



Farm to Preschool: Getting Started with Local Foods Purchasing

FOR IN HOME AND CENTER-BASED PROVIDERS

There is no one model for doing Farm to Preschool, and programs may take many forms. Use these tips to help get you started:

Which products?

Procuring local fruits and vegetables is one of the easiest places to start. Procuring local milk can be easy, too. Other options for local purchasing include: flour, meat, eggs, beans, or seafood. These can work well if your kitchen(s) have the capacity for scratch cooking.

When you are deciding on which local fruits or vegetables to purchase, it can work well to purchase items that can be used in their whole form, or that can be easily processed. For example, small apples (farmers like to sell small apples to schools or preschools, since they often don't have good markets for small apples otherwise), frozen fruit (for yogurt parfaits), whole strawberries, sweet peas, potatoes that can be left whole for baking, or pears. Some products that can be easily processed are: tomatoes, cucumbers, and broccoli. Products that are more difficult include: corn on the cob (shucking the corn is more time consuming, though kids have fun helping with this; corn can be cut into rounds, or cut off for fresh corn) and winter squash, as two examples. It works well to start small, maybe one product each month, or only during the high harvest season.

Defining “local”

You get to decide. Think about your capacity to buy local, and how you want to define “local”. Local can mean from in your county or immediate community, anywhere in Oregon, or may also include other states in your region.

Planning for the year

It's helpful to decide in advance which local food items you want to serve in which months, since different products are available at different times of the year. Prioritize serving fresh items when they are available (for example, tomatoes and melons in September and October), and think about items that can be stored for use in the winter (for example, pears, carrots, apples, and potatoes). You can store items yourself, but make sure you're storing properly so that food does not spoil. Frozen local food products such as berries or green beans are great in winter, as well.

For additional support, contact:

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Purchasing local foods and supporting local and regional farmers



Don't forget to promote your local purchases! Let kids and families know what you're serving.

The Oregon Department of Education offers great free promotional materials: for several Oregon fruits and vegetables:
www.ode.state.or.us/go/h4s/

FoodHub is a free online directory and marketplace for buyers and sellers of local foods. Use it to find local farms:
www.food-hub.org



There are a wide variety of ways that in-home child care providers and child care centers can procure local foods. Spring is the best time of year to begin exploring your options; while local foods are available year-round in Oregon, summer and fall offer the most abundance.

Options include:

- **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** Food purchased through a CSA model is often paid for up front, and then boxes of fresh produce are delivered or available for pick-up weekly throughout the harvest season. A CSA provides the opportunity to develop a close relationship with a single farm, which could open doors for other opportunities such as farm field trips. You can search for CSAs at www.localharvest.org, or in the Portland area at www.portlandcsa.org/
- **Cooperative Buying:** Partnering with other early care programs to buy in bulk from a farm or wholesaler can help lower costs. If you are a smaller center or an in-home provider, consider partnering with other early care sites or joining an existing buying cooperative like *Know Thy Food* in SE Portland (<http://knowthyfood.com/>) to explore the following options:
- **Farm Direct:** Buying directly from a farmer can be a good option for centers that need food delivered in large quantities. Delivery can be arranged, and farms can be found online at: www.food-hub.org
- **Farmer's Market Direct:** Some sites are able to meet their needs by shopping at a nearby farmer's market, or by arranging in advance to pick up larger orders at the market. Consider a field trip to the market with your kids!
- **Distribution Company:** Many wholesalers carry products from local markets. If you're a child care center that purchases foods from a distributor, ask your representative where they source their food, and request local options!

