



FARM TO EARLY CARE & EDUCATION SERIES



Procuring Local Food for Meals and Snacks in Childcare Settings

BY ALLEAH SCHWEITZER, ARIEL AGENBROAD AND MAUREEN TOOMEY

This guide is designed to help those working with young children in educational or care settings to incorporate more fresh, locally grown and produced food into planned mealtimes, snacks, or for use in exploratory taste tests.

HOW YOU DEFINE LOCAL AND SEASONAL

Understanding the growing regions around you, as well as what is grown or produced and available in your area, and at what times of year, will help you plan ahead to incorporate local food into your menus.

WHERE AND HOW TO BUY LOCAL FOOD

Not everyone knows where to find local food, or what the best practices are when purchasing directly from the farm or farmers market. Knowing how to find local food is the next step.

FINDING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR EFFORTS

A wealth of information exists to support Farm to ECE activities and getting more healthy local food into childcare and pre-school settings. We'll share some of our favorite sources.

Farm to Early Care and Education

Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE) are national strategies that help children in public and private educational settings establish healthy eating habits while supporting local farmers and ranchers.



Farm to ECE focuses on the youngest learners and their families. Like Farm to School, Farm to ECE teaches children about where their food comes from by integrating three basic approaches:

- Incorporating more locally grown food into meal and snack programs.
- Engaging children in hands-on learning through gardening activities.
- Including agricultural literacy into lesson plans and activities.

Why Local Food?

Purchasing locally grown produce in season for meals, snacks or taste testing introduces children to an array of vegetables and fruits. It also supports local producers and can even encourage families to serve locally raised or garden grown vegetables and fruits as part of a healthy diet.

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Defining Local

Local is a term typically used to define foods that have been produced close to your community, city, state, or geographic region. There is no one standard for what defines local.

When you purchase local foods for a Farm to ECE program, it is up to you, as the childcare provider, and your other stakeholders to define what is “local” to you. How you define local is important and should be considered before searching for or buying food. Advisors in this process might include your fellow educators, families of the children you serve, community partners, and even area farmers. The definition you choose should support the mission, vision, and goals of your center and should also support other community goals, if possible. It might be a set number of miles, it might be state or county lines, or more commonly, a variable radius that includes the agricultural regions closest to you.

Bear in mind, the broader the geographic definition of “local,” the more foods and sources will be available to you. The narrower the geographic focus, the greater your impact on the immediate community. Allow room for your definition to grow and evolve.

Seasonal Availability of Local Foods

Seasonal food is produce that is purchased and consumed around the time that it is harvested. Fresh produce in season can be fresher, tastier and more nutritious than food consumed out of season. For example, produce that is picked at its peak ripeness is generally better tasting than food that has been picked when underripe and transported across long distances.

Fruits and vegetables contain more nutrients when allowed to ripen naturally on their parent plant and consumed shortly after harvest. Of course, in winter months, we can enjoy foods that have been harvested at their peak and preserved for use throughout the year. The following table highlights ECE-friendly foods that are grown in Idaho and the surrounding region and when they are available to be used in Farm to ECE programs in most regions of the state (this will vary based on climate and other factors). Some foods not listed, such as dairy products, are available year round.

In our experience, the foods on this list have been well received by the children participating in Farm to ECE programs, and are grown in many parts of the state.

Calendar Month	Seasonal Food Available
January	Dried beans, peas and lentils
February	Oats
March	Microgreens and leafy greens
April	Asparagus
May	Radishes and carrots
June	Cherries
July	Berries
August	Cucumbers and summer squash
September	Bell peppers, peaches and plums
October	Beets and tomatoes
November	Apples and winter squash
December	Potatoes and dried fruits



How to buy local

Introducing young children to fresh, locally grown foods enriches the connection that young children have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers.

You can choose to buy directly from a farmer, or you can shop a local retailer carrying local foods or visit an area farmers market. Access, convenience and price will likely all be factors that influence your decisions.

Examples of Local Food Purchasing

You might decide that a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription is the best way to support your farm to early care and education goals. In a CSA program, you buy in to a share of the harvest. In return, subscribers usually receive a weekly or bi-weekly box of produce or other farm goods. The CSA model works for those looking to experiment weekly with new products and recipes.

You can connect with farms in your area directly to arrange for purchases and to work out pick or delivery options and frequencies. Buying directly from a farmer can be a good option for centers that need food delivered in large quantities.

You may be able to meet your needs by shopping at a nearby farmer's market or by arranging to pick up larger orders from a farm who sells at the market. This works if you have the time to shop at the market and are willing to be flexible on what you purchase and the quantities. If this approach works best for you, get the children involved too and consider making a field trip to the market with your class, especially if the market is held on weekdays!

If you're enrolled in a child nutrition program like CACFP, local foods can be eligible for reimbursement. Review the many ways that CACFP allows local food purchasing through their Procuring Local Foods guide: www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp.

Where to find local food

If you live in Idaho, the Idaho Farmers Market Directory is a good place to start. This directory, published annually, provides the locations, dates, contact information and times for all of Idaho's farmers markets. Even if you think you will want to purchase products directly from the farm, you can often find individual vendors with the products you need through the market website. You can pick up a

directory at your local Extension office or download it from either the Idaho Preferred (www.idahopreferred.com) or Idaho Farmer's Market Association (www.idahofma.org) sites. In addition to the directory Idaho Preferred's website also includes a comprehensive digital guide to all of the Farmer Markets throughout the state.

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred program mission is to help bring the farm to your fork by making locally grown, raised, or crafted agricultural products easy to find and enjoy. The Idaho Preferred website is user friendly and searchable by location, type of product, producer, and seasonality. This can be a great place to find community agritourism events, where to buy product direct from farmers, ranchers and food crafters near you, ag-minded recipes, and more! The website also includes a "What's In Season Calendar" helpful in planning when to look for, find, and feature local foods on your plate based on their freshness and peak harvest time.

Many Idaho farms also have listings on the Local Harvest database. Keep in mind that not all farms listed on Local Harvest are still in business or keep their listing updated regularly (www.localharvest.org).

You should also visit with your foodservice supplier, local grocery co-op or independent grocer to inquire about what local products they carry or are able to source. While shopping at any of your local retailers be sure to look for the Idaho Preferred logo on product to know the products is produced locally in Idaho.



Tips for safety in handling, preparation and storage of farm fresh produce

Wash hands before handling any fresh produce. Use only clean, food grade containers to transport fresh produce from the farm or market to your site. Examples include; plastic or stainless-steel kitchen colanders or bowls, 5-gallon food safe or food grade HDPE plastic buckets, plastic produce bags and paper grocery bags.

Plastic trash liner bags are not food safe. Whenever possible, brush, shake or rub off excess soil outside, before bringing produce inside or storing it.



Rinse fresh produce under cool running potable water, even produce with thick skins and rinds. It is appropriate to use a vegetable brush on produce with thick, rough skin or rinds. The surface of this produce can harbor bacteria that can enter the food when cut. When washing produce under cool running water, do not use soap, detergent or bleach. There are many commercial produce washes available, but they are not necessary. If using these washes in the classroom, make sure they are designed for fresh produce and follow the manufacturer's recommendation on use. Clean and sanitize vegetable brushes frequently if used.

Avoid cross contamination with other foods by making sure there is access to separate cutting boards and equipment washing stations are readily available. Cutting boards should be designated for preparation of one kind of food product: raw food, cooked food, vegetables or meat, etc. Clean work surfaces and equipment before and after each use. Sanitize work surfaces with a diluted bleach solution (1 tablespoon of unscented chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of clean water) and allow to air dry. Remind students to follow the food preparation checklist both in the classroom and when they are preparing food in their own home.

Keep fresh produce out of the temperature "danger zone" during and after food preparation. The "danger zone" is between 40°F and 140°F.

Whenever possible, avoid washing produce before storing, the added moisture will cause faster microbial growth, and will cause faster breakdown of the produce, shortening its shelf-life and ability to be consumed. If

Additional Resources

University of Idaho Extension programs, local and national partners and resource providers supporting Farm to ECE activities.



www.uidaho.edu/extension/small-farms/farm-to-school/early



www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov



www.idahopreferred.com



www.farmtoschool.org

