

How to Buy, Prepare, & Serve Local Foods



How early care & education sites can use local foods in their meals, snacks, & taste-tests

ECE sites can improve the nutrition of their children and cultivate lifelong healthy eating habits with local foods. Here's how to get started buying, preparing, and serving local fruits, vegetables, dairy, eggs, grains, and meat at meals and snacks.

Kick start menu planning

- **Start small.** Purchase items that can be used whole or are easily cut, such as apples, berries, peas, and cucumbers.
- **Swap it.** Substitute one local ingredient in an existing child-approved menu item or snack.
- **Dig in.** Involve children in every stage of the process. They can select veggies on a farmers' market visit or pick produce from the garden. Then they can use child-friendly utensils like [wavy choppers](#) to prepare the produce for a snack!
- **Explore.** Discover the wide range of local food items available! Visit a local farmers' market to see what types of foods are available when. Local food can be found year-round, even in the winter in more northern states, especially beef, chicken, eggs, yogurt, and milk.
- **Learn.** Hone your culinary skills and practice seasonal recipes with the [Chop! Chop! video series and resource guide](#). This video training series even counts for Professional Development CEUs.



A farmstand is the perfect place to practice color vocabulary with kids, while also grabbing fresh veggies for snack time.

Identify your team and resources

- Connect with local farmers and food service staff to make a plan and put it into action. Schools doing farm to school and parents can also help you get started.
- Make a list of existing kitchen equipment (i.e. knives, food processors) and resources (i.e. eager parents, access to a garden) that will help you reach your goals.

What?

Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE) offers increased access to local foods, gardening, hands-on learning, and family engagement opportunities that support the health and educational experience of children in all ECE settings.

Who?

All ECE providers including group child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, and 4K programs in K-12 school districts.

Why?

- Offers opportunities for hands-on learning
- Increases children's access to nutritious food
- Provides family engagement opportunities
- Supports local farmers and healthy communities

Find sources of local food

- Determine what ‘local’ means to you. Local for your site may be your town, county, state, or beyond.
- Consider purchasing a “share” of produce from a local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm and have fresh local produce delivered regularly throughout the local growing season.
- Explore local purchasing options that work best for your site size:

Did you know?

You can use your **CACFP reimbursement for purchasing local foods**, even directly from farmers!

Family child care homes and small group centers	Purchase from a farmers’ market or farmstand
	Purchase directly from a farmer
	Purchase a weekly produce box via a CSA Share
Large group centers and 4K programs	Purchase directly from a farmer
	Find out if your distributor offers local products
	Ask your caterer for local options and/or include language about preferring local food in your contract

Local products are on the menu, now what?

- Share photos of where food comes from or who grows it with students.
- Give foods cool names like ‘dinosaur kale chips’.
- **Eat with your children at meal and snack time!**
- It can take 10-20 tastes for a little one to try a food and like it! Offer an item repeatedly or in a different way if children don’t like it the first time.
- Enhance literacy. Try new food-related vocabulary at meal time: tart, spicy, juicy, and sweet!
- Extend the excitement about local food into other parts of the day. Look at tomato seeds under magnifying glasses and read books about pumpkins!
- Explore cooking with children by making fresh jam from local concord grapes or raspberries.
- Engage families in taste-tests when they pick up their children and post pictures of children trying new local foods on the front bulletin board.



Questions? Comments? Get in touch!

Contact our Farm to ECE team at wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org. Visit our website at rootedwi.org for more Farm to ECE resources.

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