North Carolina, collected farm to preschool resources, agreed upon an operating structure (Network) and completed a Network project to align the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale with suggested farm to preschool activities: <http://growing-minds.org/documents/reach-for-the-stars.pdf>.

The NC F2Preschool Network is currently engaged in the following activities:

- Defining Network membership;
- Disseminating the Reach for the Stars document;
- Developing a definitive resource with the Dept. of Environmental Health;
- Growing the farm to preschool movement in North Carolina; and
- Being a representative to National Farm to School Network's Farm to ECE work group.

Wisconsin: Wisconsin also has an independent working coalition which is in the process of creating a strategic plan. Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education's vision is as follows, "ECE providers have access to local foods and resources to help children develop lifelong healthy eating habits." The coalition consists of garden training and education partners, health services and the state department of public instruction.

In 2015, the group focused on two objectives: 1) creating a website and 2) developing language to include one point on the 40-point quality rated system (Young Star). The group wished to have the state adopt a point for nutrition/physical activity, which must meet CACFP guidelines, and/or be earned through a gardening quota. Finally, Wisconsin's ECE network participates in the Great Lakes Apple Crunch (<http://www.cias.wisc.edu/applecrunch/>). The Apple Crunch is a multi-state event that celebrates National Farm to School Month by having children crunch into locally and 3 regionally grown apples at the same day and time. The website is here: (<http://dpi.wi.gov/community-nutrition/cacfp/farm-2-ece>)

Wisconsin Farm to ECE Objectives:

- Complete a scan of existing early care and education programs throughout the state that are currently engaging or are interested in farm to ECE, including analyzing the Wisconsin results of the National Farm to School Network's ECE survey.
- Create language and educational materials for a legislative proposal for a Wisconsin Farm to School/ECE Month. Collaborate with the Farm to ECE Workgroup to develop language and an action plan to expand Wisconsin's definition of Farm to School to include children ages 0-5 in all early education and child care settings.
- Work together with partners in North Carolina and elsewhere to develop and advocate for farm to ECE specific standards to be added to the major national childcare accreditation systems. Propose similar language for Madison's child care accreditation program.
- Continue to move forward with Young Star Workgroup to compose and advocate for additional language around farm to ECE, including collaborating with partners to produce the necessary tool kits, training, and resources. Similarly, create and advocate for commentary in child care licensing and regulation that promotes and rewards healthy eating policies and practice.
- Collaborate with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), farm to ECE groups, and non-profit gardening, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), local food producer associations (as well as for profit food service companies) to connect ECE providers with healthy, local, fresh food.
- Develop model child care program policies around farm to ECE to include: gardening, sourcing local foods for meals and snacks, farm field trips, nutrition/agriculture lessons, taste testing, and family engagement.
- Establish a database of funding opportunities to share with partners.
- Establish a farm to ECE recognition award for early education and child care programs that exemplify healthy eating practices and policies and for farmers/producers that supply and partner with these sites.



Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania has a statewide farm to ECE recognition program, The Food Trust's Farm to ECE Recognition and Awards. The Food Trust seeks to recognize five early care and education providers (child care centers, licensed family child care, private preschools, Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs, Pre-K Counts, preschool or childcare centers through K-12 school districts, and others) in Pennsylvania that are engaged in farm to ECE. This refers to early care center programs with established activities representative of Pennsylvania's three pillars of farm to ECE: food and agriculture education, hands-on gardening opportunities, and use of local food for meals, snacks or taste tests. As part of this recognition, centers will be awarded \$1,000. Learn more here: thefoodtrust.org/about

South Carolina: The South Carolina Team Nutrition program oversees farm to preschool initiatives, and assists centers in connecting farm to early care activities to their Quality Rated program. They have created a useful website: <http://scfarmtoinstitution.com/farm-to-preschool/>.

Vermont: Vermont's farm to school strategy includes farm to ECE: strategy.vermontfarmtoschool.org/index.

For additional farm to ECE program examples, visit the National Farm to School Network website at www.farmtopreschool.org/programmodels.html. Case studies can be found here: farmtoschool.org/news-and-articles/good-food-great-kids.



Overview of Georgia Early Child Care

The early care and education industry in Georgia cares for an estimated 337,024 children each year. Centers and family child care homes serve children of need: “An estimated 36.6% of children in centers and 68.9% of children in school-based programs receive meals subsidized through federal food assistance programs.” More than 75% of centers and family child care homes operate 12 months per year. Among those, 10.9% of family child care homes and 2.8% of centers operate during the weekends.

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the childcare and early education needs of Georgia’s children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia’s Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program and federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia’s community-powered child care rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education.

The following types of licensed care are available in Georgia:

Home-based Care

- ***Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH):*** Programs operated in a private residential home and provide care for three to six children under the age of 14.

Center-based Care

- ***Child Care Learning Center (CCLC):*** Programs operated by a person, society, agency, corporation, institution, or group that receives pay for group care. CCLCs care for seven or more children under the age of 14.
- ***Georgia’s Pre-K Program:*** Voluntary, universal education program for Georgia’s four year olds to prepare children for Kindergarten. This program is funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education. Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms are housed in public schools and in private child-care learning centers.
- ***Early Head Start and Head Start:*** Sites are federally funded and provide comprehensive early childcare and development services to children from birth to five, pregnant women and families.

Note: Georgia’s Pre-K and Head Start can blend into one classroom. A blended classroom is defined as a class that has funding which is braided using both Georgia’s Pre-K and Head Start dollars. Pre-K funding is used for the 6.5 hours of instruction and Head Start funding is used for the wrap-around support services.



Table 1: Early Child Care and Education in Georgia

Category	Number of Children	Number of Centers (home or center)
Center-based Care	355,357 c*	3,135
Home-based Care	11,298 c*	1,844
Pre-K	80,815	1,815
Head Start and Early Head Start	28,158	358
Pre-K and/or Head Start in public school districts	38,019	772
Total number of children in child care	337,024	7,259
Total number of children aged 0-4 in Georgia	662,675	NA

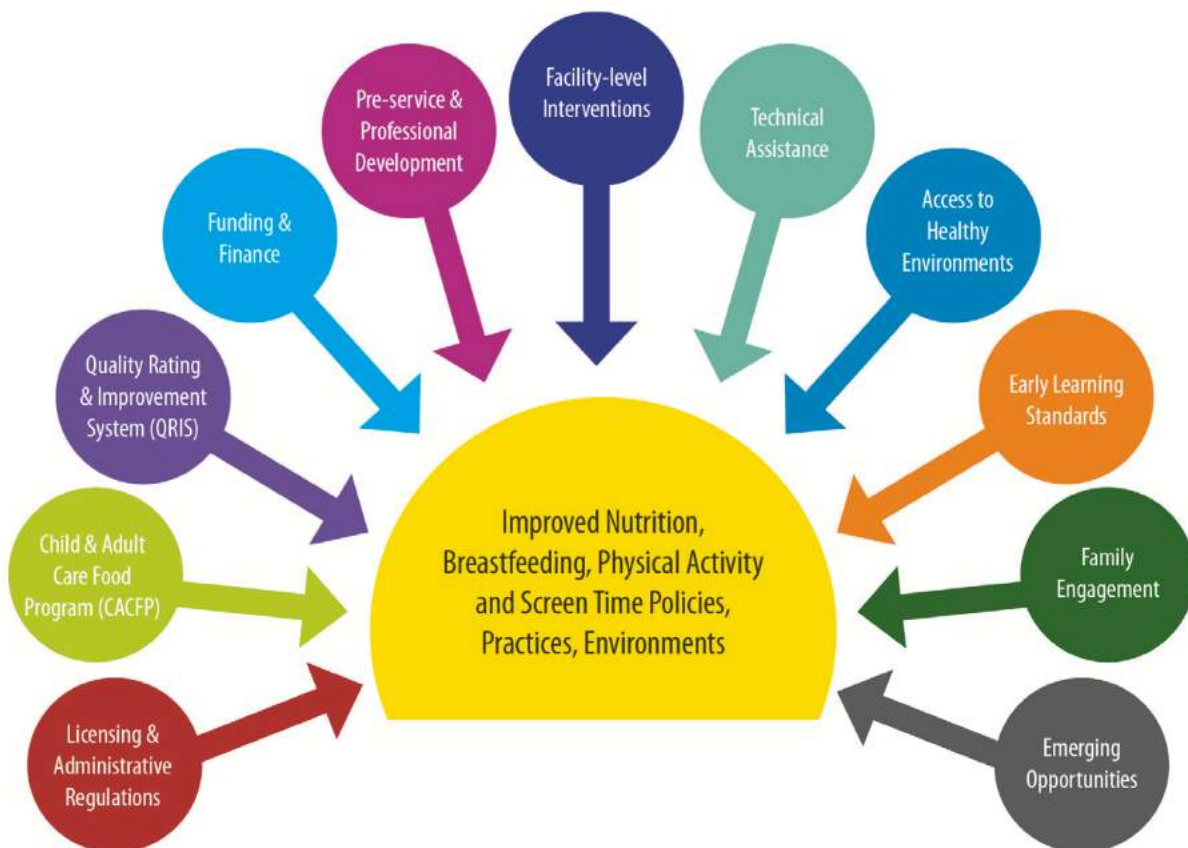
(c* = capacity, not enrollment.)

The Spectrum of Opportunities for Georgia Farm to ECE

Applying Center for Disease Control’s “Spectrum of Opportunities” Framework to Georgia Farm to ECE

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention uses a framework, known as the “*Spectrum of Opportunities*” to highlight leverage points to influence policies and practices in early care and education settings to improve nutrition, as well as breastfeeding, physical activity, and screen time. The report states that, “not all opportunities need to be pursued successfully in each state to achieve impact; however, it is likely that multiple opportunities pursued as part of a coordinated approach will be most effective at achieving desired goals.” The Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Strategy uses this framework to assess the extent to which farm to ECE is already being supported within the state and to identify where stakeholders can work to enhance support.¹⁰ The following discussion combines recommendations from the “Obesity Prevention in Early Care and Education: Quick Start Action Guide” and feedback from the Georgia Farm to ECE Coalition.

Spectrum of Opportunities for Obesity Prevention in the Early Care and Education Setting



Source: Obesity Prevention in Early Care and Education, 2016

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Obesity Prevention in Early Care and Education: Quick Start Action guide” Retrieved at: www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/early-care-education-ece-web.pdf

1. Licensing and Administrative Regulations

Licensing is permission from the state to operate an ECE facility. ECE programs and providers (with some exceptions) are required by law to meet state- specific minimum standards of care. Farm to ECE can be incorporated into licensing and administrative regulation a few ways:

- Recommending ECE providers to obtain training, continuing education or certification that includes Farm to ECE activities: gardening, food exploration, taste testing, and cooking
- Incorporating farm to ECE and standards into coursework, training, and education requirements for ECE providers

In addition, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning requires all licensed centers to meet CACFP requirements. The Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition should explore this requirement, and address any parts that may act as a barrier to FTECE activities.

2. Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Centers and day care homes offering meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) play a critical role in supporting the wellness, health, and development of children, older adults, and chronically impaired disabled persons through the provision of nutritious foods. By October 2017, all licensed centers receiving CACFP funding must adhere to the new CACFP nutrition standards; meals and snacks served will include a greater variety of vegetables and fruit, more whole grains, and less added sugar and saturated fat.

In 2016, USDA released policy guidance on best practices for local food procurement for CACFP. It states,

“Local foods can play an important role in creating and promoting a healthy environment. A growing body of research demonstrates several positive impacts of serving local foods and providing food education through Child Nutrition Programs, including increased participation and engagement in meal programs; consumption of healthier options, such as whole foods; and support of local economies. There is also well-established public interest in supporting local and regional food systems, and a growing interest in aligning local food sources with CACFP. In light of this, FNS [Food and Nutrition Services] is adding a best practice to encourage centers and day care homes to incorporate seasonal and local products into meals, when possible, as a way of enhancing CACFP operations.”¹¹

The USDA and Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning will oversee and provide trainings and oversight over the next year to ensure all centers meet these new requirements by October 2017. These new requirements present opportunities to not only increase fresh, local fruits and vegetables, but also to integrate farm to ECE nutrition education activities into upcoming trainings.

11 “New CACFP Meal Pattern and Best Practices Promote Local and Seasonal” (2016) Retrieved at http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/CACFP_RuleSummary_May2016.pdf

3. Quality Rating and Improvement System

Georgia's Quality Rated is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for other service related industries, Quality Rated assigns a quality rating to early care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in Quality Rated, early care and education programs embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. Quality Rated is intended to improve the quality of early care and education programs through aligning and coordinating system-wide initiatives.¹²

Quality Rated Standard 2.1.1 provides specific guidance around nutrition and wellness, and is stated as follows: "The program has conducted the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment and has developed a written improvement plan addressing at least 1 criterion for each of the two domains (nutrition and physical activity)." Read more in the GA DECAL program manual online at:

https://qualityrated.dec.al.ga.gov/Content/Documents/PM_ProgramManual.pdf

The following FTECE standards are imbedded into the Quality Rated "Nutrition" section:

Standard 2:

- 4.4 Taste testing activities are conducted to allow children to try new or unfamiliar foods
- 4.5 Cooking activities or demonstrations are conducted to teach children that combining foods can create new flavors
- 4.6 Edible gardens are developed and used as a learning resource
- 10.1 Food items are purchased locally (within the county, within 100 miles, from Georgia or a state touching Georgia)
- 11.1 Farmers are guest speakers or field trips to farms are provided to explain where food comes from

To support early care and education programs in their effort to integrate this standard, the Georgia Department of Public Health published the Growing Fit Toolkit, and HealthMPowers delivers trainings on how to implement wellness policies. The toolkit provides examples of how farm to ECE can help create success stories and provides healthy eating and physical activity resources. Review the toolkit here: <https://dph.georgia.gov/early-care-providers>

Other states, such as South Carolina and Wisconsin, are working to leverage their state's quality rated system to grow their Farm to ECE programs. North Carolina has created a comprehensive document entitled: ***Reach for the Stars: Aligning ECERS with Farm to Preschool.*** See document here: <http://growing-minds.org/documents/reach-for-the-stars.pdf>

¹² Georgia's Quality Rated website (2017) Retrieved at <https://qualityrated.dec.al.ga.gov>

4. Funding and Finance

The following are examples of funding sources that could potentially support farm to ECE initiatives in Georgia. Note that some of these examples are grants, and others are funding sources that could support FTECE trainings, curriculums, or supplies.

- USDA:
 - Farm to School Grant Program
 - Specialty Crop Grants
 - Team Nutrition Grants
 - CACFP
 - Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Child Care Development Fund 2019 - 2020
- State Administrative Expense (SAE) Funds
- Preschool Development Grant Funds

5. Pre-Service and Professional Development

All licensed providers in Georgia need training hours to maintain licensure. At child care learning centers and family child care learning homes, all staff members and providers are required to obtain 10 hours on an annual basis. Head Start staff are required to obtain 15 hours of professional development each year. ECE providers have a high need for low-cost, easily accessible training opportunities that can count for pre-service and professional development (e.g. for licensing requirements, clock-hours to maintain certification, QRIS requirements, and child care subsidy requirements.)

The Georgia Farm to ECE Coalition may choose to review the curriculum required for renewing a Child Development Associate (CDA) Certificate in Georgia, and adjust farm to ECE professional development accordingly.

There are a few on-line modules related to farm to ECE. “Early Sprouts” is approved for 10 professional development hours in Georgia and costs \$50. “Children Can Cook” and “Fresh Harvest: Children Grow in the Garden” are approved for 2 professional development hours and cost \$5.

The following organizations have annual conferences and trainings, and could integrate farm to ECE into these sessions and workshops.

- Georgia Association on Young Children
- Georgia Childcare Association
- Georgia Farm to School Alliance (Georgia Farm to School Summit)
- Georgia Organics
- Georgia Head Start Association
- Georgia’s Pre-K

Additional opportunities for professional development include creating a farm to ECE specific training for Georgia referral agencies to offer on a regular basis. Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCRR) serve as a resource for parents by assisting them with finding quality child care, and for child care providers through training, technical assistance, national accreditation services, inclusion services, and more. Accreditation facilitation services are provided free of charge to child care learning centers, group day care homes, family day care homes, and school-age care programs. This service includes site visits to assess the program's readiness to participate; assistance to help each program develop an improvement plan; on-site technical assistance; and coaching to help program staff develop skills to achieve and sustain program improvement goals. A list of CCRR agencies providing services in each region is found here: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/CCS/CCRRSystem.aspx#Region1>

Finally, there is a great opportunity to partner with academic institutions to provide specific farm to ECE-service opportunities for their students. North Carolina's The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) created a "Learning Lab" with at a Head Start Center where university and college students can observe farm to school in practice. Through the Learning Lab, ASAP provides college students and teachers with Farm to School training, gives the schools educational resources, and trains parents to be effective advocates.

6. Facility Level Interventions

Facility-level interventions are any programs or initiatives that encompass a defined set of activities that take place directly within ECE facilities. Examples could include incorporating a new curriculum, such as "Color Me Healthy"; "Grow it, Try it, Like it"; and "Early Sprouts."

It would difficult to create a pilot program that every child care center could replicate in Georgia. However, three types of centers hold potential for serving as a vehicle for change in Georgia: Georgia's Pre-K, Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These programs have internal communication systems and training structures which may make integrating farm to ECE on a larger scale more replicable.

Georgia's Pre-K Program is a state lottery funded educational program for all age eligible four-year-old children in Georgia. The purpose of Georgia's Pre-K Program is to prepare children for success in Kindergarten and later school years.

In Georgia, there are 772 Pre-K site in public schools, and 1,043 Pre-K sites in private centers. Georgia's Pre-K serves a total of 79,868 children. 42,596 are Category One students. (Category One child eligibility is defined as the child's and/or family's participation in one of the following: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), SSI (Supplemental Security Income), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or Child and Parent Services (CAPS) program.) Approximately 24% of all Georgia children currently enrolled in ECE are enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K.

Georgia's Pre-K programs are embedded in Georgia school districts. Many of these districts are currently represented in the Golden Radish Awards program. (The Golden Radish Award is given to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in Georgia who are doing extraordinary work in farm to school.) Therefore, it is an attainable leap to provide more resources to support Georgia's Pre-K programs.

Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in many areas such as language, literacy, and social and emotional development. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. These programs help build relationships with families that support family well-being and many other important areas.¹³

Early Head Start serves infants, toddlers, and pregnant women and their families who have incomes below the federal poverty level.

Head Start programs serve 28,158 children in 358 sites. There are 31 organizations, including school systems, community action agencies and universities that operate Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Georgia. Head Start services are provided to children and families in 157 out of 159 counties in Georgia.

Head Start requires 15 hours of staff training (5 hours more than the state requirement), providing more opportunity to offer farm to ECE trainings. In addition, 100% of Head Start providers participate in CACFP and therefore will be required to abide by the new regulations requiring more fruits and vegetables by 2017.

7. Technical Assistance

The 2014 Georgia Farm to Preschool survey highlighted “technical assistance (TA)” as a top need to grow farm to ECE programs. Nutrition professionals can provide technical assistance on menu planning, nutritional assessment of meals and snacks, training for foodservice personnel, and nutrition education for ECE providers, children, and families. Farm to ECE “train the trainer” sessions could target TA providers to help centers with gardening, cooking, introducing lessons, taste testing, and sourcing local foods.

Several groups are well equipped to reach ECE providers at the community level:

- Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- Resource and Referral agencies
- Child care health consultants
- Cooperative extension agents
- Non-profits specializing in gardening, farm to school, cooking and food education
- Physicians
- County and state nutritionists
- Health department nurses
- Nutrition professionals

8. Access to Healthy Learning Environments

“Access to nutritious foods and space for active play is essential if ECE providers are to comply with enhanced regulations, QRIS, and facility-level interventions that support obesity prevention efforts.”¹⁴ CDC recommends farm to early care initiatives and centralized kitchens that provide affordable, nutritious meals.

¹³ Georgia Head Start website. Retrieved at <http://www.georgiaheadstart.org>

¹⁴ CDC's Obesity Prevention in Early Care and Education: Quick Start Action Guide. Retrieved at: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/early-care-education-ece-web.pdf>

9. Early Learning Standards

Several Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) can be incorporated into farm to ECE initiatives. Centers need to have specific training on how lessons and activities can support GELDS. A simple toolkit or website with lessons connected to Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) is needed to assist in this effort.

Examples of GELDS that specifically relate to farm to ECE include:

Physical Development and Motor Skills:

PDM2	The child will participate in activities related to nutrition.
PDM2.4a	Helps prepare nutritious snacks and meals.
PDM2.4b	Sorts foods into food groups and communicates the benefits of healthy foods.
PDM4.4a	Discriminates between and identifies a variety of sights, smells, sounds, textures and tastes.
PDM6	The child will demonstrate fine motor skills. (This could include working with seeds, gardening, measuring)

Communication, Language and Literacy:

CLL1	The child will listen to conversations and demonstrate comprehension.
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Cognitive Development – Math:

CD-MA3	The child will explore and communicate about distance, weight, length, height and time.
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Cognitive Development – Science:

CD-SC5	The child will demonstrate an awareness of and the need to protect, his/her environment.
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Georgia Organics' October Farm to School Month campaign offers a sample of free FTECE lessons connected to GELDS. See more here:

georgiaorganics.org/for-schools/octoberfarmtoschoolmonth

10. Family Engagement

While engaging parents can be challenging, the impacts are lasting. Including family members in taste tests, cooking demonstrations and garden days at the school, and sending recipes home are examples of how to engage parents in farm to ECE programs. Family engagement is a specific requirement for Georgia Head Start, and therefore may be a promising starting point for pilot activities for Georgia farm to ECE.

11. Emerging Opportunities

- **The Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition** will fill an immediate need to connect agencies and businesses working in ECE, nutrition and agriculture and to coalesce resources among these stakeholders.
- **Incentives and Awards.** Award programs can help highlight successful programs and reward those who are going the extra step. Currently, Georgia has the SHAPE awards (K- 12th grade) program and the Golden Radish Awards Program (K-12th grade in public schools.) There may be opportunities to explore ways to use these existing programs to showcase and incentivize high achievers, and there are models, such as Pennsylvania, to create new awards programs if needed.
- **Communication and Resources.** ECE providers, staff and parents need more information about farm to ECE grants, research and best practices. This can be fulfilled through integrating Georgia Farm to ECE news through existing newsletters/website/social media sites or creating a new newsletter/website/social media sites. The following organizations have websites and newsletters where farm to ECE could be integrated:
 - Captain Planet Foundation
 - Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
 - Georgia Department of Agriculture
 - Georgia Association on Young Children
 - Georgia Shape
 - Georgia Organics
 - Georgia Head Start Association
 - HealthMPowers
 - Quality Care for Children, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R) and other referral agency newsletters
 - Voices for Georgia's Children



Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education 2017- 2020 Strategic Plan

In June 2015, members of the Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition summarized major goals for the statewide strategy (see Appendix A.) This strategic plan was informed by national and state programs and policies, as well as input from the Georgia Farm to ECE Coalition members.

Strategies and objectives were prioritized by how easily they could be completed, and how well the strategies fit into existing priorities established by Coalition members' grant deliverables, strategic plans or programs. Goals and objectives will be achieved by the collective work of Coalition members, and coordinated by the Coalition Chair. This is a working strategy, and will remain fluid and flexible for additions, edits and changes.

In February 2017, the Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition crafted the following language to define the group's collective work:

The Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition is a network that joins stakeholders* in early care, food, farming, and nutrition to coalesce resources and support farm to early care and education, and to create a dialogue for building statewide programming.

Vision: The health of Georgia's children and our communities is enhanced by increasing awareness and consumption of fresh, nutritious, and locally grown foods in early care settings.

Mission: The Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition will connect early childhood programs, local farmers and stakeholders for the purpose of:

- Helping children develop healthy lifelong eating habits through exposure to gardening, hands-on nutrition education, cooking and local foods;
- Increasing access to healthy, local foods, gardening opportunities, and food-based activities to enhance the quality of the educational experience in early care and education;
- Providing all early care and education providers, regardless of geographic location, type of program or socioeconomic status, the information, resources, and support to successfully implement farm to ECE initiatives;
- Creating a healthy eating environment which enables children to make healthier choices;
- Collaborating with Georgia farmers and distributors to provide increased access to local foods;

*Stakeholders include parents/guardians, agencies, nonprofits, public and private leaders, community initiatives, business communities, policy makers, farmers and distributors, providers, and academic institutions



Goals and objectives:

(note * = easier/few resources required, *** = more difficult/more resources required)

Goal 1. *Increase the understanding and knowledge of farm to ECE among child care providers through workshops, webinars, and articles. At least 20 approved training hours will be offered for farm to ECE specific trainings between 2017 – 2020*

***Objective 1:** : Incorporate farm to ECE sessions into at least 3 – 5 existing annual trainings, conferences and workshops. These events should be considered for approval for Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning training hours. These sessions should address the following: farm to ECE curriculum resources, how to implement curriculum, how to engage children, and how to locate farm to ECE experts and resources such as chefs, farmers, agencies and nonprofits. (Deadline: December 2019)

- Identify at least 3-5 individuals who can serve on a Speakers Bureau to present farm to ECE sessions at existing conferences and workshops. These individuals can be providers, agency or non-profit representatives, parents, chefs or farmers. The Georgia FTECE Coalition members would be great candidates for this opportunity. (June 2017)
- Create a farm to ECE presentation slide deck and train speakers that can present at key workshops across the state. Identify speakers and funding for 3-5 new presentations in 2017. (December 2017)

* **Objective 2:** Offer at least one annual opportunity for providers to convene to share resources, opportunities, and challenges. This could be the bi-annual Georgia Farm to School Summit (October 2017), or at another existing conference. (Deadline: December 2019)

Table 2: Conferences and trainings that could incorporate farm to ECE content

Conference/Trainings
Georgia DECAL Summer Food Service Program
Georgia Association on Young Children
Georgia Child Care Association
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning- CACFP specific
Georgia Head Start Association <i>Fall Conference</i> <i>Georgia Head Start Board Retreat</i>
Georgia Organics Annual Conference
Georgia Organics Quarterly Trainings for Educator and School Nutrition
Georgia Farm to School Summit
Georgia - National Association of Black Child Care Providers
Georgia Pre- K <i>Summer Trainings</i>
Southern Obesity Conference
Health M Powers <i>Growing Fit Kit Workshop</i>
Georgia Department of Public Health <i>Eat. Move. Talk! and Georgia Shape Trainings</i>
Child Care Resource and Referral Agency Trainings

Objective 3: Create and provide new trainings and workshops on how to implement farm to ECE programs.

- ****Obj. 3a.** Offer Statewide Webinar Series to ECE providers that cover procurement, gardening, wellness policies, lessons, and nutrition. (December 2018)
 - Coalition members can volunteer to help lead or assist with one webinar (approximately 1- 4 hours required.) See Michigan monthly Farm to Preschool webinars here: <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/events/farm-to-early-child-care-mini-webinar-series> (see Appendix C)
- *****Obj. 3b.** Offer 1-3 specific in-depth (4-8 hours) farm to ECE workshops tailored to at least one of the following audiences (December 2018):
 - Child Care Resources and Referral Agency
 - Georgia Early Care and Learning CACFP
 - Georgia Pre-K
 - Georgia Head Start
 - Child Care Resource and Referral Agency representatives

***Objective 4:** Distribute 6 -10 farm to ECE articles through Coalition members to Georgia ECE providers. The content for these news articles will be gathered and shared via email, social media and websites from farm to ECE partners, National Farm to School Network newsletters and other sources. Stories will be collected by the Farm to ECE Coordinator and shared on a bi-monthly basis to all Farm to ECE Coalition members. When highlighting “success stories”, members shall use a template to ensure consistency. (Appendix D.) (annually - December 2019)

****Objective 5:** Create a template that aligns GELDS or ECERS-3 with farm to ECE. (Such as North Carolina’s Reach for the Stars: Aligning ECERS with Farm to Preschool) (December 2017)

***Objective 6:** Create and disseminate resources that include an overview of farm to ECE and demonstrate how to get started. In addition, create documents that list helpful resources, participating farmers and distributors and funding opportunities. (December 2017)

Goal 2. *Grow and strengthen network of the Georgia Farm to ECE child care community (child care providers, agencies, nonprofits, parents)*

***Objective 1:** Formalize the Farm to ECE Coalition. Coalition members will meet on a quarterly basis to share resources, highlight successful models and initiatives, and address coalition strategy goals. Meetings will rotate among agency member’s sites and include field trips to model programs. Explore a more formalized structure, like the Georgia Farm to School Alliance, to sustain the work of the Coalition. (January – December 2017)

****Objective 2:** Explore strategies to increase representation in Farm to ECE among grassroots stakeholders such as childcare providers, educators and parents. States such as North Carolina and Michigan offer a simple on-line registration for these stakeholders to sign up for regular emails and invitations to workshops and meetings. (December 2018)

***Objective 3:** Coalition members will assist in sharing resources for October Farm to School Month and recruiting child care providers to implement activities. Resources will be provided through the National Farm to School Network and Georgia Organics. (June - October 2017)

****Objective 4:** Explore a pilot program leveraging simple curriculum and training modules. (Deadline: December 2018)

- Explore learning labs models at university or technical college where early education and dietetic students can observe farm to ECE best practices. See ASAP Learning Lab model: <http://growing-minds.org/farm-to-school-education-project/>
- Explore school districts or non-profits to pilot a Farm to Pre-K program which focuses on one school district.
- Explore launching a one year Learning Institute which incorporates training, technical assistance and mini-grants.

Goal 3. Support system and policy change to strengthen Georgia Farm to ECE
(System and policy change refers to both state and center-based policies.)

***Objective 1:** Leverage the new CACFP meal pattern to educate child care centers on farm to ECE initiatives, and how to procure, promote, and prepare fresh, local foods. CACFP centers and day care homes must comply with the new meal patterns by October 1, 2017. USDA and Georgia Dept. of Early Care and Learning will provide trainings for centers. (by December 2017).

**** Objective 2:** Explore opportunities to integrate farm to ECE into early care standards and policy language. (December 2018)

****Objective 3:** : Incentivize farm to ECE through a new or an existing awards program (e.g.: Georgia SHAPE, Golden Radish Awards) and track progress of local food procurement, gardening, wellness policy adoption and integrated farm to ECE curriculum. (by October 2018)

***Objective 4:** Explore existing licensing and administrative regulations that incentivize or create barriers to implementing FTECE.

Goal 4: Increase locally grown food served in child care programs (snacks and meals)

****Objective 1:** Increase understanding of ECE administrators and food service providers of the CACFP Best Practice Policies to “integrate local food into snacks and meals” through Georgia DECAL trainings and success stories in GA Farm to ECE Coalition newsletters (see Goal 1.)

****Objective 2:** Actively engage distributors in farm to ECE Coalition meetings and trainings, convene farmer and distributors to address opportunities and challenges in increasing local foods in child care settings. (December 2018)

****Objective 3:** Explore best practices for increased procurement as they are being developed in other states. (June 2018)





Appendix A:

*Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition Partners**

Organization	Institution	Category
Captain Planet Foundation	Non-profit	Farm to School
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Federal	Nutrition
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta	Non-profit	Nutrition
Common Ground Market	Non-profit	Distribution
Food Well Alliance	Non-profit	Distribution
Georgia Department of Agriculture	State	Agriculture
Georgia Department of Education/ Georgia Shape	Non-profit	ECE
Georgia Child Care Association	Non-profit	ECE
Georgia Department of Early Care & Learning	State	ECE/Nutrition
Georgia Department of Education	State	ECE
Georgia Department of Public Health	State	Nutrition
Georgia Head Start Association	Non-profit	ECE
Georgia Organics	Non-profit	Farm to School/ Agriculture
Georgia State University	University	Nutrition
Head Start/Georgia DECAL	Federal	Nutrition
HealthMPowers	Non-profit	Nutrition
Little Ones Learning Center	Private	ECE
Quality Care for Children	Private	ECE/Nutrition
Turnip Truck	Private	Distribution
United Way	Non-profit	ECE
University of Georgia	University	Nutrition
USDA	Federal	Nutrition/Agriculture

Note: These partners have participated in at least one Georgia Farm to ECE meeting or conference call since 2015. Partners are not required to implement or endorse all aspects of the Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Strategy. There may be additional partners not listed in this document.

Appendix B:

Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool Excerpt

To see the full toolkit go to: <http://growing-minds.org/documents/reach-for-the-stars.pdf>



REACH FOR THE STARS WITH FARM TO PRESCHOOL Aligning Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) with Farm to Preschool (F2P)

The **North Carolina Farm to Preschool Network (NCFPN)** was convened in May 2015 by Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and North Carolina Child and Adult Care Food Program. This group of stakeholders are committed to supporting and promoting farm to preschool programming across the state of North Carolina. NCFPN developed a definition for farm to preschool: *Farm to preschool enhances the health and education of young children by developing systems and experiential learning that connects children and their families with local food and farms. Farm to preschool includes any type of childcare that incorporates local foods through: meals and snacks, taste tests, lessons, farmer visits, cooking, growing food, and/or community and parent involvement.*

This resource, *Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool*, was created by NCFPN. Its purpose is to help child care centers and family child care homes integrate farm to preschool activities into their curriculum while addressing the Early Childhood Rating Scale (ECERS). This resource will benefit early childhood programs in North Carolina and across the country.

Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool is organized by four farm to preschool activities:

1. Edible gardening with young children,
2. Farm field trips/farmer visits with young children,
3. Local food classroom cooking/taste tests with young children, and
4. Local food served in meals and/or snacks.

In each of these activity components, the ECERS subscale, scale, and indicators were aligned with suggested farm to preschool activities, providing ideas and prompts for early childhood educators. In addition to enriching the educational experience, this resource clearly demonstrates how star ratings can be achieved through farm to preschool programming. The indicator is not spelled out, only referenced by the number, and in the place of the indicator language is the suggested farm to preschool activity.

Activity: Edible Gardening with Young Children	
SUBSCALE	SPACE AND FURNISHINGS
Scale	Child related display
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.1 Children display art that references experiences in the garden and includes pictures of themselves in the garden</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Creative and Individualized displays depicting the garden are created by 50% of the children</p>
Scale	Space for gross motor play
Indicators	<p>Indicator 7.1 Children utilize gross motor skills in the garden (weeding, digging, using a wheelbarrow) on a variety of surfaces (soft: dirt, wood chips/mulch, grass; hard: concrete surface)</p>
Scale	Gross motor equipment
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.1 Children have access to gross motor equipment (wheelbarrows, shovels, hoes, buckets) in the garden</p> <p>Indicator 5.1 Numerous gross motor equipment (wheelbarrows, shovels, hoes, buckets) are made available to children in the garden</p>
SUBSCALE	PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES
Meals/snacks	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.2 Fresh, local produce picked from the garden is served as part of meal and/or snack</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Locally grown food (from school garden or local farm) is served family style.</p> <p>Indicator 7.3 Staff and children discuss where their food comes from, who grew it, how did it get from the field to their plate, how it grows (on a vine, underground) and if it is or is not growing in the school garden</p>
Scale	Health practices
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.2 Staff eat fresh, local produce picked from the garden</p> <p>Indicator 5.3 Children have gloves (and/or aprons) on when working in the garden</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Children wash their hands after working in the garden</p>
Scale	Safety practices
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.1 Staff put away garden tools when not in use</p> <p>Indicator 5.2 Safety rules for work in the garden are explained to the children</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Small groups of children take turns working in the garden, to avoid many children using garden tools at the same time.</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Children demonstrate the safe use of garden tools</p>

Appendix C: Webinar Series

Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Webinar Series (DRAFT proposal)

The 2017-2018 Farm to ECE Mini-Webinar Series is a series of 12 webinars that will cover a variety of topics. Webinars will be 15-20 minutes of presented material with time for questions and answers following.

This series is designed for early childhood program staff including food service directors, cook staff, administration, teachers, and family day care home providers, and can also be beneficial for those seeking to support farm to ECE efforts. Webinars will be recorded and posted for public use.

This webinar series is based off of the Michigan State University's web series, as well as Georgia's Golden Radish Award criteria.

Farm to Early Care and Education Overview	The webinar will include an overview of farm to ECE efforts and resources available to help support programs looking to increase their early purchasing efforts.
Taste Tests with Young Children	Purchasing more local foods can often bring in foods that are new or unusual to children in early childhood programs. This webinar will highlight an approach to taste tests that has helped increase children's willingness to try new foods in one program.
Early Childhood Gardens for Experiential Gardens	Gardens can be a great way to connect children to local food in farm to ECE programs. Kristen Salem from Adventures Learning Center will share her strategies for building gardens into early childhood education and how it's helped support their local food purchasing efforts.
Engaging Parents and Community Members	Engaging parents in early childhood learning can be an important component of programming. Farm to ECE can provide opportunities for deep engagement that supports children and families.
Preparing Healthy Foods with Young Children	Learn simple, easy recipes that you can make with students as young as one year old!
Grants, Workshops and Technical Assistance	Learn about available funding and educational resources you can use to build a successful program.
Creating a Wellness Policy with farm to ECE	Wellness policies help ensure that everyone in your center is on the same page, but also help provide clear steps to reach your goals.
Introduction to Local Food Purchasing 101	Local procurement is a central component of Farm to ECE. This webinar will cover a brief overview of local purchasing options. There will also be a brief overview of rules and regulations that pertain to local purchasing in early childhood programs.
Local Food Purchasing 102	This webinar will cover the three basic ways of purchasing from farmers: directly from the farmer, farmers markets and a broadline distributor.
Seasonal Menu Planning	Adapting menus to locally available products is an important part of farm to ECE. In this webinar, local experts, will share their approaches to developing menus seasonally according to Georgia production.

Appendix D: Success Story Template



Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE) Success Stories

Early Learning Program Name: _____

Type of program (child care center, family day care home, etc.): _____

City/County: _____

Month/year school started Farm to Farm to ECE initiatives: _____

Why did you want to start Farm to ECE initiatives in your early learning program? _____

Does your early learning program teach children about food, nutrition and/or gardening in the classroom? If so, how? _____

Does your early learning program include local foods in your menus? If so, how? _____

How has Farm to ECE made a difference in your program? _____

What do the children think of Farm to ECE? (Include direct quotes with names/ages, if possible)

What do the parents think of Farm to ECE? (Include direct quotes with names, if possible)

What do your teachers/staff think of Farm to ECE (Include direct quotes with names, if possible) _____

Notes

Notes

[illegible]



Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education

Overview and Strategy 2017 - 2020