

Vision and Key Strategies to Advance Farm to Early Care and Education



From National Farm to School Network's Farm to Early Care and Education Working Group

Farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) is a set of strategies and activities that include increased access to fresh, local foods through local food procurement, gardening opportunities, and food and agriculture education activities. The purpose of this document is to share the vision for long-term impacts of farm to ECE, offer a comprehensive list of key strategies to advance towards that vision, and to elevate examples and resources that demonstrate these key strategies in action.

Vision for the Future of Farm To Early Care and Education

Racial Equity and Justice



Farm to ECE initiatives are a key leverage point to advancing racial and social equity.

ECE Environments



All ECE environments include:

- Access to healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant local foods;
- Gardening; and
- Food, nutrition, and agriculture education.

Comprehensive farm to ECE initiatives are a tool to:

- Enhance the quality of ECE settings;
- Engage families and communities;
- Support comprehensive child development; and
- Meet learning and programmatic standards.

Food Systems



Farm to ECE initiatives support development of:

- The next generation of responsible food consumers; and
- Sustainable, equitable, and just local food systems.

ECE Professional Development



Information, resources, and supports empower all ECE providers to implement culturally relevant and reflective farm to ECE initiatives.

Collaboration and Community Engagement



Diverse stakeholders and sectors engage in collaboratively advancing farm to ECE programs and policy at the local, state, tribal, and national level.

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National Farm to School Network is rooted in the vision of a just food system for all. We believe focusing on the ways kids eat, grow and learn about food in school and early care and education can help turn this vision into reality. National Farm to School Network's early care and education work is supported in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Learn more about our work at farmtoschool.org.

Strategies for Advancing the Vision for Farm to ECE

RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Increase equitable access to the benefits of farm to ECE and leverage farm to ECE as a pathway to advance equity in ECE and food systems.

Strategies for Advancement

- Enable those most impacted by programs and policies (including ECE providers, families, and producers) to participate in **leadership and decision making roles** in farm to ECE initiatives
- Elevate farm to ECE as a cost-effective way to **increase the quality of ECE setting and access to nutritious food**, thus beginning to address health and educational inequities in communities of color and historically underserved communities
- Embed **racial equity training** in farm to ECE professional development initiatives
- Leverage farm to ECE local food purchasing to **support producers of color**
- Increase availability of **trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and culturally relevant** farm to ECE training, tools, and curriculum resources
- Utilize appropriate **evaluation and data collection (including disaggregation of data)** to assess and address inequities in reach and impact of farm to ECE in communities of color and historically underserved communities

Resources & Examples of Strategies in Action

Assessment and Framing Tools and Resources

- NFSN* Resource: [Racial and Equity Assessment Tool for Farm to School Programs and Policy Assessment](#)
- The Food Trust Resource: [Farm to ECE Racial Equity Framework](#)
- NFSN Webinar: [Placing Equity at the Center of Farm to Early Care and Education](#)

Professional Development and Training Resources

- North Carolina Farm to ECE Collaborative Resources: [Learning Bursts - Racial Equity](#)

Racial Equity and the Food System

- MSU CRFS* Webinar: [Racial Equity in Food Systems Works](#)
- Center for Social Inclusion Resource: [Building the Case for Racial Equity in the Food System](#)
- NFSN Webinar: [Indigenous Foods in Early Care and Education Settings](#)

Trauma Informed and Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials

- APIA* Resource: [QAQAMIIGUŪ Head Start Traditional Foods Preschool Curriculum](#)
- The Food Trust Resource: [Multicultural Collection of Farm to ECE Books](#)
- NBCDI* Resource: [Good for Me! Curriculum](#)
- NAEYC* Resource: [Trauma Sensitive Classrooms](#)

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

NFSN Resource: [Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool for Farm to School Programs and Policy](#)

NFSN's tool is intended to help advance farm to school/ECE's racial and social equity priority by increasing understanding of farm to school/ECE in the context of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism. This tool is designed to:

- Increase our capacity to identify racial and social inequities embedded within program and policy initiatives,
- Support decision making processes which maximize opportunities for advancing racial and social equity,
- Create a community of practice to empower us to take action within our sphere of influence, and,
- Embrace our collective power to address the systemic changes needed for social transformation within the farm to school/ECE movement.

*Organization Acronyms Used

NFSN: National Farm to School Network

MSU CRFS: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems

APIA: Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association

NBCDI: National Black Child Development Institute

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

ASPHN: Association of State Public Health Nutritionists

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

UNC: University of North Carolina

IATP: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Strategies for Advancing the Vision for Farm to ECE

COMMUNICATION, PROMOTION, AND AWARENESS BUILDING

Establish farm to ECE as an evidence-based strategy that simultaneously addresses multiple public health, food system, and ECE priority goals.

Strategies for Advancement

- Demonstrate **alignment of farm to ECE with ECE priority areas**, including:
 - Centering equity, inclusion, and diversity
 - Empowering families through partnership
 - Celebrating cultural diversity and encouraging culturally relevant environments
 - Supporting social and emotional development
 - Increasing quality of education environments
 - Meeting regulatory, early learning, quality improvement, and programmatic standards
 - Improving health, wellness, nutritional quality, and food access for children, families, and providers
- Integrate farm to ECE activities into existing local, state, and national **ECE structures, standards, and programs**
- Elevate the role and **importance of food, nutrition, and physical activity** in creating health promoting environments that support child development
- Promote **farm to ECE research and evaluation** by compiling and disseminating evidence-based information

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

NFSN Blog: [Growing Healthy Eaters in Georgia](#)

The [Georgia Farm to ECE Learning Collaborative](#) provides eighteen early care providers across the state with mini-grants, resources, and professional development to support implementation of farm to ECE activities. This blog highlights how farm to ECE activities implemented through the Collaborative align with providers goals related to providing access to and supporting acceptance of fresh fruits and vegetables for children and families, engaging parents with culturally reflective activities, and providing hands-on experiential education opportunities.

Resources & Examples of Strategies in Action

Alignment of Farm to ECE with ECE Priority Areas

Empowering Families

- Community GroundWorks Resource: [Engage Families in Farm to ECE](#)
- NFSN Webinar: [Family Engagement Through Farm to Early Care and Education](#)

Social and Emotional Health

- Community GroundWorks Resource: [Engage Families in Farm to ECE](#)

Health, Nutrition, and Food Access

- NFSN Blog: [Growing Healthy Eaters in Georgia](#)

Farm to ECE and ECE Structures, Standards, and Programs

- NFSN Resource: [Growing Head Start Success with Farm to Early Care and Education](#)
- ASPHN* Webinar: [Farm to ECE and CACFP Alignment](#)
- Rooted Resource: [Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education: Considerations for Programs in YoungStar Guide](#)
- North Carolina Farm to Preschool Network Resource: [Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale \(ECERS\) - Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool](#)
- USDA* and UNC* Resource: [SNAP-Ed Toolkit - Farm to Early Care and Education](#)
- NFSN Resource: [A Roadmap for Farm to Early Care and Education](#)

Elevate Nutrition and Physical Activity

- Nemours Resource: [Improving Obesity Prevention Through the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)
- UNC Chapel Hill Resource: [Go NAPSACC: Farm to ECE Self-Assessment and Module](#)

Research and Evaluation

- NFSN Resource: [Farm to ECE Research and Literature Compilation](#)
- NFSN Resource: [Compiled Farm to ECE Evaluation Tools and Resources](#)

Strategies for Advancing the Vision for Farm to ECE

PROGRAMS AND POLICY

Support integration of farm to ECE language/initiatives in federal, state, and local education and nutrition policies and related programs.

Strategies for Advancement

- Advance **farm to ECE supportive policies** at federal, state, and local levels through coordination with strategic partners, including government agencies and ECE stakeholder groups
- **Leverage ECE policies and investments** to increase capacity for farm to ECE initiatives

Resources & Examples of Strategies in Action

Farm to ECE Supportive Policies

- NFSN Resource: [State Farm to School Policy Handbook 2002-2018](#)
 - [DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education Healthy Tots Act](#)
 - [Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Program](#)
- ASPHN Webinar: [Farm to ECE State Legislative Landscape 2020](#)
- John Hopkins Law Review Publication: [A Policy Analysis of Current Farm-to-Preschool/ Early Childhood Education Legislation in the United States](#)
- NFSN Resource Compilation: [Local Wellness Policies](#)

Leveraging ECE Policies and Investments

- CDC* Resource: [Spectrum of Opportunities for Obesity Prevention in Early Care and Education](#)
- Voices for Georgia's Children Website: [Farm to ECE Advocacy](#)
- PFC Social Impact Advisors Publication: [Good Food, Great Kids: Making Practice and Policy Work for Farm to Early Care and Education](#)
- NFSN Resource: [A Roadmap for Farm to Early Care and Education](#)
- Rooted Resource: [Farm to Early Care and Education Considerations for Programs in Young Star](#)
- NFSN Toolkit: [Every Student Succeeds Act and Farm to School](#)
- Policy Equity Group and NFSN Resource: [Informational Memorandum - Opportunities to Improve Head Start Quality through Farm to Early Care and Education Initiatives: Supporting Programs Competing for Head Start Funding](#)

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

PFC Social Impact Advisors Policy Lessons: [Good Food, Great Kids: Making Practice and Policy Work for Farm to Early Childcare & Education](#)

In this report, PFC Social Impact Advisors offer insight on building farm to ECE supportive policies and demonstrates how connecting farm to ECE to current policies can benefit ECE sites, children, and families. The report provides examples and recommendations for how advocates and policymakers can address the complex system of early childhood well-being through healthy food and learning initiatives.

Strategies for Advancing the Vision for Farm to ECE

PROGRAMMATIC CAPACITY BUILDING

Increase access to farm to ECE resources and information, training and technical assistance, funding, and networking opportunities for all types of ECE providers and community partners.

Strategies for Advancement

- Identify and **leverage funding streams** to support farm to ECE initiatives
- Increase **access to high-quality training** for ECE providers by integrating farm to ECE training into existing continuing education opportunities and required ECE professional development
- Broaden **community-based connections** across stakeholder groups
- Identify and **elevate scalable models** to broaden impact and advance reach of farm to ECE initiatives
- Support **development of regional, state, and local food systems infrastructures** that maximize opportunity for participation and benefit to producers
- Capitalize on existing communication channels and utilize strategic partnerships to **enhance targeted outreach**
- Prioritize unique needs and opportunities of **broad array of ECE settings** (e.g., family child care homes, child care centers, Head Start/Early Head Start, private preschools, state preschools)

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

MSU CRFS Toolkit: [Local Food for Little Eaters: A Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Guide to Purchasing Local Foods](#)

This guide is designed to help Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs increase the amount of local foods they purchase and use in their ECE programs serving children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

The resource demonstrates the unique opportunities of MSHS programs and offers specific recommendations for overcoming challenges in this specific setting.

Resources & Examples of Strategies in Action

Professional Development

- Better Kid Care Resource: [Better Kid Care On-Demand Training Modules](#)
 - [Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures: Nurture Healthy Eaters](#)
 - [Fresh Harvest: Children Grow in the Garden](#)
- North Carolina Farm to ECE Collaborative Resource: [Farm to ECE Learning Bursts](#)

Broadening Community-Based Connections

- NFSN Blog: [Promoting Partnerships: Extension and Farm to ECE](#)
- PA Ready Set Grow Model: [Regional Learning Collaboratives](#)
- ASPHN Webinar: [Farm to ECE Learning Hubs and Collaboratives](#)

Identifying Promising Practices and Scalable Models

- NFSN Blog: [Farm to ECE Procurement Blog Series](#)
- North Carolina Farm to ECE Collaborative Website: [Farm to ECE Success Stories](#)
- NFSN Blog: [Advisory Board Perspectives: Wande Okunoren-Meadows and Little Ones Learning Center](#)
- PFC Social Impact Advisors Case Studies: [Good Food, Great Kids: Farm to ECE Case Studies](#)
- IATP Case Studies: [Farm to ECE in Head Start Case Studies](#)

Farm to ECE and Local Food Systems

- NFSN Resource: [Farm to Early Care and Education Local Food Purchasing Resources](#)
- Community Groundworks Fact Sheet: [Farm to Early Care and Education for Growers](#)
- NFSN Blog: [Farm to ECE Opportunities in Alabama](#)
- USDA Website: [Local Foods and Related Activities in the CACFP](#)

Meeting Needs of Different Types of ECE Settings

- NFSN Blog and Webinar: [Farm to ECE in Family Child Care](#)
- NFSN Fact Sheet: [Local Purchasing for Family Child Care Homes](#)
- MSU CRFS Toolkit: [A Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Guide to Purchasing Local Foods](#)

Strategies for Advancing the Vision for Farm to ECE

STRATEGIC COLLABORATION

Strengthen national, state, tribal and local level collaboration/coordination among diverse stakeholders (e.g., ECE providers, families, producers, policy makers, state agencies, advocacy and professional development organizations) and sectors (e.g., food systems/supply chain, public health, ECE systems).

Strategies for Advancement

National Initiatives

- Develop and nurture **partnerships with national organizations** including federal agencies, ECE provider advocacy and support organizations, and organizations representing and serving diverse communities and stakeholder
- Support and facilitate **connections between farmers/farmer support organizations** and ECE partners
- Facilitate coordination of farm to ECE movement with **other community building and health movements**
- Collaborate with national partners to **identify and pursue funding streams** to advance the farm to ECE movement

State Level Initiatives

- **Build capacity for state leaders across sectors** (e.g., ECE advocacy organizations, state agency representatives, community partners) to engage in and provide leadership for farm to ECE initiatives
- Facilitate **collaboration among existing farm to school (K-12) networks and ECE networks** and organizations
- **Identify effective state level collaboration** and coordination efforts that enhance health and wellness and increase overall quality of ECE settings and lift up success stories and best practices
- Capitalize on existing **state coordinator positions** and provide support to increase number of states with farm to ECE coordinator positions

Local Level Initiatives

- Form **community-based coalitions of stakeholders** to support farm to ECE activities/initiatives
- Lift up **exemplary models of local ECE sites and their community partners**
- **Engage municipal leaders** to support Farm to ECE initiatives

Resources & Examples of Strategies in Action

National Cross-Sector Partnerships

- USDA Office of Community Food Systems Website: [Farm to Preschool](#)
- ASPHN Fact Sheet: [Farm to ECE Mini-CoIlN](#)
- CDC Tools and Resources: [Early Care and Education](#)
- Nemours Website: [Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures](#)
- NFSN Fact Sheet and Report: [2018 National Farm to Early Care and Education Survey](#)
- National CACFP Sponsors Organization: [Growing Healthy Kids with CACFP and Farm to ECE](#)
- NFSN Blog: [NAEYC and Farm to ECE](#)
- NFSN Blog: [Farm to ECE On the Menu At National Indian Head Start Directors Association Conference](#)
- USDA, NFSN, and Office of Head Start Webinar: [Kick Off Summer with the Office of Head Start](#)
- NFSN Blog: [Celebrating Farm to School with Head Start Gardening!](#)

State Networks, Initiatives, and Resources

- [Alabama Farm to ECE Coalition Strategic Plan](#)
- [Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Coalition](#)
 - [GA Farm to ECE Overview and Strategic Plan](#)
- [Iowa Farm to School & Early Care Network Website](#)
- [North Carolina Farm to Preschool Network Website](#)
 - [North Carolina Farm to ECE Initiative Resources](#)
- [MSU CRFS Michigan Farm to ECE Website](#)
- [Missouri Farm to Preschool Program Resources](#)
- [Pennsylvania Ready, Set, Grow Website](#)
 - The Food Trust Resource: [Emerging Strategies to Support Farm to Early Care in Pennsylvania](#)
- Washington Farm to School Network Website: [Farm to ECE](#)
- [Wisconsin Farm to ECE Resources](#)

Local Coalitions, Initiatives, and Resources

- [Boulder County Farm to Early Care and Education Initiative](#)
- [Little Ones Learning Center Farm to Early Care and Education Initiative](#)
- NFSN Blog: [Growing Together: Gardens Bring Together Veterans and Children](#)