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Farm to Early Care and Education Funding Opportunity: Leveraging the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program

May 2018

The federal budget passed in March 2018 included historic increases for a number of key federal early care and education programs, presenting a rare opportunity to apply new funding to support farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) initiatives in states. Notably, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which funds the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program, was increased by \$2.37 billion. This increase means that most states will receive 70-80 percent more funding through the CCDBG program this year compared to last year. The CCDBG program primarily provides a child care subsidy to eligible low-income families to help them offset the cost of child care, but this new influx of funding will also be used for quality improvements to early care and education and can include farm to ECE activities.

What does this funding increase mean for states?

The \$2.37 billion CCDBG funding increase means significantly more funding for each state. (See final Fiscal Year 2018 allocations by state [here](#)). Right now, states are awaiting guidance from the federal Office of Child Care and are planning how to spend this funding to improve access to high-quality early care and education in their states. The funds can be used for a variety of purposes, including expanding eligibility for a child care subsidy, increasing the amount of the subsidy, quality efforts focused on infants and toddlers (at least 3 percent of the funds must be spent on this purpose), and overall quality improvement initiatives (at least 8 percent of funds must be spent for quality initiatives). From a start date of October 1, 2017, states have two years to commit the CCDBG funding and one additional year to spend the funding, meaning all the 2018 funds must be spent by October 2020. No state match is required.

What does this mean for farm to ECE?

States are required to invest at least 8 percent of their CCDBG funding to improve child care quality in the state. This “quality set-aside” could be used to support state level farm to ECE initiatives.

What farm to ECE activities could this funding support?

- Farm to ECE focused professional development and training for ECE providers.
- Staffing in state agencies and Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to support farm to ECE education and implementation.
- Pilot projects that would increase nutrition education and local foods in ECE settings.
- Minor improvements to ECE facilities to facilitate food preparation and cooking on site.

How can we influence how this funding is used?

Because early care and education has long been underfunded, this infusion of funding will be used by states to expand eligibility for child care subsidies, increase payments to providers, and provide needed supports to early care and education professionals. Early care and education advocates in each state are setting priorities for the funding, and it is important to coordinate with them in order to prioritize farm to ECE as a funding request. To communicate farm to ECE as an important part of child care quality to relevant stakeholders, here are a number of things to know and do:

- **Review your state’s current Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plan to see current projects and priorities in your state.** States submit a biannual plan to the federal Office of Child Care to outline how they will be using their child care funding to meet the objectives of CCDBG. You can find your state’s 2016-2018 plan [here](#). Frame your farm to ECE conversations not just in terms of general farm to ECE benefits such as family engagement, experiential education, and health and wellness,

but communicate how farm to ECE meets child care quality goals articulated in the plan and through the state's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS).

- **Identify the lead CCDF agency in your state.** Use the plan above or this [contact list](#) from the Office of Child Care.
- **Determine key “asks” and recommendations for integrating farm to ECE into the plan (see examples below).** It will be important to provide a clear rationale for your asks, offering evidence of the need (beyond anecdotes) and connecting them to the state's ECE priorities and goals.
- **Schedule a meeting with the lead CCDF agency to discuss farm to ECE opportunities.** This is done best in conjunction with your ECE advocacy partners in the state who will have the background on the state's ECE priorities and plans for the new CCDBG funds to put your “asks” in context.
- **Submit comments on your state's CCDF plans.** States are currently in the process of revising CCDF plans for 2019-2021 (due in July) and will be sharing draft plans with the public for comments this spring. This is a great opportunity to submit feedback – either through oral testimony or letters – on how CCDF funds could be used to support farm to ECE projects that are well-aligned with the state's ECE priorities. If you are engaging several partners to submit written or oral testimony, it will be important to reach consensus on the main asks first and reinforce a consistent message across submitted comments and/or testimony.
 - **Attend and comment at public hearings.** Find the schedule for hearings in your state on the lead CCDF agency's website. Providing testimony in person is a great way to communicate the importance of farm to ECE for promoting ECE quality in your state along with specific recommendations of how CCDF funds can be used to support farm to ECE.
 - **Submit written comment to the lead CCDF agency.** See the lead agency's website for contact information and comment deadlines.

Examples of State Efforts to Leverage CCDBG Funds for Farm to ECE (See Attachments)

- Wisconsin – Letter offering feedback on the state CCDF plan
- North Carolina – Strategic paper on using CCDF for farm to ECE

For more information, contact Lacy Stephens, Program Manager at the National Farm to School Network, at lacy@farmtoschool.org or Soumya Bhat, Director of Early Childhood Equity Initiatives at the Policy Equity Group, soumyab@policyequity.com.



April 16, 2018

Judy Norman-Nunnery
Department of Children and Families
201 East Washington Avenue, Second Floor
P.O. Box 8916
Madison, WI 53703-8916

Dear Ms. Norman-Nunnery:

On behalf of Wisconsin's Farm to Early Care and Education Work Group, we appreciate the opportunity to inform the development of Wisconsin's 2019-2021 Child Care Development Fund Plan. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, our organizations work together to improve child health and nutrition through the expansion of farm to early care and education (ECE) programming in Wisconsin. Farm to ECE projects connect early care and education providers to healthy foods grown by Wisconsin farmers; increase nutritional awareness among young children and their families; and promote the development of local gardens at early care and education programs. The historic increase in federal CCDF funding provides a unique opportunity to ensure that all child care providers in Wisconsin have access to the training and support needed to promote child nutrition.

Nutrition is a key component of quality early care and education. The benefits of access to good nutrition during early childhood are well-known and set the foundation for health and school success. Children who consume nutritious food enter school ready to learn and grow, leading to better educational and health outcomes for Wisconsin's youngest residents. Wisconsin-grown nutritious food delivers a triple bottom line: children benefit from eating healthier, less processed food; local farmers benefit from the opening of new markets for their product; and communities benefit from the increased revenue and job creation.

We are very encouraged to see that child nutrition is part of the CCDF plan in Section 7.10, which references to numerous important state initiatives including Healthy Bites, nutrition-focused YoungStar criteria, the NAP SACC Self-Assessment, the Out of School Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative (OSNAP) self-assessment, and training designed to make child care centers more breastfeeding friendly.

With the recent meal pattern changes for the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the overall long-term benefits of child nutrition, there is a need for additional trainings and support for Wisconsin's child care providers. A key issue related to these initiatives involves the resources necessary to successfully implement them with fidelity widely across the state. We strongly support the use of CCDF funding to expand the capacity of Wisconsin's training and technical assistance (TA) infrastructure to ensure adequate implementation of these initiatives. Child care providers rely on the critical training and TA currently provided by Wisconsin's network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs). These agencies are equipped to offer expertise in program quality and support child care programs so they can provide the best possible care for children, including in the areas of child health and nutrition. CCR&R staff also help programs that are working toward a higher rating on YoungStar, which recognizes farm to early care and education activities as part of its point structure. CCDF quality funding could be used to hire additional staff with expertise in farm to ECE across the state's CCR&Rs,



thereby extending the capacity of these training organizations to provide TA to child care providers on child nutrition.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment and we look forward to talking more about our recommendations at next month's public hearing.

Sincerely,

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems
Community GroundWorks
Kids Forward
The Parenting Place



Supporting Child Care Quality through Farm-to-Early Care and Education Initiatives

Farm-to-early care and education (farm-to-ECE) models connect early care and education providers to locally grown, healthy foods; increase nutritional awareness among young children and their families; and promote the development of local gardens at early care and education programs. The historic increase in Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding passed as part of the 2018 federal budget agreement provides an unprecedented opportunity to use the current infrastructure developed by the North Carolina’s Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) to improve child nutrition through the expansion of specific farm-to-ECE initiatives that are aligned with the North Carolina’s CCDBG plan.

Current Farm-to-ECE Work

CEFS is a partnership of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and North Carolina State University. The Partnership works to develop and promote just and equitable food and farming systems that conserve natural resources, strengthen communities, improve health outcomes, and provide economic opportunities in North Carolina and beyond. As part of its work, CEFS engages communities through the NC Farm-to-ECE Collaborative, which builds and connects local teams and implements initiatives that increase child care quality and promote child well-being. CEFS is also promoting best practices with the new Go NAPSACC farm-to-ECE module and the use of veteran ECE providers as coaches to providers who are newer to the farm-to-ECE movement.

The Farm-to-ECE Collaborative was a direct result of overlaying Farm-to-ECE with Shape NC, an initiative created to increase the number of children starting kindergarten at a healthy weight and ready to learn. The NC Partnership for Children, CEFS’ lead partner, initiated a Shape NC Collaborative Series in 2016, a professional development hub that provided networking and collaboration, and sites greatly accelerated progress in their nutrition and physical activity goals compared to Shape NC sites not participating in the Collaborative. Because of Shape NC’s success with this approach and existing relationships with NC Partnership staff, the project leadership team chose to adopt this strategy to engage sites in becoming models for Farm-to-ECE programs. CEFS began an opt-in process in October 2016 to invite Partnerships and ECE facilities from the Shape NC Collaborative to the table.

Benefits of Farm to ECE for NC Children

Farm to ECE has the potential to deliver a triple bottom line—children, farmers, and communities stand to benefit from the implementation of high-quality farm-to-ECE models. Children who have increased access to nutritious local food will be more likely to enter school ready to learn and grow, leading to better educational and health outcomes for North Carolina’s youngest residents. Farm-to-ECE activities also improve ECE provider quality by incorporating hands-on, experiential learning related to food, health, agriculture, and nutrition into the ECE setting. By opening a new market, farmers, food processing organizations, and food manufacturers can take advantage of a previously untapped financial opportunity by engaging with ECE providers. Likewise, when ECE providers purchase from local producers and processors, it can also help to create a stronger local economy

through job creation. Farm to ECE also benefits the larger community by offering opportunities to strengthen family and community engagement.

As a result of this Collaborative professional development hub, 730 children in 13 child care centers across 9 North Carolina counties of high need have been served since 2016. In addition, the following program goals have been achieved:

- 92% of the child care facilities in the model included fresh, local food on their menus;
- 92% of the child care facilities in the model have an edible and educational garden on site;
- 92% increased access to fresh, local food for children.
- 88% changed their behavior and reached best practice standards because of their participation in the farm-to-ECE program.

Expanding the Collaboration with Shape NC: Healthy Starts for Young Children

CCDBG quality set-aside funding is currently being used to fund Shape NC. Through the program, CCDBG funds help communities and child care centers develop environments, practices, and policies that encourage young children to be healthy. Through Shape NC, Smart Start encourages child care centers and home-based providers to adopt the best practice standards in the areas of nutrition, physical activity, reduced screen time, enhanced outdoor learning environments and breastfeeding. Now with the development of GO NAP SACC Farm to ECE module, best practices in Farm to ECE as well.

CEFS has already been working with Shape NC providers to add a farm-to-ECE component to the Shape NC model through a pilot and, benefitting from economies of scale, will be ready to expand the model strategically to benefit more children and ECE providers in the state. An additional \$500,000 in CCDBG quality funding over two years would allow CEFS to sustain the work going on in the current Shape NC sites and expand the farm to ECE model to 15 counties.

By investing a portion of the historic CCDBG increase into farm-to-ECE efforts, North Carolina will benefit from a triple bottom line through an initiative that aligns with the state's existing early childhood priorities. High-quality farm-to-ECE initiatives can lead to better child outcomes, greater program quality, and economic benefits. The strategic expansion of CEFS' collaboration with Shape NC will allow additional ECE providers to adopt best practices for child nutrition and create better learning environments for more young children across the state.