

NURTURE YOUNG CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND CURIOSITY DURING COVID-19

FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION (FARM TO ECE) OFFERS HEALTHY AND SAFE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND ECE STAFF, AND CONNECTS ECES TO LOCAL FOOD PRODUCERS. BELOW ARE REASONS WHY FARM TO ECE COULD BE HELPFUL DURING THE CHALLENGES AND UNCERTAINTY OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Communities and ECE sites are experiencing many changes within the food and education systems. ECes continue to care for young children while managing changing policies, concerns about physical distancing, issues related to accessing food, and other challenges. Farm to ECE is a set of activities that can include growing edible gardens, teaching children about food and farming, and buying local food to serve an ECE. Each one of these three activities could ease some of the challenges facing ECes during the COVID-19 pandemic, while also nurturing children's health and curiosity.

BENEFITS OF GROWING EDIBLE, OUTDOOR GARDENS WITH CHILDREN

Growing Certainty - The natural world reliably continues. Seeds sprout, plants grow, and children experience a natural, dependable cycle. This can be calming in a COVID-19-impacted world.

Growing with Space - Outdoor gardens can offer safe, physical distancing.

Growing Calm - Children and adults refresh outside. Gardening can help with mental focus and well-being.

Growing Equitable Access - Gardens offer a source of fresh food for children, families, and ECE staff.

Growing Purpose and Belonging - Adults and children feel valued and purposeful when gardening.

Growing Activities Help Meet Learning Standards - Gardens make learning across domains easy and support children's development of motor, social-emotional, and cognitive skills.



BENEFITS OF TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT FOOD AND FARMING

Learning Outside - Being outside makes physical distancing easy in a calming environment.

Learning Experientially - Learning about growing food can be hands on, offering developmental, cognitive, and social-emotional benefits.

Learning Where Food Comes From - Understanding where their food comes from is valuable when children are especially distant from food sources.

Learning About Environmental Impacts - Sharing with children how less human activity during the outbreak impacts the natural world, through air and soil improvements and increased animal and insect activity, is beneficial for farmers and food.

Learning About Growing - Learning about growth and renewal builds optimism and positivity.

Learning that Supports Program Goals - Assisting ECes in quality rating systems, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), and Infants and Toddlers (ITERS) guidelines meets ECE program objectives.



BENEFITS OF BUYING LOCAL FOOD FOR THE ECE SETTING

Supporting the Community - Supporting local food producers and economies during difficult times keeps money in the community.

Supporting Reliable Food Sources - Buying from local food producers may be more reliable and less expensive because it avoids the disrupted global supply chain.

Supporting a Sense of Safety - Connecting children and families to local food producers can make families feel safe and confident in their food.

Supporting Easier Connections to Farmers - Changing food markets because of the outbreak means more smaller, local farms and farmers markets are now selling directly to customers, like an ECE, or using [easy online purchasing](#).



FARM TO ECE ACTIVITIES ECE PROVIDERS ARE FINDING HELPFUL DURING COVID-19

1. Serving foods from ECE gardens and local farmers – ECEs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) can use reimbursement for the cost of the foods from their garden and a local farmer. See examples [here](#).
2. Enjoying garden activities safely with masks and physical distance per your state guidelines. Learn more [here](#).
3. Hosting virtual farm to ECE sessions for children and their families to learn about growing with virtual bingo or recipe sharing. Learn more [here](#).
4. Providing boxes of fresh produce from local farmers for ECE families to take home. Learn more [here](#).

Next Steps for Creating or Rebuilding Farm to ECE Programs



STEP 1: CONSIDER 1-2 FARM TO ECE ACTIVITIES TO GET STARTED. EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Create a fresh produce box for families with your garden produce
- Connect with a local farmer and ask about buying food for the ECE
- Plan a unit about apples for the fall



STEP 2: CONNECT WITH THE ECE COMMUNITY

Ask other staff, families, local farmers/producers, or local groups if they want to help, have specific ways they can contribute, or have ideas to share on Farm to ECE activities



STEP 3: DECIDE HOW AND WHEN TO TAKE NEXT STEPS

Use the resources below to help guide the next steps

Additional Resources

[CDC Guidance for Childcare Programs](#)

[Getting Started with Farm to ECE](#)

[National Farm to School Network - Farm to School/ECE and COVID-19 Information Hub](#)

[Farm to ECE - Family Friendly and Physical Distancing Activities](#)

[CSA and Your ECE Program](#)

[Local Procurement for Child Care Center](#)

This publication is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of cooperative agreement number NU38OT000279-02. The specific project funded through this cooperative agreement (ASPHN Obesity Mini CoIN: Farm to Early Care and Education) totals \$125,000 with 100 percent funded by the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity/National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion/CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, DNPAO/NCCDPHP/CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.