

Farm to Early Care and Education



Farm to early care & education (Farm to ECE) is a collection of strategies for connecting young children to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity. This is an extension of the farm to school movement, focusing on the specific learning styles, needs, and environments that children birth through age eight learn and grow in.

Farm to ECE has been shown to flourish in a variety of early learning environments with the three core elements;



- **Hands on learning-** Educational activities that are facilitated by the educator but led by the child. Each offers the opportunity to connect with healthy food in a new way or experience physical activity.
- **Gardening-** Gardening offers the opportunity to experience healthy foods from seed to table. Indoor, outdoor, large and small, gardens of all types are popping up in early learning environments across Iowa.
- **Focusing on seasonal, fresh & local food-** Early learning environments are in a unique position by serving multiple meals and snacks to young children each day. Sourcing this food seasonally and as local as possible is a triple win strategy for children, farmers, and communities.

What are the benefits?

For Kids

Farm to ECE provides all children access to nutritious, high quality, local food so they are ready to learn and grow. Hands on activities enhance classroom education by connecting concepts of food, healthy living, agriculture and nutrition. When presented in this pivotal window of development, children can build on a strong foundation of healthy living skills throughout their lifetime.

Sources: 1. National Farm to School Network

For Farmers

Farm to ECE can offer new financial opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufactures by opening the doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.¹

For Communities

Often families of young children are able to build on these concepts within their home environments. Also, buying from local producers and processors reduces the carbon footprint of food transportation while stimulating the local economy. Educational activities such as gardens and composting programs help to create a healthy and livable environment for the entire community.¹

Where can I learn more?

There are many wonderful resources to get you started, and support you as you build your work.

Iowa Farm to ECE Website Toolkit www.iowafarm2ece.com

This website serves as starting point for early childhood programs in Iowa. Visit the *Tools for Early Childhood Educators* tab to view classroom tools, food purchasing guides, and other resources.

National Farm to School Network <http://www.farmtoschool.org>

Since 2007, the National Farm to School Network has been working across local, regional, and national levels to expand the farm to school network. Visit their *Resources* page for a searchable resource database where you'll find lesson plans, garden toolkits, menus, recipes and more!

