



## Unit 1: Farm to Preschool Benefits

Children need nutritious foods to grow and learn and starting early will help establish lifelong healthy eating patterns. Healthy diets that include plenty of fruits and vegetables can help prevent obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease later in life.

[Film] *Often for children that we see who live in urban communities to have something in their environment every day where they go to preschool that is teaching them about where food is grown and how food is grown and open space and farmland, the benefits are lifelong changes in their potential behavior with regard to eating and nutrition.*

Farm to preschool programs provide many benefits to young children. In this unit you will learn about activities you can incorporate into your curriculum and the benefits they have for young children in your community. By the completion of Unit 1 Farm to Preschool Program Benefits you will be able to identify the components of a successful farm to preschool program, list the benefits for children who participate in a program, and identify best practices that incorporate farm to preschool activities into your early childcare center.

Preschool children should eat between one and one-half cups of fruit and between one and two cups of vegetables each day. To help achieve these goals the United States Department of Agriculture recommends filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables and has developed the Choose My Plate graphic to illustrate this.

[Film] *Ready?  
Yeah.  
Yeah.  
Can I see, please?*

Since most children do not eat enough fruits and vegetables it is important for early childcare centers to find creative ways to expose children to a wide variety of produce and teach them which foods are important to eat for a healthy diet.

Children often dislike trying new foods. Introducing children to fruits and vegetables is important to help overcome neophobia. Neophobia is the fear of new things or experiences and in this case the fear of new foods. Research suggests that it takes between five and ten exposures to a new food for a child to accept it.

[Film] *It's important to connect children in centers to farm and garden activities so that they can have hands-on experiences with how to grow food and experience the freshness and the excitement of planting a seed and a few weeks or months later*



*being able to actually eat it. Children are fascinated by that and it's a very good connection for them to be able to form life-long healthy eating habits and learn about good nutrition. And they often go back and teach their families. We've heard stories from parents saying, "You know, my child came home and started asking us about the five groups. They wanted the five groups." And of course they weren't sure what that was until the child was able to explain about their nutrition curriculum and that was really wonderful to have the child be the educator.*

Starting or expanding a farm to preschool program at your center is an excellent way to bring more fruit and vegetable experiences to the children. There are a variety of ways you can incorporate farm to preschool activities into your curriculum. These might include: Providing healthier snacks and meals using locally grown fruits and vegetables, planning field trips to farms and farmers' markets, or inviting a farmer to your center for show and tell, planting a school garden outside or starting seeds inside under lights, taste testing and cooking demonstrations for parents and their children, or holding a harvest festival at your center with hands-on nutrition activities for children and their parents.

In a recent survey conducted by the University of Massachusetts and the University of New Hampshire, over one hundred early childcare educators were asked what steps they had taken to link children with local farms and agriculture in the last three years. Almost 50% indicated they had taken children on a field trip to visit a farm and 46% reported planting a garden at their center.

Everyone benefits from a farm to preschool program. The children and their families learn to eat and prepare fresh seasonal foods, they get to know the farmers which can help support the local economy, and they get the great taste of fresh local produce.

Now, take a few minutes to explore the food safety from farm and garden to preschools sharing board. The sharing board asks you to answer questions and post your best practices, tips, success stories, and challenges. You may also respond to other participants' posts. Once you have posted a response to a question or responded to someone else's post you will be able to return to the unit and continue on with the training. Click the sharing board icon to begin this part of the training.

Many early childcare centers bring local fresh fruits and vegetables into their classrooms and kitchens but don't formally call what they do farm to preschool program. However you identify your program there are four best practices to keep in mind.



Incorporate local produce into meals and snacks. There are many ways to do this. Taste testing fresh local produce is a key component of many farms to preschool programs. Taste testing is a great way to introduce new fruits and vegetables to children. You might pick a different fruit or vegetable to focus on each week. Fruits and vegetables can also be integrated into spelling or math curriculum. Story time could include a book about a selected food. And over the course of the week the fruit or vegetable could be prepared in different ways for snack or lunch. At the end of the week provide a recipe for the children to take home to their parents.

Plant a garden at your center. Planting a garden can be an exciting way for children to become involved in the process of growing fruits and vegetables. Organizing garden activities to include children when planting, watering, and harvesting. Use outdoor garden activities to show the children how the plants grow and where their seeds come from. The garden is the perfect place for the children to explore and investigate nature. Children also love to see the seedlings grow inside through the winter.

Provide hands-on nutrition education. Focus hands-on nutrition education on fresh fruits and vegetables and food safety practices for children and their parents. Teach the children how to wash fresh fruits to make them clean and safe to eat. Explain how and when to wash their hands to reduce the spread of germs. Invite a local farmer to visit the classroom to talk about the importance of growing food and the role of farmers in providing our foods.

Plan a field trip to a farm or farmers' market. Visiting a farm or farmers' market is a great way for children to see up close a variety of fruits and vegetables and how they are grown in person. At a farmers' market they can experience the excitement of the colorful produce through touch and smell. They can interact with farmers as they learn about new fruits and vegetables. At a farm they can walk the garden paths, participate in a harvest, and learn about the growing cycles. To learn more about farm to preschool program lesson plans, recipes, and other activities refer to the Resources section of this training.

We have outlined the many benefits for incorporating a farm to preschool program into your early childcare center. But, to have a successful program it is also important to understand the food safety risks associated with consuming fresh fruits and vegetables. While raw or under-cooked meats, fish, poultry, and eggs are most often associated with the source of bacteria or viruses that can make us sick, consuming fresh fruits and vegetables can also be risky. By taking important steps to prevent food safety risks during farm to preschool activities you can enjoy the benefits of serving fresh local produce that promote good health for the children in your care.

# FOOD SAFETY FROM Farm & Garden



TO  
PRESCHOOL

An orange silhouette of a family consisting of a man, a woman, two children, and a baby in a stroller.

You will learn more about fresh produce and foodborne illness risks in Unit 2. Throughout the Food Safety from Farm and Garden to Preschool Training you will be creating a Best Practices Planning Tool for each unit. As the units progress you will be prompted to click the Best Practices icon and answer questions relating to the units. You are required to respond to all questions before continuing. Your planning tools are a visual reminder of each unit's best practices. At the end of each unit you will be able to revise your responses, print, and post at your center. Click the Best Practices icon now to complete Unit 1.