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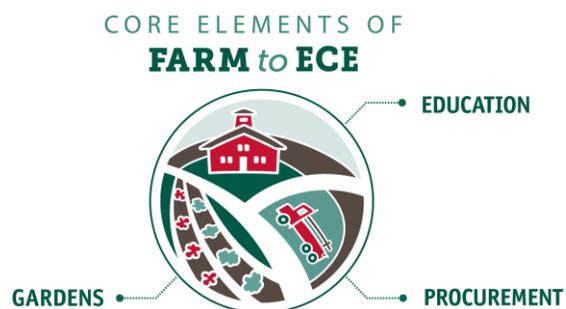
## Opportunities to Improve Head Start Quality through Farm to Early Care and Education Initiatives: Supporting Programs Competing for Head Start Funding

June 2019

### Farm to Early Care and Education and Head Start

Farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) is a set of activities and strategies that include three core elements: local food procurement, gardens, and nutrition and agriculture education. These activities and strategies enhance the quality of the educational experience in all types of ECE settings, including Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Given that taste preferences develop in early childhood and many children's daily nutritional intake is dependent on what is served in ECE settings, farm to ECE is a critical strategy to enhance the quality of ECE settings and to meet the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) and promote outcomes aligned to the [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#).



- Promoting Health - Farm to ECE activities like taste tests, cooking lessons, and gardening offer repeated exposure to new, healthy foods, promoting lifelong healthy food preferences and eating patterns and decreasing the risk for obesity in childhood and beyond.
- Engaging Family and Community - Gardening and food-related activities appeal to families and create more opportunities for meaningful family engagement in the Head Start setting. Young children take home the excitement of learning about new foods and act as a catalyst for change, influencing family food choices. Additionally, farm to ECE benefits the entire community. Purchasing local products creates new market opportunities for family farmers and bolsters local and regional food systems, while food-based learning educates teachers and staff about healthy habits and their local food system.
- Facilitating Experiential Learning - The experiential learning opportunities associated with farm to ECE enhance the learning environment and support the Head Start program's achievement of goals across the spectrum of domains and sub-domains outlined in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

You can find an alignment of farm to ECE with specific Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Early Learning Outcomes Framework in [Growing Head Start Success with Farm to Early Care and Education](#), developed by the National Farm to School Network to further its commitment to advancing farm to ECE nationwide.

### Supporting Organizations that Must Compete for Head Start Funding

Each year, competitions are held for Head Start funding in communities across the country. These competitions occur because of the Head Start Designation Renewal System (DRS), a process through which low performing Head Start grantees are identified and required to compete for their Head Start funding. While most Head Start grantees continue to receive funding without competition, in the fall of 2019, there will be competitions in the numerous communities where low performing programs have been identified.

Head Start and other organizations (public or private non-profit organizations, including community-based and faith-based organizations, or for-profit agencies within a community that wish to compete for funds) participating in the competition will be looking for innovative models to make their applications more competitive. Including farm to ECE in a Head Start application is a unique innovation that supports high-quality learning environments and meaningfully engages families and community partners. Incorporating farm to ECE into a Head Start application sets the stage for embedding farm to ECE into the activities and approaches of the Head Start setting. It may also open up opportunities for partner organizations to be contracted or hired to provide training and technical assistance for farm to ECE implementation.

## Opportunities for Incorporating Farm to ECE in Head Start Funding Applications

The Head Start funding application offers a number of opportunities to incorporate farm to ECE, including in the following areas:

- **Demonstration of Need for Child Development and Health Services: Location, Population, and Service Delivery Options:**  
In this section, applicants could include data on food insecurity, community food access, and childhood obesity and related health issues. This data establishes the need for and opportunity of farm to ECE initiatives to address family and community needs related to food access and health.
- **Achieving Early Learning and Developmental Outcomes to Promote School Readiness for Children:**  
In this section, Farm to ECE initiatives could be included to address:
  - school readiness (through experiential farm to ECE opportunities that cultivate learning in other areas like math and science);
  - health and nutritional needs of children and families (through nutrition education and increased healthy food access);
  - parent and family engagement (with impactful food-related family engagement opportunities); and
  - public and private entities that are willing to commit resources to assist the program (through relationships with state farm to ECE networks and cross-sector community partnerships).
- **Building Capacity of the Early Learning Workforce:**  
In this section, farm to ECE initiatives could be included to strengthen the early learning workforce through engaging and impactful professional development and training opportunities on farm to ECE. These trainings can also increase staff capacity to address Program Performance and Early Learning Standards while positively influencing staff health and nutrition knowledge and behaviors.

## Strategies to Engage Head Start Programs in Communities

Organizations working to implement farm to ECE are well-positioned to reach out to programs that are competing for Head Start funding in their communities. Strategies to engage organizations, with the goal of including farm to ECE language in the grant applications, include:

- Identifying which Head Start grantees in the community are competing for funding and researching them to better understand the size of the program, number of children served, number of staff, and other program characteristics. The majority of applicants will be existing Head Start grantees. Current Head Start grantees can be found here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/center-locator>. When announced, the list of communities (and thus Head Start grantees in those communities) that will be competing will be available here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/funding>.
- Reaching out to program directors and nutrition managers in Head Start programs in competing counties to set up meetings to discuss farm to ECE.
- Using resources like [Growing Head Start Success with Farm to Early Care and Education](#) to make the case for farm to ECE as an innovative strategy that will help Head Start programs distinguish themselves in the competition and by providing examples of how your work aligns with the goals of their grant application. Emphasize existing farm to ECE resources and supports that can be made available to the program staff to improve the quality of their program.
- After the meetings, develop and share plans for how farm to ECE trainings or other farm to ECE technical assistance and support can be incorporated into the program's Head Start application. These plans should be developed in conjunction with the program staff and director.
- Support the application by providing sample text and budget information (for farm to ECE trainings) that is responsive to the application criteria.

For more information on farm to ECE and to find state and local resources to support farm to ECE initiatives, contact Lacy Stephens, Program Manager at the National Farm to School Network, at [lacy@farmtoschool.org](mailto:lacy@farmtoschool.org) or visit the National Farm to School Network website ([www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)).