



LOCAL PURCHASING FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

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The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing and food and agriculture education into school systems and early care and education settings.

Farm to early care and education enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by enhancing food purchasing and education practices in early care and education settings like family child care homes. Farm to early care and education activities expose young children to healthy, local foods through meals and snacks, taste tests, lessons, cooking activities, gardening, field trips, farmer visits and more. These activities not only promote health, wellness and important hands-on educational opportunities, but also increase access to healthy foods, encourage and support family engagement, provide additional market opportunities for farmers and support thriving communities.

Options for purchasing local food

There are many different types of farm to early care and education activities. One option is to serve local foods, like fruits, vegetables, proteins, dairy and grains, in meals and snacks. Family child care providers can find locally-grown food in the following ways:

1 Your local farmers' market. You can shop at a nearby farmers' market, or arrange with a farmer in advance to pick up a larger order at the market. Find a market near you at www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets.

2 Your local grocery store or food co-op. Many grocery stores and co-ops carry locally-grown food. Look for signs or labels that say where the food came from, or if it's not labeled, ask!

3 A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Food purchased through a CSA is often paid for in advance, and then weekly boxes of food are delivered or available for pick-up all season long. A CSA provides a good chance to try new foods and to learn what foods are in season. If using a CSA, speak to your farmer for ideas and recipes so that you're able to use the variety of products that you receive.

4 An edible garden. Edible gardens are perfect for smaller amounts of produce. Fun, easy foods to start with include snap peas, radishes, lettuce, herbs, cucumbers and squash. If you are unsure about your soil quality or have limited space to grow, consider growing food in pots or containers. Contact your county's Cooperative Extension for advice on starting, maintaining and harvesting from a garden in your region: www.nifa.usda.gov/Extension.



CACFP and local food

Did you know that if you participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), you can use those funds to do things like buy food from farmers' markets and plant edible gardens? For more information, see the Local Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program Memorandum from USDA: www.fns.usda.gov/local-foods-child-and-adult-care-food-program

Tips for family child care providers

Serving local food in meals and snacks is rewarding but can be challenging at first. Here are some ideas to help make serving local foods in your home a success:

- **Start small!** Begin with one or two items that fit in your current menu. You could also start by trying one new local food each month.
- **What is "local"? You get to decide.** Local can mean within your county, in your state or in your region. Consider your area's growing season and the types of foods that grow and are produced near you.
- **Ask questions.** It's okay to ask farmers questions about their products. Things you might want to ask about include pricing, available quantities and delivery options. Farmers may also have tips and recipes for using new foods.
- **Fruits and vegetables are an easy place to start.** Purchasing local milk can be easy, too. If you live in a colder climate, think about foods that might be available year round like eggs, grains, meats or beans.
- **Start by purchasing items that can be used in their whole form or that can be easily cut up and prepared.** For example, small apples or pears, berries, sweet peas or potatoes that can be left whole for baking are all good places to start. Some products that can be easily sliced/chopped and ready to serve are: tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots and broccoli.
- **Buy foods in bulk when they are in season.** Farmers are often willing to offer discounts on large purchases. If you have room for storage, think about buying larger quantities of foods that keep well, such as: apples, carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes, frozen berries, beans and grains.
- **Get children involved.** The farmers' market is a great place for a field trip and kids love to help pick out new foods for meals and snacks. Children can also help with simple preparation like washing produce and mixing salads.

Farm to preschool in action: Highland Park, California

Maria Elena "Mini" Gonzalez is the owner of Mini Family Child Care in Highland Park, Calif. She has operated her family child care program for over 14 years, serving 12-14 children per day, ages 6 weeks to 8 years old. In 2014, Mini joined the farm to preschool program at Occidental College as a pilot site and has been implementing farm to early care and education activities ever since. With the encouragement of a strong parent base of supporters, Mini continues to buy fresh fruits and vegetables—and even children's books—from the local farmers' market down the street on Tuesday evenings. Mini routinely purchases anywhere between \$80-\$120 of fresh fruits and vegetables to serve at breakfast, lunch and snacks to children for the entire week.



Mini Family Child Care in California

Before Mini started buying local foods, she purchased all her produce from a local grocery store. Now, she routinely sources her produce from the farmers' market because it reminds her of growing up in her hometown in Mexico where she'd always go to the weekend tianguis with family and friends to buy necessities and to socialize. Mini likes providing nutritious and delicious food to the children in her care. She also likes trying new things and finds that produce at the market is often cheaper than at the local grocery store. At first, her biggest challenge was storing all of the produce and making sure she purchased everything she needed for the week. She has since dedicated a refrigerator to storage, buys ripening produce so it will last longer, and takes her weekly menu and recipes to the farmers' market so she is prepared for all meals and snacks.

The National Farm to School Network has a wide variety of resources and information about farm to school in early care and education. For more information visit farmtoschool.org/earlychildhood.