



LOCAL PROCUREMENT FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

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NATIONAL
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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.

Farm 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. Young children 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 young 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. Family child care providers can most easily 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 <http://search.ams.usda.gov/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 up front. Then, 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 and to learn what's in season and when. 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 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.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/

Tips for child care providers

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 within 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 keep well, such as: apples, carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes, frozen berries, beans and grains.

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 center for over 14 years, serving 12-14 children per day, ages 6 weeks to 8 years old. Last year, Mini joined the farm to preschool program at Occidental College as a pilot site and has been implementing the program ever since. With the encouragement of a strong parent base of supporters, Mini continues to source 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 as breakfast, lunch and snacks to children the entire week.



Mini Family Child Care in California

Prior to the farm to preschool program, Mini purchased all her produce from Food4Less, 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 socialize. Mini likes providing nutritiously delicious food that is pesticide-free to her students; she likes trying new things; and produce is often cheaper than at the local grocery store or even Costco. At first, her biggest challenge was storing all the produce and making sure that she didn’t forget anything; 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 doesn’t forget anything.