



# LOCAL PROCUREMENT FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS

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**NATIONAL  
FARM to SCHOOL  
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### GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

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 child care settings.

**F**arm to preschool enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices in early care and education programs. Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as education opportunities such as edible gardens, cooking lessons and farm field trips. Farm to preschool empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.

### Options for purchasing local food

There are many different types of farm to preschool activities. One option is to serve local food in meals and snacks. Spring is the best time of year to begin planning food purchases since summer and fall are peak harvest seasons for farmers. Child care centers can most easily buy locally-grown food in the following ways:

- 1 Through your food distributor or food service management company:** Many distributors and food service management companies (FSMCs) can supply locally grown food. If you are already purchasing from a distributor or working with an FSMC, start by asking them where their food comes from and requesting local items. You can also think about incorporating local foods in future contracts.
- 2 Directly from a local farmer:** When purchasing directly from a farmer, delivery can often be arranged. Your National Farm to School Network State Lead can help you find farms in your area. Find your State Lead at [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)
- 3 Your local farmers' market:** If you only need small quantities, you can shop at a farmers' market or arrange with a farmer in advance to pick up a larger order at the market. Find a market near you: <http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>
- 4 A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program:** Food purchased through a CSA is often paid for up front. Weekly boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables are delivered or available for pick-up all season long. A CSA provides a good chance to try new foods. If using a CSA, speak to your farmer for ideas and recipes so that you're able to use the variety of produce that you will receive. Or, ask the farmer if your box can contain less variety but more quantity of the items you want to serve. Also consider asking your families if they'd like to receive CSA boxes to take home with them. If so, the farmer might be willing to make weekly deliveries to your site.
- 5 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.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/](http://www.csrees.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 pages 111 (gardens and nutrition education) and 152 (procurement) of the CACFP Financial Management guide: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/796-2%20Rev%204.pdf>

The National Farm to School Network has compiled additional resources on this topic and others. Find more information and join our network at: [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

## Tips for Child Care Centers

Serving local food in meals and snacks is rewarding, but there can be a learning curve. Here are some things to think about:

- **Start small!** Begin by deciding which local foods you want to serve. It works well to start in the summer or fall when lots of local food is available. Or, start with one local item each month.
- **Define "local." You get to decide.** Local can mean from in your county, in your state or in your region. Consider your area's growing season and the types of foods that grow 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, delivery, food safety and liability insurance.
- **Fruits and vegetables are an easy place to start.** Purchasing local milk can be easy, too. Other options for local foods include: flour, meat, eggs, beans or seafood.
- **Make a monthly calendar.** It's helpful to decide in advance which foods you want to serve in which months since different foods are available at different times of the year. Prioritize serving fresh items when they are available.
- **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.
- **Farmers are often willing to offer discounts on large purchases.** If you have room for storage, think about buying larger quantities of foods that keeps well, such as: apples, carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes, frozen berries, beans and grains.

## Farm to preschool in action: IATP and NHA in Minnesota

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and their childcare partner, New Horizon Academy (NHA), launched their Farm to Childcare pilot in Minnesota in the summer of 2012 (see the photo on the front page). Together, IATP and NHA designed a set of practical, on-the-ground strategies to connect young children in their centers to local foods, including: age-appropriate curriculum, parent outreach, a rigorous evaluation program and procuring locally grown foods to include in childcare meals.

One of the primary goals of the Farm to Childcare program was teaching participating children where their food comes from and giving them a connection to the local producers who grew the foods highlighted in the program. Because NHA has a centralized food distribution system for all their centers and an exclusive purchase agreement with their prime distributor, they were not able to purchase from farms directly. However, NHA's distributor was able to identify which of their local, Minnesota producers could supply fruits, vegetables and wild rice for the program and worked closely with their planning group to determine when each local product would be available. NHA was then able to order those products and have them delivered to centers through their regular distribution process.

To make sure they were building relationships with farmers even though the connection with the centers was indirect, IATP visited each of the farms that supplied food for the program. These farm visits were a great opportunity for them to learn more about the farms and for the farmers to hear first-hand about the Farm to Childcare initiative and how their foods would be used. They also took photos of the farmers and vegetables in their fields to share with children and their families to reinforce the connection with where the foods were grown.

After seeing great success in 2012, in 2013 the Farm to Childcare program expanded to all 62 New Horizon Academy Centers throughout the Metro area and greater Minnesota, reaching 7,500 children.

IATP and NHA's Farm to Childcare work has been funded in part by the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.