

National ECELC Newsletter

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October is National Farm to School Month!

Are you interested in learning more about how to implement or coordinate Farm to Preschool efforts in your state or community? Contact the Farm to Preschool associate, Lacy Stephens, for ideas!

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The Farm to School Network wants to hear from your early care and education programs! Please send the survey link to your ECE programs to complete by November 20th. Survey participants will be included in a drawing to win one of 5 framed pieces of artwork!

Survey link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NFSNfarmtopreschool>

The Farm to Preschool Initiative

The Farm to Preschool (F2P) initiative serves as an extension of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) "Farm to School" program and began as a grant-funded project though it is now found across the country.¹ F2P targets the earliest learners (ages 0-6), in early care and education (ECE) settings such as child care centers, Head Start sites, in-home centers, and preschools. The F2P model has three elements:

1. **Gardens:** creating an on-site edible garden helps to extend the learning environment to the outdoors and provides an opportunity for children to learn where and how food grows.
2. **Food and Farm Education:** providing a learning opportunity in the classroom for children to learn about agriculture and the importance of consuming fresh fruits and vegetables.
3. **Procurement:** connecting with local farmers and farmers markets to provide locally sourced foods during program meals, snacks, and weekly or monthly taste tests.

It is important to keep in mind that F2P initiatives can and do look different in every state and every community. A program can choose to implement all three elements at the same time or may choose to start with one element, such as gardening, and then build in the other two elements of F2P at a later time.

Helpful resources for Implementing Farm to Preschool:

- [Get Started with Farm to Preschool](#)
- [USDA Farm to Preschool Fact Sheet](#)
- [Farm to Preschool Seasonal Menus and Recipes](#)
- [School Gardening Resources](#)
- [Farm to Preschool Program Models](#)
- [Farm to Preschool Resources for Families](#)

Success Story from
New Dimensions Learning
Center in Jacksonville, Florida

"Preparing children for success in school is the best gift we can give them", is the motto for New Dimensions Learning Center in Jacksonville, Florida and they are doing just that. "As a center, we strive to provide as much education to our families in all aspects of early childhood education however, the nutritional information has always been a weaker point", says Center Director, Kenyatta Jelks. With the challenge being nutrition, Kenyatta began to make changes in the center. Creating healthier menus, building a garden, implementing nutrition into daily lesson plans, and getting parents involved were a few strategies that she used to enhance her program.

When creating the new menus, it was important for Kenyatta to find innovative ways to introduce children to new, healthier foods. As a program, they built a garden to introduce the children to new foods and teach them about gardening. "Our children have taken pride in planting their gardens and eating the vegetables that they have grown themselves", Kenyatta states. The staff also included new foods in their daily lessons by charting and discussing "whoa" and "go" foods. This allowed the children to identify those foods that are healthy. "If we had to sum up the program changes in one word, it would be illuminating." – Kenyatta Jelks



Through F2P, young children can learn important gardening and harvesting methods, nutritional facts about fresh fruits and vegetables, and are introduced to healthy habits at an early age.² Research has shown that with the incorporation of school gardens, a child's preference for fruits and vegetables increases, parental involvement rises, and there are marked improvements to a child's enthusiasm about their learning experience, teamwork skills and self-understanding.³

There are many ways to get involved with this growing agricultural learning movement. For instance, EcoTrust, an Oregon non-profit, has developed a [toolkit](#) for child care providers to become involved with the F2P program.⁴ As an active partner to F2P, the USDA compiled a curriculum toolkit through their Team Nutrition for ECE centers titled, "[Grow It, Try It, Like It](#)" to utilize when implementing the program.⁵ The Institution for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) also created a curriculum package aimed at ECE centers that participate in F2P. IATP has identified that engaging children early in healthy eating and healthy habits can have lasting and beneficial effects to long-term development.⁶ This curriculum package can be accessed here: [Farm to Childcare Curriculum Package](#)

Questions?

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¹ Who We Are. Farm to Preschool Website. <http://www.farmtopreschool.org/whoweare.html>

² Farm to Preschool: Local Foods and Related Activities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). United States Department of Agriculture Website. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-preschool>

³ Preschool Gardens. Farm to Preschool Website. <http://www.farmtopreschool.org/preschoolgardens.html>

⁴ Sobell, S. Accelerating Farm to Preschool. <http://www.ecotrust.org/accelerating-farm-to-preschool/> EcoTrust. Published May 14, 2014. Accessed October 9, 2014.

⁵ Grow It, Try It, Like It! Nutrition Education featuring MyPlate. United States Department of Agriculture Website. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it-try-it>. Published June 1, 2013. Accessed October 9, 2015.

⁶ Berkancamp J, Mader L. Farm to Childcare: Opportunities and Challenges for Connecting Young Children with Local Foods and Farmers. *Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy*. 2012. 4-17. Accessed October 9, 2015.

