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**What is Farm to ECE?**

Farm to ECE is a diverse set of activities and strategies that include the use of local foods in meals and snacks, gardening opportunities, and educational activities implemented to promote health and wellness and enhance the quality of the educational experience. Farm to ECE particularly addresses the need to influence eating behaviors and patterns and learning outcomes in the early years of life.  Farm to ECE connects families, providers, and young children in all types of early care and education environments to healthy local foods and to meaningful educational opportunities focused on nutrition, food, and agriculture.

**Core Elements of Farm to Early Care and Education**

Farm to ECE varies by setting but usually consists of three core elements: 1) **Gardening** - an experiential educational opportunity for children to get their hands in the dirt and better understand how food grows; 2) **Procurement** - bringing local products into the ECE settings and building community relationships between ECE providers and local farmers; and 3) **Education** - ranging from sensory opportunities for the youngest children to learning about where food comes from and how it grows for the older ones as well as engaging families throughout the process.

**A Few of the Many Benefits of Farm to ECE**

* Experiential, hands-on educational opportunities align with the natural learning style and curiosity of children, presenting not only the opportunity to meet their developmental needs but for programs to adhere to program performance (such as Head Start and CACFP) and early learning standards;
* Increased educational experiences, exposure to new foods, and a connection to healthy foods;
* An economic win for communities due to the dollars that consumers put back into the local economy;
* Bolstering of the local food system due to greater demand for healthy food (which creates increased access for all people);
* Increased access for parents to healthier food choices to provide at home as a result of farm to ECE activities; and
* Promotion of equitable outcomes not only for children and families, but for small, local farms.