

# Local Food to Little Forks

Advancing the Purchase of Local Foods  
in Early Care and Education Settings

Policy Brief 3





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## INTRODUCTION

Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE) is a national movement that works to connect early childhood programs with local food sources to support nutrition education and healthy eating among young children.<sup>1</sup> The movement is marked by a set of four core activities taking place in early learning settings:

**nutrition  
education**

**on-site  
gardening**

**family  
engagement**

**local food  
procurement**

**Local food procurement**  
in the context of Farm to ECE, it is the purchase of local or regional foods within early care and education programs for the purpose of consumption by young children.

While the first three activities are more easily incorporated into early care and education (ECE) programs, local food procurement—the purchase of local food by an ECE program—is an ongoing implementation challenge for both ECE providers and local food producers. Local food procurement can be a highly localized issue with no single universal approach—what works for one community may not work for another.

This brief investigates the benefits, challenges, and successful examples of local food procurement in early childhood settings. Further, the brief explores how making upstream policy and system changes may help facilitate the expansion and incidence of local food procurement in early childhood settings.



# FARM TO ECE LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT: BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

## Benefits of Farm to ECE Local Food Procurement

When Farm to ECE local food procurement is successful, it can result in significant benefit to children, families, and early childhood programs. Documented benefits of local food purchasing have also shown a positive impact for the local food economy and environment.



To experience these benefits and consistently purchase and serve local food, early childhood programs must navigate several hurdles.

### Benefits to children and families include:



Providing proper nutrition through fresh, locally sourced fruits and vegetables.<sup>2</sup> Locally sourced meals served as part of Farm to ECE are often more nutritious compared to non-local foods.<sup>3</sup>



Developing the taste preferences of children and exposing them to healthy foods at a time that can influence lifelong eating habits and improve later health outcomes, including reducing the risk of heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.<sup>4,5,6</sup>



Creating positive experiences that increase a child's willingness to try new foods and ensure they are receptive to fruits and vegetables at later ages.<sup>7</sup>

### Benefits to the local food economy and environment include:



Supporting local farmers and food producers by opening additional avenues for sales, including ECE facilities, families served by ECE programs, and ECE staff.<sup>8,9,10</sup> Sales to ECE providers and families have fewer barriers than other larger institutions (e.g. school cafeterias or hospitals) and therefore ECE programs can offer flexibility to smaller farms.<sup>11</sup>



Boosting local economies by connecting children, families, and ECE providers to local farmers and food producers.<sup>12</sup> Local food procurement also helps small farms retain their land ownership, keeping vital land in the hands of community members.<sup>13</sup>



Reducing emissions associated with the transportation and storage of food.<sup>14</sup>

## Farm to ECE Local Food Procurement Challenges

The ECE system and the food system developed independently, resulting in Farm to ECE local food procurement challenges, impact both ECE providers and local food producers. Local food procurement is challenging because it depends on the seamless collaboration between the ECE and local food systems, both of which are under-resourced, fragmented and struggle to effectively function for ECE programs and farmers alike.

The current food system does not always benefit small, local, or diversified farming operations. Decades of farm consolidation has resulted in more large-scale industrial farms, which make it challenging for small, local, and diversified producers to compete in a globalized economy, in part because of the mass scale and low prices that large industrial operations can offer.<sup>15</sup>

Like small farms competing in the current food system, ECE programs experience their own distinct challenges, particularly because of small operating size, time constraints, and staff capacity limitations. Such challenges include limited space to store or process foods, inadequate staff capacity to prepare fresh foods, and/or the absence of sufficient nutrition education. In most cases, ECE providers are focused on supporting working families and providing school readiness opportunities for young children. For ECE staff, implementing Farm to ECE programming without adequate support can feel like 'one more thing.'

The challenges facing Farm to ECE local food purchasing can be categorized into two main categories, discussed in greater detail below:

- ECE programs do not generally require bulk orders that would be cost-effective to local food producers, a concept referred to as: "little people, little orders;" and,
- ECE programs are constantly facing workforce challenges, which can make local food purchasing an added complication.



A close-up photograph of a young child with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The child is holding a large, green apple in their right hand, which is held up towards the camera. The apple has a bite taken out of it. The background is blurred, showing an outdoor setting with a person in a blue patterned shirt.

## "Little People, Little Orders"

ECE providers require smaller food orders than schools, hospitals, or other settings that participate in Farm to Institution efforts. Early learning programs typically need less food because small children require smaller serving sizes, and ECE programs vary in the number of children they serve. Consequently, ECE programs may not meet the minimum order requirements for farms or food hubs: the small size of ECE sales can make it challenging for local food producers and food hubs to recoup delivery expenses.<sup>16,17</sup> As an example, the vegetable serving size for children ages 5 and under in a Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) enrolled program is measured as 1/4 cup or 1/8 cup.<sup>18</sup> With one apple able to serve multiple children, the reality of this "little people, little orders" phenomenon can make it less profitable for local producers and distributors to market and sell products to single, stand-alone ECE programs.

## ECE Programmatic & Administrative Challenges

Purchasing local food can also come with procurement challenges for ECE programs as they are impacted by a number of factors including: scale, staff shortages, kitchen capacity, children's taste preferences, and/or the seasonality of preferred food.

Caring for young children is already a demanding job—the additional labor required to purchase, prepare, and serve fresh produce poses yet another demand on providers. For home-based providers<sup>24</sup> who complete their own shopping, programs are reliant on a “single, very busy individual to purchase, prepare, and serve meals, deliver curriculum, and engage parents.”<sup>25</sup>



Time limitations are not unique to home-based providers. ECE programs that purchase food through a distributor may have challenges finding information about what products are sourced locally and find that the research process is time-consuming and does not always lead to answers.<sup>23</sup> For programs that do incorporate local food, ECE settings are not always designed to process fresh produce and consequently may lack the counter space, refrigeration, and sink capacity that is needed to process and prepare fresh, local produce.

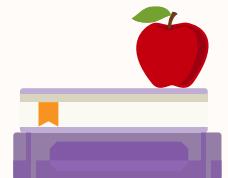


Programs are also limited by staff capacity. Early education is already facing a severe workforce crisis and successful local food procurement may require an ECE professional, even if passionate about serving fresh fruits and vegetables, to juggle competing responsibilities outside of their intended role, such as using personal time to connect with local farmers and pick up produce to avoid order minimums or delivery fees.<sup>19</sup>



The burden of affording food, whether local or not, is also placed solely on providers, who already operate on slim margins.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to purchasing and preparing foods, ECE providers must consider children's taste preferences when meal planning, and local produce is not always aligned with foods young children prefer.



Familiarity and knowledge of food preparation, the seasonality of produce, and nutrition education are all added barriers. For programs participating in the CACFP, a study reported that more than 85% of individuals who prepared meals for children did not have any nutrition or food program training.<sup>20</sup> Staff, included directors and cooks, are limited in their knowledge of how to access local foods, as well as how to incorporate fresh produce.<sup>21</sup> Nutrition education for ECE professionals—though critical to the young children in their care—can easily become an afterthought in relation to training, professional development, and continuing education.



## FARM TO ECE LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES

The challenges described above are not insurmountable. There is an ongoing movement: values-based procurement, that is building momentum to both shift mindsets and increasing purchasing power alongside the Farm to Institution Movement. Furthermore, a major federal program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, is a powerful tool for supporting Farm to ECE programming. Finally, there are case studies of successful Farm to ECE programming across the United States that can serve as opportunities from whom to learn or model ongoing Farm to ECE local food procurement efforts.



## An Opportunity to Shift the Farm to Institution Paradigm: Values-Based Procurement

The Farm to ECE and Farm to Institution movement are a radical departure from traditional methods of food procurement. The Farm to ECE movement is different because it is guided by principles of equity and measures its impact based on the health and well-being of children, families, and thriving local food system and local economies.



In contrast, institutional procurement has historically centered around achieving the lowest cost and at the greatest convenience, and this is especially true for larger institutions such as K-12 schools, hospitals, senior living centers, and governmental entities.<sup>26</sup> Placing the highest value on low monetary cost comes at the expense of other factors such as child health and nutrition, mental wellness, fair practices and wages, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

Larger institutions that engage in bulk food purchasing have been described as

the “**sleeping giant**” of food purchasing.<sup>27</sup> Because they spend such a significant amount of money on food procurement, they could potentially fundamentally shift the procurement ecosystem and food system in the United States by making changes to their purchasing habits.<sup>28</sup> As an example, the U.S. Government spent \$9 billion on food in 2022 and 25 vendors received half of those dollars.<sup>29</sup> Small and mid-size, diversified producers cannot compete at scale in terms of decreasing costs, but if the U.S. Government also accounted for the cost of their procurement choices on the environment,

on the health of the people they serve, and on the long-term sustainability of small, diversified farms, it would become more evident how costly those procurement choices are.

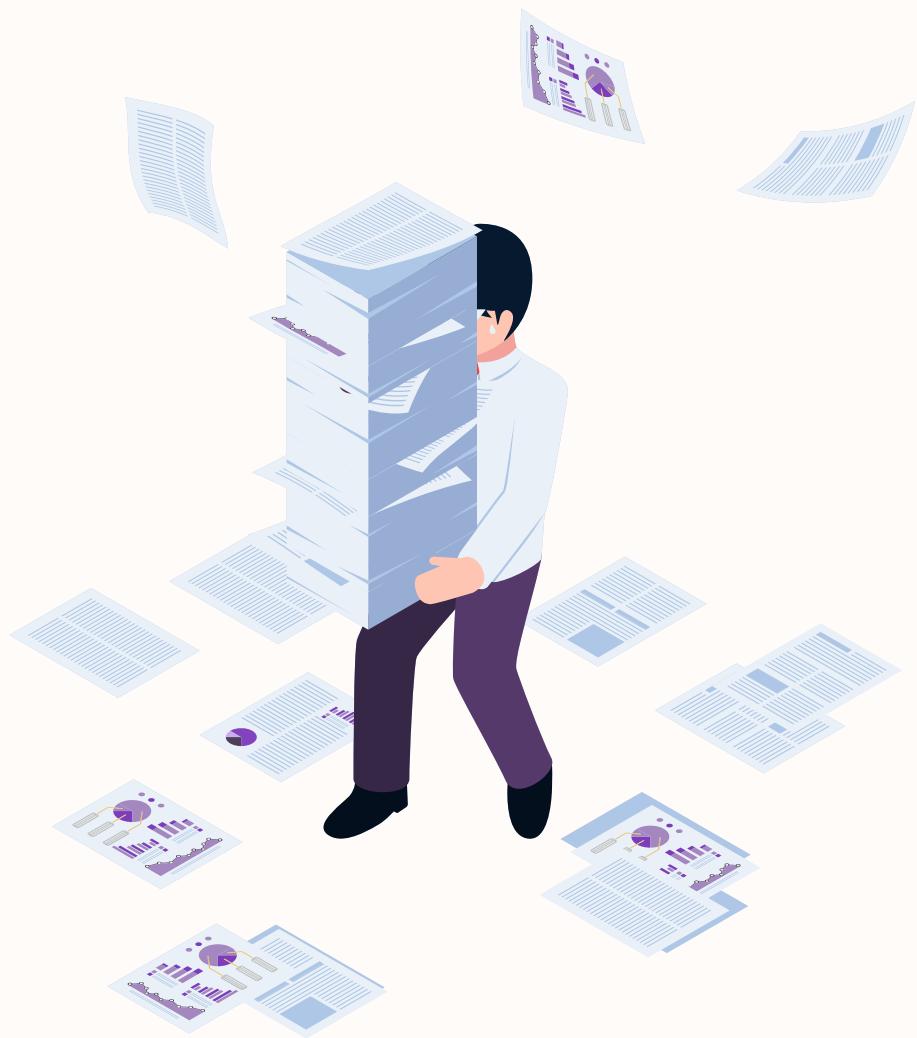
Values-based procurement is a procurement practice that Farm to ECE embodies and is the methodological key to expanding the Farm to ECE movement beyond a community of child care programs and families, to a vertical integration across all institutions.

## The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a Powerful Tool for Farm to ECE Local Food Procurement

While values-based procurement is a guiding principle of Farm to ECE, the federally funded program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), has turned out to be a powerful tool for supporting ECE programs in their tangible purchase of local foods. CACFP partially reimburses participating ECE settings for nutritious meals and snacks served to eligible, enrolled children.<sup>30</sup> CACFP reimbursement is not “dollar for dollar.” Instead, ECE programs are reimbursed depending on:

- The ECE setting type, either a center or home-based program. Centers typically receive higher reimbursement rates, while home-based providers receive, on average, nearly 70 cents less per meal or snack.<sup>31</sup>
- The number of meals served to children who meet income thresholds. For free meals, household income must be 130% or less of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For reduced-price meals, the income threshold is 185% FPL.<sup>32</sup>
- The reimbursement rate for each breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snack that the ECE program is approved to serve. The rate for each meal varies, as do the meal pattern requirements for meals.<sup>33</sup>

CACFP is currently being used by ECE programs to purchase local food: A 2021 survey found that 47% of ECE programs participating in CACFP receive reimbursement for local foods.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, of the over 1500 respondents in the survey, they estimated that approximately one-third of their total foods purchased



were locally grown or produced.

A recent federal rule change also recognized that ECE programs seek out smaller order sizes. In 2019, the rule changed the “micro-purchasing threshold.” By making this threshold smaller, the federal government allowed ECE programs to purchase increased amounts of food (including local food) without having to follow federal purchasing procedures, such as obtaining price quotes or soliciting competitive bids, as long as the amount remains under \$10,000.<sup>35</sup> This change is helpful for ECE programs that have small food orders and want to work with or prioritize local food producers without

having to adhere to burdensome federal requirements for small orders. While this recent rule change is helpful, CACFP is still far from perfect. ECE programs struggle to adhere to the meal pattern compliance as each age group has different needs and standards, making menu planning difficult to navigate for providers who have limited time and capacity.<sup>36</sup> CACFP also offers low reimbursement rates that do not cover the full cost of food, especially specialty food ingredients (like dairy milk alternatives), organic products, and local food.<sup>37</sup> Finally, CACFP is accompanied by administrative burdens such as time-consuming paperwork. For ECE providers, burdensome enrollment paperwork is seen as a barrier to participating in the CACFP, alongside the need to maintain and organize records related to meal patterns and reimbursements.

While compliance with CACFP is perceived as a barrier to local food procurement for some ECE programs,<sup>38</sup> it is still the only national program that facilitates widespread Farm to ECE local food procurement. Because ECE programs operate on slim margins, providing the funding behind the procurement of local food is transformative for the success and expansion of Farm to ECE.



## Farm to ECE Local Food Procurement: Stories of Success

Flourishing local food procurement efforts exist across a number of states and communities—from “veggie vans” in rural areas to centralized kitchens and collaborative ordering in cities. State-level work includes examples of both government policies and non-governmental efforts to enhance access to local foods for ECE settings. Showcased below are three examples of how states and communities have successfully implemented Farm to ECE local food purchasing.

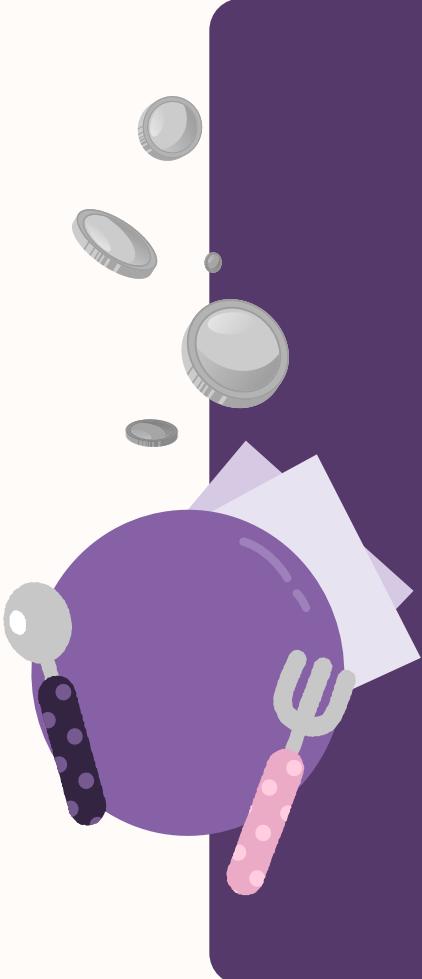
The three solutions showcase:

**Michigan:** Enhanced purchasing power with 10 Cents Meal.

**New Mexico:** Integrated governance with NM Grown.

**North Carolina:** Community-based solutions.

### Enhanced Purchasing Power: Michigan “10 Cents A Meal”



One rising policy strategy provides ECE programs with greater purchasing power by providing additional funds to source local produce. In Michigan, the state provides an additional reimbursement up to 10 cents per meal to schools and ECE programs that purchase and serve local foods using CACFP.<sup>39</sup> While CACFP is a federal program that reimburses programs, the state of Michigan provides an additional 10-cent reimbursement to early childhood programs when they purchase local foods. The program has largely been successful at increasing local produce consumption.

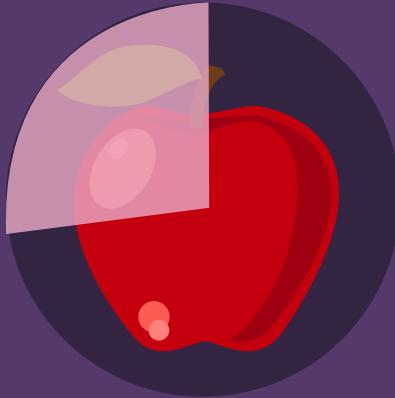
From 2022-2023, more than 200 grantees participated in purchasing from food hubs, distributors, and directly from farmers.<sup>40</sup> Grantees in 2022 purchased from 100 farms, giving children across the state a chance to taste Michigan-grown apples, saskatoon berries, microgreens, rutabaga, kohlrabi, rhubarb, and more.<sup>41</sup>

In Michigan and elsewhere, 10 cents a meal can help offset the low CACFP reimbursement rates, the increased cost of food (including local food), and is an opportunity to reach more children across ECE programs. As of 2023, a handful of states offered meal-matching programs similar to 10 cents a meal, including Colorado, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.<sup>42</sup>

## Michigan 10 Cents A Meal <sup>43</sup>



**84%** of grantees offered more local fruits



**73%** increased fruit consumption



**79%** of participants provided more local vegetables



**71%** increased vegetable consumption



**73%** said the program “allowed them to try new Michigan-grown foods in meals that they otherwise would have not tried.”

## Integrated Governance: New Mexico (NM) Grow



Another innovative state government effort is New Mexico Grow, a program that connects local farmers, ranchers, and food producers to provide locally sourced food to young children, school-age children, older adults, and families.<sup>44</sup> New Mexico Grow is a paragon of values-based food procurement in action. It provides funding so that institutions, including ECE programs, can access local food at an affordable price, simultaneously supporting local food producers to sustain and grow their businesses.<sup>45</sup> Focused on connecting smaller-scale producers to new market opportunities, participating preschools, K-12 schools, and senior centers can access fresh fruits and vegetables, minimally processed products, and meat grown by small family farms and ranchers.

For ECE programs that struggle with finding and accessing local food, NM Grow takes the guesswork out of compliance issues as food vendors are already approved by the state. Additionally, an approved vendor list can be found on the state's procurement website, making it easier for ECE providers to navigate foods available for purchase, and from where.

**87** **produce** vendors

**30** **meat** vendors

**36** **early care and education programs** accross the state participate, from Albuquerque to Rosewell.

**61** **approved products** ranging from fresh fruits and vegetables like apples and green beans to minimally processed items including **honey, juice, and tea**.

## North Carolina: Community-based Procurement Pilots

North Carolina's work on Farm to ECE has grown over several years after being awarded a USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Grant in 2021 allowing the state to pursue three methods of local food purchasing in early childhood: a mobile produce van, collaborative ordering, and a centralized kitchen.<sup>46</sup>

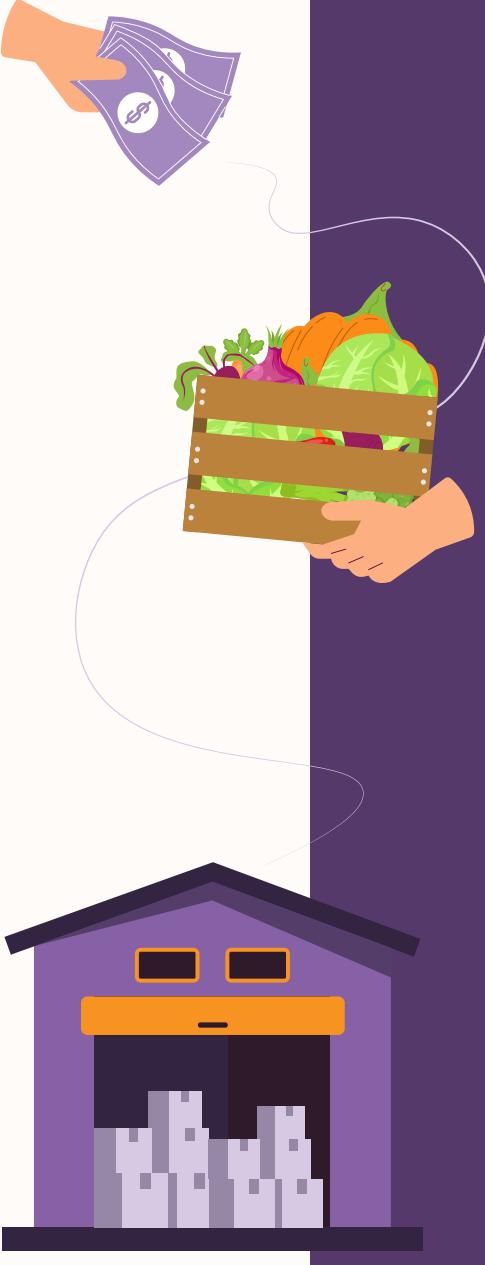
### Mobile Produce Van

Set in the rural northwest region of the state, the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children and a local community health organization established the Wilkes Fresh Mobile Market in 2016.<sup>47</sup> The mobile market sources local produce from multiple farms, then organizes and sells it as the main local distributor. Consumers—consisting of families, ECE staff, and programs—can order produce ahead of time, utilizing an online form developed by the Wilkes Fresh market managers. The mobile market delivers produce to the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children, where staff distribute orders to families at their child's ECE program.

Initially, the van operated akin to a CSA, where an assortment of produce was delivered to consumers, without having much choice for taste, quantity, or other preferences. When the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children discovered this was a barrier, the model shifted to providing additional consumer choice for produce selection and quantity. In a conversation with Stacy Daniels, the Child Development Specialist with the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children, she acknowledged the challenges of accessing fresh foods across her rural community, "We have a lot of food deserts. There aren't a lot of grocery stores, and people have a hard time accessing fresh, local foods." While the organization approached Farm to ECE and local food procurement in a unique way, Stacy said "it gave us an opportunity to give parents a chance to order fresh local food from the comfort of their home and pick it up at their child care center. [The Mobile Market] helps eliminate the issue of transportation to a grocery store and reduce the barriers that busy families face when accessing fresh produce." The mobile market is overcoming obstacles that are experienced across rural and urban areas, including limited ECE staff capacity to order and pick up local food, meeting order and delivery minimums, and providing more choice and access to local food for children and families.



## Shared Services Model: Collaborative Ordering



The shared services model creates a centralized infrastructure for multiple, small early care and education businesses in a way that reduces costs, strengthens management systems, creates efficient and standardized processes, and eliminates duplication of services.<sup>48</sup> In the context of local food procurement, child care providers can use this model to aggregate their orders for locally sourced food items. By pooling their purchasing power, providers can access locally grown foods at more affordable prices.

Drawing from a survey of the region's early childhood programs, Wake County Smart Start sets out to enhance local food procurement and address challenges with small-scale ordering and delivery minimums by aggregating local produce orders on behalf of child care programs. In this model, ECE programs collaborate to order a larger amount of food than each program would individually, allowing the group to purchase a large amount of produce that can then be split among the programs to fulfill their smaller-scale needs.

Lynn Policastro with Wake County Smart Start spoke to the efficacy of the shared service model for both ECE programs and local producers: "ECE programs can be a consistent market for farmers compared to only selling at a farmers' market, where farmers don't know how much they are going to sell from week to week. For farmers connected to our child care program, they know consistently that they are going to have that income coming in." This collaborative strategy can work with a variety of vendors, including farmers, food hubs, and distributors. When added together, the food items allow the programs to collectively meet order minimums and avoid delivery fees. Depending on the source, orders could be delivered to one location or delivered to a food hub that can process and organize the individual orders. The model works particularly well for foods like apples or carrots, which are commonly served to young children.



With aggregate ordering, programs can address barriers to purchasing local food including concerns with child taste preferences, order size, and order minimums.



### Shared Services Model: Centralized Kitchen

The Wayne Action Group for Economic Solvency (WAGES) leverages the organization's existing kitchen, which caters to a variety of programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Locally grown produce is sourced from a food hub that, in addition to aggregating, also processes the food, including washing, preparing produce (such as dicing carrots), and delivering to the centralized kitchen. Once received, the centralized kitchen incorporates the local produce into cooked meals. The meals are served across four centers and appear on the plates of about 368 children every day. Charlotte Neely, a staff member from WAGES, explained that the benefits are far-reaching, "Because of the way our kitchen services are designed with other contracts, the fresh produce that we purchase actually goes into about 1,800 meals. Not only do the children have this experience to eat local produce, but also senior citizens and others in the community." While the centralized kitchen removes the burden of meal prep from ECE providers, the model can also address the knowledge gap of food preparation and nutrition that can exist among ECE providers. Utilizing a food hub that sources from local farms and then processes them into prepared foods, like fresh-cut carrots, added another layer of ease for the centralized kitchen staff and allowed for a smooth transition to local produce.<sup>49</sup>



The centralized kitchen model is an appealing solution for ECE programs that may struggle with limited capacity to order, store, process, and prepare local foods.

## **POLICY OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT FARM TO ECE LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT**

Farm to ECE local food procurement has seen some traction in the federal, local and state policy initiatives. Given its impact on child health and wellness and integration across food systems and early childhood systems, local food procurement is an exciting opportunity for policymakers at all levels to consider. At the federal level, the Farm Bill and Child Nutrition Authorization and expansion of CACFP are at the federal and state level are the most potential policy levers that, with modification or expansion, can continue to support Farm to ECE local food procurement.

# **POLICY**

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## The Farm Bill

The Farm Bill, reauthorized every five years, has vast implications on efforts to ensure young children have access to nutritious foods and authorizes programs that could help expand Farm to ECE local food procurement.



Paying close attention to when the Farm Bill is up for reauthorization and how it could be expanded or modified is an important opportunity to leverage policy for Farm to ECE local food procurement.

First, **Title IV Nutrition** is the largest title within the Farm Bill. Title IV is dedicated to nutrition efforts like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). It also authorizes a grant program, the Farm to School Grant program, seeking to enhance access to locally grown food in educational settings through on-site gardening, field trips, and local food procurement. Specific to Farm to ECE, child care programs that also operate CAwCFP are eligible for grant funding.

Additionally, **Title X** of the Farm Bill created the USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership program, which authorizes the USDA to distribute grants to public-private partnerships that are working to strengthen local or regional food systems, including Farm to Institution efforts.<sup>50</sup> Grantees can use the funds to develop, plan, implement, and expand local food procurement strategies in ECE settings, like projects that connect local farmers and ECE programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables to young children.

In 2023, \$56.5 million was available to fund these projects and the grant program has already been used to support Farm to ECE local food procurement.<sup>51</sup> In 2021, the federal grant program supported North Carolina State University Center for Environmental Food Systems to engage partners across the state in creating the local food procurement pilots for Farm to ECE discussed above.<sup>52</sup> In 2022, Farm to ECE was discussed as one of the focal points of projects that received awards in Colorado and in Michigan.<sup>53</sup>



## Child Nutrition Reauthorization and the CACFP

Historically, child nutrition programs have been reauthorized through legislation outside of the Farm Bill, known as Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), which authorizes and administers CACFP.

Given the administrative challenges and low reimbursement rates of CACFP, the CNR is an important opportunity to consider policy changes that may help facilitate wider uptake of CACFP for Farm to ECE local food procurement. For example, there should be a focus on expanding awareness and outreach of CACFP with child care providers who generally reduce the administrative burden of the program, and increase the reimbursement levels to cover the cost of purchasing local foods.<sup>54</sup> Aligned with findings from a national Farm to ECE technical assistance expert, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), federal policy could also facilitate local food procurement by allowing child care programs to provide an additional meal service through CACFP.<sup>55,56</sup>

## State Policy Opportunities

State policy can have a big impact on facilitating Farm to ECE local food procurement. Michigan's 10 cents a meal program is a legislative appropriation that enhanced reimbursement rates for CACFP and subsequently expanded local food procurement across the state. As states consider their legislative budgets each year, there are opportunities either through new grant opportunities or through administering federal grant dollars, to enhance the purchasing power of early childhood settings. States are also responsible for providing licensing and quality standards for ECE programs. Integrating or encouraging Farm to ECE local food procurement through licensing or quality rating systems is another opportunity for state policy to help facilitate Farm to ECE local food procurement.



### Did you know?

The Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (Go NAPSACC) represents another opportunity for state governments to invest in and improve the health of young children. Go NAPSACC offers online training modules, guides, and other resources that help ECE providers and programs track and implement healthy practices.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: EXPANDING FARM TO ECE LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT

While Farm to ECE local food procurement has a number of challenges to overcome, there are models of success to learn from and policy opportunities to pursue. ECE providers, food producers, policymakers, community organization partners, and advocates all have a role in advancing Farm to ECE local food procurement.



**ECE Providers**



**Policymakers**



**Advocates**



**Farmers/Food Producers**



**Community Organization Partners**

Below is a set of recommendations for supporting Farm to ECE local food procurement in local, state, and national settings. In recognition that Farm to ECE local food procurement is the product of a collective impact strategy, each recommendation is identified by the stakeholder group that should be involved in implementation.

Provide educational materials to expand awareness of using CACFP for local food procurement within early childhood settings; increasing awareness could be written into Child Care and Development Fund state plans every three years to recognize it as a priority for the State.



Identify a full-time staff member at the state or regional level that can support ECE providers to apply for and navigate using CACFP for local food procurement. This could also be hosted by community-based partners.



Support the aggregation, purchasing, and distribution of local foods on behalf of early childhood programs to minimize staff burden.



Implement an online platform for Farm to ECE purchasing and ordering. Making it

possible for early learning programs to order locally grown food in advance allows a local producer to intake a larger, more aggregate order that can be distributed across multiple early learning programs.



Pursue state-level funding either as a grant or enhanced matching opportunity through CACFP to support ECE providers purchase local foods.



Amend state licensing rules to encourage local food procurement through nutrition education requirements or streamlining licensing rules to ease any unnecessary burden around building or renovating kitchen facilities.



Amend CACFP to be less administratively cumbersome, increase its reimbursement rates, and better facilitate local food procurement by early childhood programs.



Refer to CACFP policy changes outlined by the 2024 report: Leveraging CACFP For Farm To Early Care And Education: Growing Wins Across Early Childhood and Food System Sectors.



Ensure the inclusion of early childhood programs as eligible grantees in any Farm to School or local food promotion grants and programs. This includes ensuring ECE programs are made aware of the available funding and provided sufficient support to apply.



If your program engages in Farm to ECE or local food procurement, consider volunteering to be a proof-of-concept site for your state's Farm to ECE coalition.



Incorporate Farm to ECE and local food procurement as part of an ECE program's early childhood wellness policies.



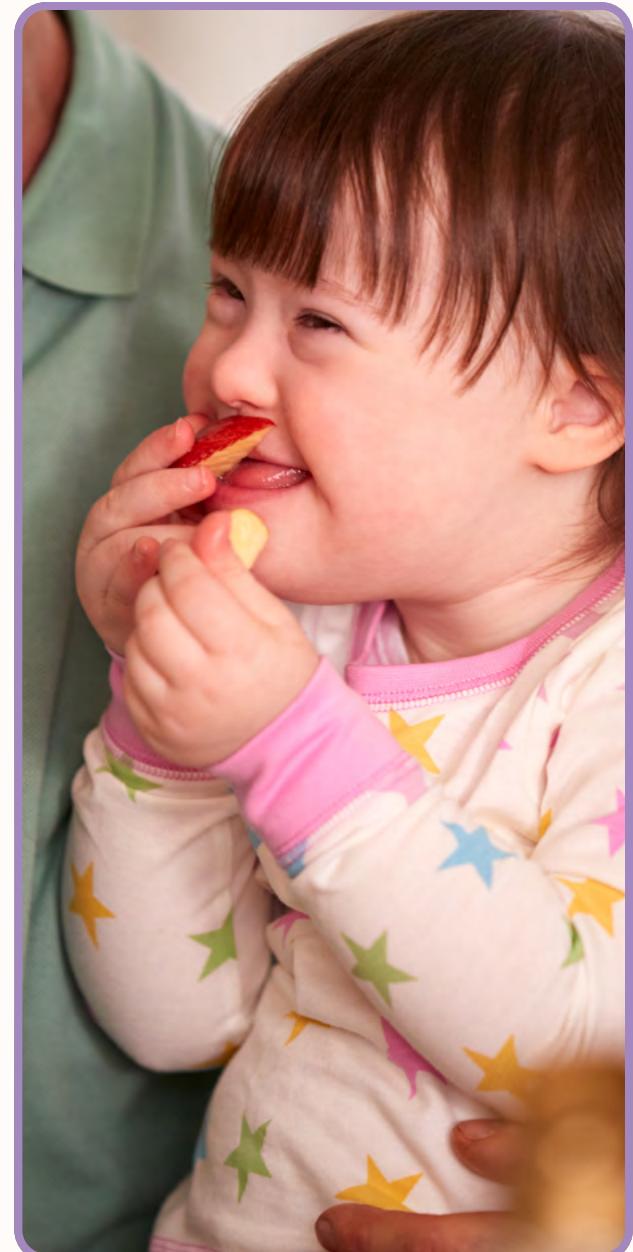
Procure and offer Go NAPSACC training free-of-charge to ECE programs.



Incorporate Farm to ECE local food procurement across policy platforms. Offer Farm to ECE local food procurement as a training opportunity for child care providers at the state and regional level, such as through Child Care Resource and Referral agencies.



Incentivize local food producers to offer modified order pricing or aggregate orders for products that are especially aligned with children's taste preferences (i.e. apples, berries, carrots etc.).



## APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

**Advancing Farm to Early Care and Education** - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Farm to CACFP** - Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture

**Farm to Preschool** - Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture

**Farm to Early Care and Education Local Food Purchasing Resources** - National Farm to School Network

**Farm to Early Care and Education** - SNAP-Ed Toolkit: Obesity Prevention Interventions and Evaluation Framework

**Find State Cooperative Extensions** - National Institute of Food and Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture

**Getting Started to Farm to Early Care and Education** - National Child and Adult Care Food Program Sponsors Association

**Local Food Directory** - United States Department of Agriculture

**Local Food Procurement for Child Care Centers** - National Farm to School Network

**Local Food Procurement for Family Child Care Providers** - National Farm to School Network

**North Carolina Farm to Early Care and Education Resources** - Center for Environmental Farming Systems

**Purchasing Local Foods** - Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture

**Produce 101: How to Identify, Prepare, and Store Vegetables and Fruit** - Fresh Farm

**Seasonal Produce Guides** - Farm Flavor

**SNAP-Ed Produce Guides** - SNAP-Ed Connection, United States Department of Agriculture

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**55** This is not an exhaustive list of every CACFP policy opportunity and more can be explored in greater detail in FRAC's 2024 report: Leveraging CACFP For Farm To Early Care And Education: Growing Wins Across Early Childhood and Food System Sectors.

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