

Shared Services and Farm to Preschool

Farm to preschool connects early care and education settings (preschools, Head Start, center-based programs, programs in K-12 school districts, and family child care programs) to local food producers with the objectives of serving locally-grown, healthy foods to young children, improving child nutrition, and providing related educational opportunities.

Farm to preschool differs by location but always includes one or more of the following:

- **Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted and served at mealtime or as a snack or taste test;
- **Education:** Children participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition; and
- **School gardens:** Children engage in hands-on learning through gardening.

It can be difficult for a small, stand-alone child development center or family child care home to participate in farm to preschool because successful participation requires time (which is often in short supply) and scale (enough participating children and families to make the partnership worthwhile.) However, Shared Services Alliances are well-positioned to incorporate these components into the array of shared services offered to center or home-based programs.

Why Farm to School?



Kids WIN

Farm to school provides all kids access to nutritious, high quality, local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Farm to school activities enhance classroom education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition.



Farmers WIN

Farm to school can serve as a significant financial opportunity for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers by opening the doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.



Communities WIN

Buying from local producers and processors reduces the carbon footprint of food transportation while stimulating the local economy. Educational activities such as school gardens and composting programs create a healthy environment around the school community.

Farm to Preschool Examples

Below are two examples of Farm to Preschool projects that use a Shared Services frame for the work.

Farm to Preschool Pilot Project, Schenectady, New York

The [Capital District Child Care Coordinating Council](#) (the Child Care Council) coordinated a Farm to Preschool pilot project in three child care centers located in Schenectady, New York between April and September 2013. The centers were located in areas with limited access to fresh produce. A Farm to Preschool program manager was hired by the Child Care Council to work with selected child care centers and two farmers to engage their participation. A market was set up once a week at each child care center to offer fresh, seasonal local produce; food tastings with recipes; and educational materials on buying, using and storing local produce. The Child Care Council applied for and acquired Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machines to process SNAP participant purchases. SNAP participants were given a \$2 Fresh Connect coupon, provided by the NYS Dept. of Agriculture and Markets, for every \$5 SNAP purchase at the market. The participating farmers also accepted WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Vegetable and Fruit checks. Additionally, participating centers were given a gardening curriculum, supplies, guidance, and child sized gardening tools to start a child care garden at each location. The center children visited the farmers on market day and were allowed to see, touch, and taste produce and the featured recipe. Parents, childcare center staff and community residents also purchased produce from the market and participated in food tastings. During the month of August, Registered Dietitians from the EWPHCCS project were available to meet with children, parents, child care center staff, and community residents.

Funding for this project came from a SNAP-Ed funded obesity prevention strategy under The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) called Eat Well Play Hard in Childcare Settings (EWPHCCS). These funds are aimed at supporting parents and their preschool children who are enrolled in child care centers participating in CACFP. In 2014, the Farm to Preschool project will be expanded to other EWPHCCS projects around the state. See their [Facebook page](#) for more information.

The Community Group, Lawrence, MA

[The Community Group, Inc.](#) (TCG) is a non-profit organization based in Lawrence, MA that uses a shared services framework to manage a network of educational and family support services, including child care centers, family child care homes, charter schools, school-age programs, child care resource and referral (CCR&R), and more. TGC contracts with a local vendor to provide meals to more than 800 children within their network each day. TGC has made it a priority to use a vendor that seeks out local, fresh foods whenever possible. In addition to these locally driven, fresh meals, students in the programs managed by TGC participate in regular food and farm education activities including fieldtrips and Farm to School Month celebrations. The CCR&R, managed by TGC, offers services for parents and technical assistance to providers, including information and resources for shopping at farmers' markets, connecting with local farmers, and local gardening organizations.

Farm to Preschool Funding

USDA funding available to support new farmer training programs

The USDA recently announced the [availability of \\$18 million](#) to fund new farmer training and education programs across the country. These federal grants are made available to non-profit and community-based organizations, as well as academic institutions and government entities, through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). BFRDP is the only

national program that explicitly provides funding to train the next generation of farmers. Grant applications are due January 21, 2016.

USDA Farm to School Grant Program

Through the USDA Farm to School Grant Program, \$5 million in funding is available per year and about \$20,000 - \$100,000 is awarded per grant. For more information and to learn if you are eligible to apply, visit the USDA Farm to School Grant Program's website:

http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/FactSheet_USDA_Grants_and_Loans.pdf

USDA Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative

The Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative addresses individual farmers looking to extend their growing season, cooperative growers looking to rebuild a food hub, farmers' markets that want to accept SNAP benefits, schools that need cold storage to store locally procured meat, and anyone in between. Visit www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer to identify funding options to support these efforts.

Youth Garden Grant

The 2016 Youth Garden Grant is an award designed to support school and youth educational garden projects that enhance the quality of life for students and their communities. Any nonprofit, school, or youth program planning a new garden program or expanding an established one that serves at least 15 youth between the ages of 3 and 18 is eligible to apply. For more information visit <http://grants.kidsgardening.org/2016-youth-garden-grant>

The SeedMoney Garden Grants Program

This mini grants program focuses on helping more people--especially disadvantaged populations--to access healthy foods and gardens. The program targets community-based nonprofits such as schools, food banks, shelters, community gardens, colleges, libraries, prisons, senior programs, and others. For more information, visit: <http://kgi.org/grants>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

CDC funds state and local public health departments and supports organizations to facilitate farm to school and farm to preschool programs in communities. Visit CDC's website to find contact information for your state's health department: <http://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/health-care-workers/state-contacts.html>

State funding opportunities

States support farm to school in different ways, including: state-level farm to school coordinator positions at state agencies, farm to school grant programs, provision of additional reimbursements for school meals, and more. To find out how your state supports farm to school, see the "State Farm to School Legislative Survey" on the National Farm to School Network's website: <http://www.farmentoschool.org/Resources/F2S-Survey-2014.pdf>

Business sponsorship

Many large chain stores (Walmart, Lowe's, Home Depot) are willing to make in-kind donations to school and community garden projects. Approach local businesses in the community that have missions aligned with farm to school efforts, such as grocery stores/co-ops/restaurants that

source locally grown products, farm and agriculture stores such as tractor supply stores, local businesses that provide health services, plant nurseries, childcare businesses, etc.

Getting Started

Farm to school offers multiple strategies to improve the health of children and communities. For more information on how to get started, go to: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/resources-main/getting-started-with-farm-to-school>

For questions about the National Farm to Preschool Network, contact: NFSN Farm to Preschool Associate, Lacy Stephens (lacy@farmtoschool.org)

To find the National Farm to School Network representative in your state, go to: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/>