



Good Food, Great Kids: Making Practice and Policy Work for Farm to Early Childcare & Education

Chapter 2: Policy Lessons and Levers for Promoting Early Childcare & Education

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Acknowledgments

pfc Social Impact Advisors would like to thank the many contributors to this project, including partners the National Farm to School Network and the BUILD Initiative.

We appreciate the contributions of all the individuals who participated in interviews, listed in Appendix A.

We also thank those who provided research, oversight, logistical, editing, and design support: D. Clancy, Helen Dombalis, Suzanne Lamoreaux, Jim Litwin, Erin McGuire, Debi Mathias, Seren Orgel, Lina Rothman, Thom Sandberg, John Sherman, Lacy Stephens, Ruth Trombka, Renee Van Siclen, Hilda Vega, and Sandra Voytovich.

Finally, a special thanks to Mark Luinenburg and Rebecca Drobis, whose pictures of the vignette sites are featured throughout both chapters.

Funding for the Good Food, Great Kids Project, under which this research was conducted, has been provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.¹ It was a collaborative project with the National Farm to School Network and BUILD. However, this work represents the work of pfc and our interpretation of the interviews and research. We are grateful for our partners' contributions to the project.

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Preface

Imagine you are a parent selecting a day care center for your three-year old. It's a decision that most working parents have to make, and one that makes you a bit nervous: leaving your young child in the care of strangers. But you've identified a childcare center that meets all of your criteria: it's close to home, it has a safe and vibrant environment, the educators and staff are well-trained, and the center employs an enriching curriculum. The hours of care line up with your work schedule, too.

But then you hear of another childcare center that meets all your criteria, plus has something a little different: it's working with local farms to serve fresh meals and snacks to all the children throughout the day. In addition to receiving healthier meals, your child will learn about where her food comes from, who farms it, how food grows, and, along with the other children, she'll learn how to prepare it into delicious snacks. There's an on-site garden where the children learn to eat what they sow. Parent cooking classes are also offered.

The assumption you make is that the second center's emphasis on local, farm fresh food will be reflected in the price tag. But what if it weren't? What if it cost exactly the same as the center that serves hot dogs and pizza? What if children and parents all across the US had equal access to the best educational opportunities, including those that foster good health, regardless of their economic situation or location?

Though no childcare setting is perfect, there is much that we know to look for in it based on research about the key components of quality early childcare. The elements of these criteria are increasingly more available to providers and parents, especially with new and ongoing improvements in state and federal agency standards. But there is a real challenge in how centers can practically and cost-effectively both meet the needs of their young learners and also fulfill requirements. This is particularly the case if we seek to provide the highest quality childcare that genuinely connects top-rated educational curricula with core components of farm to early childcare and education (farm to ECE) such as fresh and nutritious food (procurement), tailored food-based and experiential learning through activities like gardening, and engagement of family members.²

Why is it important to make and enrich the food-education nexus in early childcare settings?

According to Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, "The science of child development now helps us to see healthy development as a causal chain—policies and programs across the public and private sectors affect the capacities of caregivers and communities to strengthen three foundations of healthy development: stable, responsive relationships; safe, supportive environments; and appropriate nutrition." These foundations impact physiological mechanisms that have lifelong impacts on cognitive development, physical growth, and behavioral outcomes.³

This report uses the definition of farm to ECE developed by the National Farm to School Network: "...food-based strategies and activities that support healthy development and learning goals in all types of early care and education (ECE) settings (e.g., preschools, childcare centers, family childcare homes, Head Start/Early Head Start and programs in K-12 school districts)."

From research conducted by the National Households Education Surveys Program (a study commissioned by the Department of Education) we know that approximately 60 percent of US children under the age of six spend time in some sort of childcare (or non-parental care) setting on a weekly basis.⁴ Fifty-six percent of these young children are at a Head Start or other center-based setting.⁵ These children, depending on the care setting, typically consume breakfast and lunch (and possibly an afternoon snack) at these sites. While our licensing and regulations for care centers are designed to ensure the safety of the food young children consume, there is little consistency in terms of the quality of the food that is offered there.

Research on the specific links between farm fresh food early in life and educational outcomes is only just getting started, leveraging what we've learned from the positive contributions of the farm to school (F2S) movement that targets kindergarten through 12th grade.⁶ Nonetheless, we do have many pieces of the farm to ECE puzzle that we can begin to fit together for testing impact and scale:⁷

- More than one in five children ages two to five years are overweight or obese.⁸
- Thirteen million children in the US suffer from food insecurity, meaning they live in a household with limited or uncertain access to food.⁹ Households with children vary in their levels of food insecurity depending on race and gender: Among those households that are food insecure, 30 percent are headed by single women, 22 percent by single men; 22 percent are Black (non-Latino) households, and 19 percent are Latino households.¹⁰
- Early life experiences for children, such as lack of breast-feeding, too little sleep, and too much television can increase the risk of obesity later in life.¹¹
- Children's food preferences and willingness to try new foods are influenced by the people around them.¹²
- Early childcare providers have a unique opportunity to create a healthy environment for children to eat, play, and learn, while also educating parents about the benefits of healthy food practice.¹³
- Federally supported early education programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, provide strong guidelines for nutritious meals and healthy activities that promote a positive environment for children and engagement of families. Similarly, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides support and financial reimbursement to childcare settings (and others not discussed here) to promote the incorporation of healthy food and wellness practices within developmental and educational programs.¹⁴

This mixture of realities and opportunities means that early care and education centers are ripe for learning more about farm to ECE and scaling up these experiences.¹⁵

From the farm to school and farm to ECE sectors themselves, we know:

- Increasing numbers of developmental research studies point to the critical role of good nutrition on brain development in early life, on educational outcomes, and on long-term health. (See “The Benefits of Farm to School” for more examples and research.¹⁶)
- Early childcare providers increasingly are incorporating (54 percent) or plan to incorporate (28 percent) healthy and farm fresh food, gardening, or food-based education activities into their programs, recognizing the learning and health values of doing so.¹⁷
- Lessons between farm to school and farm to ECE are increasingly available for new practitioners. In particular, the lessons from more than two decades of farm to school activities can be leveraged and adopted to the farm to ECE approach, especially from organizations and partnership that have worked on this expansion in their communities.
- Measures for encouraging childcare providers to incorporate healthier food into their meal offerings exist through federal funding and competitive grants, foundation funding, and supportive elements of health and economic security programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); and Training and Technical Assistance Funds for Head Start, just to name a few.
- There is a gap between the farm to ECE resources available (especially culturally relevant and inclusively designed materials) and the capacity of childcare providers to access and fully utilize them.
- Programs are needed to link parents, care providers, farmers, and food providers meaningfully in comprehensive quality education planning and implementation.
- There are model programs and policies that are available for stakeholders to learn from.

Researchers—including Nobel Laureate in Economics James Heckman of the University of Chicago—have provided unequivocal evidence on the economic and social returns of investing in quality early childhood education.¹⁸ Much of the data from landmark, long-term studies of programs, such as the Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Project, clearly show that quality early educational interventions create positive outcomes in almost every aspect of a child’s life and on into adulthood: academic success, better mental and physical health, lower crime rates, stronger marriages, and higher salaries.¹⁹

The recent *Road to High-Quality Early Learning Lessons from the States* report by the Learning Policy Institute provides further examples from four states that are building

strong and effective early childhood programs. How do we make sure that early childhood education continues to evolve with the best evidence and practice available? The Learning Policy Institute's report teases out five key lessons that can be applied to the farm to ECE movement:

1. Prioritize quality and continuous improvement, including monitoring and evaluation.
2. Invest in training and coaching of teachers.
3. Coordinate the administration of birth-through-grade-three programs, limiting isolation between early childcare and elementary school systems and beyond.
4. Combine multiple funding sources to increase access and improve quality.
5. Create broad-based coalitions and support.²⁰

What these lessons essentially tell us is that those involved in farm to school and farm to ECE need to keep observing, learning, and sharing practices and knowledge that help our children thrive in early childhood.

Report Purpose

It is with this spirit in mind that we will explore opportunities for learning from and leveraging policy development and implementation to continue to create a base of knowledge that can help practitioners from across sectors build bridges to support better health and educational opportunities for vulnerable children and their families. The following policy overview, developed in partnership with the National Farm to School Network and the BUILD Initiative, is intended both to share a broad spectrum of existing information about various experiences in building farm to ECE-supportive policies and begin to point out how forging greater connections between current policies and the work of farm to ECE can benefit early childcare centers, children, and families.

The Good Food, Great Kids* case studies are part of a series developed by pfc Social Impact Advisors for public use and dissemination via the book *Good, Evil, Wicked: The Art, Science, and Business of Giving* (Stanford University Press 2017), among other publicly accessible media. Information presented was gathered through desk research and 53 interviews with practitioners, policy and issue-area experts, funders, and other local and national stakeholders in the farm to early childcare and education and farm to school sectors.

*This report borrows the phrase good food from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which defines good food as food that is "healthy, sustainable, fair, and affordable."

Policy Lessons and
Levers for Promoting
Early Childcare &
Education



Introduction

If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much.

—Marion Wright Edelman, Children's Defense Fund

Since the late 1990s, policymakers have increasingly recognized the overlapping impacts that a set of complex and interconnected (often termed 'wicked')²¹ problems—including poor nutrition and obesity, fragmented food systems, and lack of equity in education—have on children's ability to thrive. The policy movement that has grown in response to this cluster of problems is a corresponding melting pot of different policy strands. It draws together a diverse set of actors with differing backgrounds and perspectives from the healthcare, education, and other social justice movements that focus their efforts on the young children (and their families) who need quality health and educational resources the most.

The childhood obesity crisis has been a driving force for many proposed health-promotion policy and program strategies. Beginning in 2002 with federal initiatives—such as the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), which brings children healthy snacks during the school day—these programs have continued to expand thanks to a combination of growing political, media, and public attention to childhood obesity, perhaps most famously embodied by First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* Campaign launched in 2010. This movement has been supported by data from the medical community, indicating that programs like FFVP can have a positive and lasting impact on children's health and food choices.²²

Key elements of these programs were pioneered somewhat earlier in agricultural policy, particularly at the state level, to address a different set of problems revolving around local food systems and economic support for small agricultural producers. One early example began in the state of Florida, where farmers launched a farm to school (F2S) program during the 1996/1997 school year in far northern Gadsden County. In this case, the primary intent was to benefit minority farmers by turning to school districts as potentially profitable markets for some crops.²³ More comprehensive F2S projects were taking shape around the country, most notably the Edible Schoolyard spearheaded by chef Alice Waters of Berkeley, CA, and other efforts that looked more intentionally at how fresh, local produce could be a part of the curriculum, as well as the meals served in schools.²⁴

Finally, the increasing focus on programs affecting child nutrition in the education policy space may coincide with a slow decline in momentum for the education reform movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s, whose peak was the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This movement tended to view educational achievement as a problem that was difficult, but largely solvable, through improvements to the educational system itself. It suggested that, like any self-contained system, one could quantify teacher, student, and school performance and maximize desirable outcomes.²⁵ By December 2015, there was bipartisan recognition of the limitations of the No Child Left Behind approach, made clear by the Every Student Succeeds Act



(ESSA), which reauthorized and broadly revised No Child Left Behind. As discussed below, ESSA contains various provisions inviting a broader variety of stakeholders and initiating a shift in orientation toward a more holistic understanding of child success and well-being, including better nutrition.

Bringing Better Nutrition and Quality Early Education Together

Recently, this shift has resulted in greater attention to the ways in which early childhood circumstances influence long-term outcomes. There is new interest in seeing how early childhood interventions can support better physical and cognitive achievement later in life. This trend is seen in the influence of cradle to career approaches like the Harlem Children’s Zone and the growing community of two-generation strategies in which both parents and children are recognized as part of a multi-generational system of interconnecting and reinforcing decisions and consequences.²⁶ At the highest policy levels, we’ve seen the commitments made by President Obama to support early learning, proposing equitable access for low-income children to “Preschool for All” programming and greater investments in Early Head Start.²⁷



In the realm of policy, everyone can agree that we want what’s best for our children. Nevertheless, how we pursue more holistic and equitable strategies that address the link between health and education, and how those strategies are funded, define the task ahead. In particular, making the connection between knowing that good food is imperative to child development and highlighting successful strategies and research that point out how healthy food can be integrated as an affordable and not overly-burdensome part of early learning programs continues to be a challenge. There are policy opportunities on both sides of this spectrum; the trick is to find, support, and fund the nexus points.

The following section provides an overview of how some advocates and policymakers have sought to address the complex system of early childhood well-being through early childhood healthy food and learning initiatives. It is followed by some ideas for finding nexus points within farm to school and farm to ECE strategies and concluded with recommendations for both connecting interested stakeholders and moving common agendas forward.



Recent and Pending Federal Legislative Action

Over the past decade, federal legislation has increasingly recognized that the problems of childhood learning, wellness, and nutrition are interconnected—particularly for children who live in poverty and are vulnerable to those risk factors resulting from limited family income. Policies have also shown greater awareness of the needs of children in childcare settings, which are distinct structures from K-12 systems.

Initiatives that aim to provide high quality early childcare programming are being revised and recalibrated to incorporate better nutrition as a key ingredient to both present experience and lasting outcomes. Additionally, when policymakers work on food systems, they are paying attention to how these systems impact children and schools.

Despite political polarization, major legislation, such as the recent Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (see below), shows that meaningful bipartisan action on these issues is possible. Nevertheless, advocates have much work ahead of them. Expanded child and food systems programs will require additional funding and legislation; yet possible changes, such as the House Education and Workforce Committee’s proposed Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization (CNR, see more below), could prune back much of the new growth in this field.

Good Food Rising

Program Ecosystem

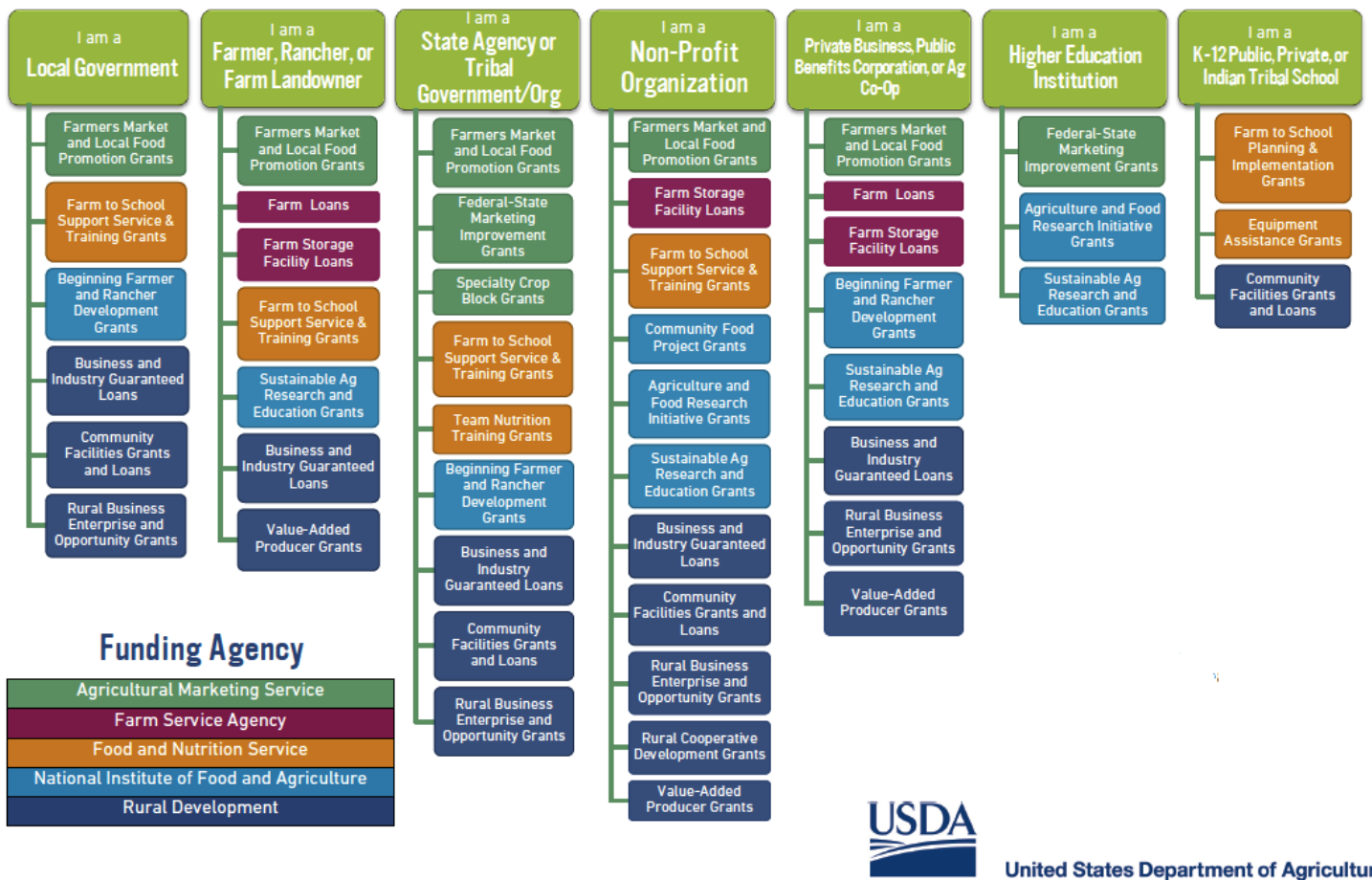
The very diversity of initiatives and administering agencies discussed here is in itself a contributing factor to the success of F2S efforts. These complementary efforts through entities under the Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services mean that the US Department of Agriculture’s own farm to school efforts are not isolated in attempting to solve the Wicked Problems of child nutrition, early development, and learning. As discussed below (see Policy at the State Level), a variety of federal resources may also allow for a greater proliferation of state and local efforts than would be possible with only a single source or type of funding.

This variety of approaches continues even within the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) itself. A centerpiece program in this space is the USDA’s **Farm to School Grant Program** created under the **Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010** (the current version of the Child Nutrition Act). The Farm to School Grant Program works to improve access to local foods in schools through co-building, planning, purchasing equipment, developing school gardens, and developing partnerships.²⁸ Matching funds of 25 percent are required for the four grant types: *Planning awards* range from US\$20,000 - US\$45,000; *Implementation* and *Support Service awards* both range from US\$65,000 - US\$100,000; and *Training awards* range from US\$15,000 -

US\$50,000. In 2016, 74 projects from 39 states received a total of US\$5 million in grant funds.²⁹

However, rather than allowing this centerpiece program to operate in a vacuum, the USDA complements Farm to School grants with a growing web of grants, loans, and other programs to develop the food systems necessary to achieve F2S’s goals. The USDA grant and loan structure for healthy food for children is mapped out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. USDA Grants and Loans Supporting Farm to School Activities



As discussed below, these multiple sources of funding and support also help states and localities blend and create diverse portfolios of funding and other resources to meet the unique policy and logistical challenges on the ground.



Opportunities through the Reauthorization Process

Part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) and overseen by the USDA, the **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** provides guidance, funding, and requirements for childcare programs and offers opportunities for farm to ECE to reach some of the most vulnerable children in the US. CACFP is a federally-funded program, administered by states, which provides financial support to child and adult care institutions and family/group day care homes to provide nutritious foods contributing to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children (as well as the health of older adults and chronically impaired and disabled persons). According to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, CACFP provides nutritious meals and snacks to 3.3 million children and 120,000 adults per day.³⁰

On April 22, 2016, USDA Undersecretary Kevin Concannon announced stronger, science-based nutrition standards and guidance for food and beverages served in day care settings under CACFP.³¹ Meals must now include more whole grains, a greater variety of vegetables and fruits, and fewer added sugars and solid fats. The new patterns are intended to align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and to be consistent with the new 2014 standards for the **National School Lunch Program (NSLP)** and **School Breakfast Program (SBP)** meals (see Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, below).³² The Best Practices memo put out by the USDA further recommended the inclusion of seasonal and locally produced foods, underscoring the potential for farm to ECE in helping providers and other practitioners meet and exceed health and nutrition guidelines.³³

Similarly, the **Food Safety Modernization Act of 2010 (FSMA)** was the first comprehensive overhaul of national food safety practices since 1938, providing new regulations for farms and food processing facilities. As the new regulations continue to be finalized and phased in during 2016, they will impact all farmers and food hubs involved in producing, aggregating, or processing food for schools and early care and education settings.³⁴ This could potentially impact how school feeding sites acquire fresh produce from local farmers.

The **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014** also updated policies relevant to the farm to ECE approach. This most recent reauthorization was the first since 1996, defining health and safety requirements for childcare providers, outlining family-friendly eligibility policies, and seeking to ensure transparent information about childcare choices and availability.³⁵ The CCDBG is the law that authorizes (with the Social Security Act) the **Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)**, a federal childcare subsidy program). This is a critical source of financial support to help low-income parents/guardians in education and training programs pay for childcare. It also invests in improvements to childcare quality. In particular, reauthorization requires that states use the quality set-aside (a percentage of CCDF funds) for one activity out of a selection of 10. Several of the acceptable activities can be applied to increased access to training for providers/teachers or improving programming standards that address health and nutrition.³⁶



Decentralization and Opportunities for Innovation

The CCDBG reauthorization also highlights a recent trend toward decentralization in funding for child education and well-being, shifting the center of policy-making gravity to state agencies, as well as increasing the role of community and other collaborative stakeholders. Under the revised CCDBG, states have new latitude to develop their own healthy eating and physical activity initiatives to meet CCDBG award requirements.³⁷ State agencies are currently in the process of redesigning their subsidy and quality systems to align with these new provisions.

Perhaps the most significant current instance of the decentralization trend is the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**. On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed this sweeping bipartisan measure into law, replacing No Child Left Behind as the primary law governing federal public education policy. The effects of this law on early childhood education, nutrition, and training and support for providers will likely vary widely, as the law imposes new limits on the authority of the Secretary of Education and moves many choices to state governments.³⁸ ESSA opens the door to an expanded role for nonprofits and other partners, encouraging states and education districts to contract with organizations that have demonstrated expertise in areas that can help fulfill a broader range of student needs—potentially to include health and nutrition.³⁹

ESSA's emphasis on state and local level accountability encourages greater collaboration and input in strategy design and monitoring. There is also discretion to use funding for improvements that help providers meet the needs of low-income students and engage parents. In particular, under Title IX Preschool Development Grants providers and agencies such as Head Start, state and local governments, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, private organizations, and local educational institutions are encouraged to work together to "improve coordination, program quality, and delivery of services."⁴⁰

States have also been encouraged to take the lead in innovation by competing for federal funds such as the **Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Grants**. Since the first round of awards in 2011, the Department of Education has granted RTT-ELC funding to 20 states, divided into three successive phases, to build or enhance comprehensive early childhood systems. Programs funded by RTT-ELC are guided and overseen by the Department of Education's Office of Early Learning in partnership with the Office of Early Childhood Development of the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.⁴¹

States that won RTT-ELC grants are currently in the process of implementing a range of projects to improve early childhood education for high-risk children, with the last phase grants due to conclude in 2018. One state that has taken advantage of RTT-ELC for advancing from ECE to ECE is Vermont. With RTT-ELC funding, grant and community partners including the Governor's Office, human services and education agencies, nonprofit community organizations, education stakeholders, and funders, have sought to advance four core objectives:



- Improve quality and access of early learning and development opportunities.
- Invest in a highly skilled workforce.
- Empower communities to support young children and families.
- Strengthen capacity to ensure change.⁴²

The initiative is working on a variety of components to include child health and wellness as a priority for quality education programming, including an Early Childhood Wellness Project (part of the Help Me Grow national network), a Childcare Wellness Consultant program, multiple services to help families access resources necessary for meeting child developmental needs, and health promotion strategies within the state’s **Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems** (TQRIS, more commonly known as **STARS**) program offering bonuses for programs providing nutritious meals and snacks.⁴³

As this example illustrates, RTT-ELC grant requirements have spurred the creation and expansion of **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems** (QRIS), not only in the 20 states that won grants, but in the states that applied unsuccessfully as well.⁴⁴ QRIS in some form has expanded to every state except Missouri, where a 2012 legislative ban on QRIS implementation is now being lifted.⁴⁵ States have wide latitude to determine what dimensions, practices, and metrics their systems will evaluate, leading to an extremely variable QRIS landscape. The opportunities available through the expansion and application of QRIS within states are explored in greater detail in the following section.

On the food systems side, similar policy priorities advancing local autonomy are included in the **Agricultural Act of 2014**, commonly known as the **Farm Bill**. The Farm Bill is a large bundle of agriculture- and food-related legislation that is reauthorized at approximately five-year intervals. The 2014 reauthorization included the establishment of a new pilot program for up to eight states to explore local and other school food procurement alternatives for unprocessed fruits and vegetables.⁴⁶ The pilot project is being implemented by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service in conjunction with selected State Distributing Agencies.⁴⁷

Scope and Funding

Complementing these attempts to improve innovation and effectiveness for child nutrition programs are various efforts at the federal level to expand overall program scope and funding to improve opportunities for young children and their families. In general, these efforts include an increased focus on equity and early childhood intervention across a range of programs that can be leveraged to complement or directly affect child nutrition. The ESSA reauthorization, for example, authorizes US\$250 million in annual grants to states to organize quality preschool programs.⁴⁸

A potpourri of such expansions can be found in President Obama’s FY 2017 budget request, which includes:



- **US\$1.3 billion for the President’s proposed Preschool for All initiative**, which would partner with states to provide all four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families with access to high-quality preschool, while encouraging states to reach additional children from middle-class families.⁴⁹
- **US\$350 million (an increase of US\$100 million over 2016 levels) for a nationwide expansion of the Preschool Development Grants (PDG) program**. PDG currently funds efforts in 18 states to develop high-quality preschool programs in targeted high-need communities.⁵⁰
- **US\$9.6 billion for Head Start**, an increase of US\$434 million. This would include US\$645 million to expand Early Head Start and the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, as well as US\$292 million to increase the number of children attending Head Start in full school-day and full-year programs.^{51,52}
- **US\$15.4 billion for Title I grants**, a modest US\$27 million increase over 2016, to increase equity of school resources for poor and minority students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

One of the most consistently funded programs for improving child access to healthy foods has been the **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)**, established in 2002. Launched as a pilot in 25 schools across four states and seven schools of the Zuni Indian Tribal Organization in New Mexico,⁵³ the FFVP is designed to increase the variety of fruits and vegetables children eat, create healthier school food environments, and positively influence the nutrition of students and their families.⁵⁴ The FFVP serves elementary schools where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals and prioritizes schools according to student need. A 2013 USDA evaluation found that the FFVP created more positive attitudes about fruits and vegetables and boosted children’s fruit and vegetable consumption both inside and outside of school.⁵⁵ Thanks to a consistently positive reception, FFVP has been steadily expanded over the years to include all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, and DC. Funding for FFVP reached US\$165.6 million in the 2013/2014 school year.⁵⁶

Challenges for Good Food

Despite recent favorable policy conditions at the federal level, there remain countervailing forces that may limit early food efforts both now and going forward in the immediate future. The rapid growth of these initiatives may in itself create unexpected new challenges, as the same profusion of federal programs and legislation that enables new collaborations and innovations also multiplies the complexity of overlapping policies and regulations.

Some growing pains are to be expected and will be a healthy part of the policy learning process. However, in the short term the need to create new relationships or reinforce current ones across states, providers, and other stakeholders may increase the difficulty of coordination, measurement, and evaluation. As new policies like the



ESSA and CCDBG go further in decentralizing decision-making and inviting new partners, questions will inevitably arise about conflicting priorities, workability of partnerships, and accountability for unintended consequences.

Challenges in Resources and Planning

Even as programs are revised and expanded, they do not always receive funding to match. For example, a recent Center for American Progress report shows that even after the sweeping 2014 reauthorization, funding for the **Child Care Development Block Grants (CCDBG)** remains capped and has declined in real terms over the past 15 years.⁵⁷ As a result, only one in six children whose families meet CCDBG eligibility requirements are actually receiving assistance.⁵⁸ Further, according to the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), the number of children receiving CCDBG-funded childcare has fallen to the lowest level since 1998.⁵⁹ While the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 omnibus spending bill included US\$326 million for CCDBG, CLASP estimates that fully implementing the law would require US\$1.2 billion in 2017.⁶⁰



Additionally, dollar amounts alone do not necessarily reflect whether critical programs are adequately resourced. For example, funding for Title I has been maintained or increased during the Obama Administration, and, in theory, all Title I grants nationwide are eligible to be used for early childhood programs. However, records show that in recent years less than 3 percent of Title I funds have actually been allocated to that age group.⁶¹ Title I is part of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act** that provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers/high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure all children meet state academic standards.⁶²



For the most vulnerable children, one of the largest potential federal funding sources for childhood nutrition is the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** program, which in 1996 replaced direct federal welfare with block grants for states to run their own welfare programs.⁶³ However, research by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) shows that due to broad guidelines and limited transparency, states are increasingly diverting TANF funds to fill unrelated state budget gaps.⁶⁴ Nationwide, core welfare activities like childcare and basic assistance combined made up an average of 50 percent of state and federal TANF spending in 2014; in eight states that share was less than 25 percent.⁶⁵

The CBPP further finds that because the federal TANF block grant is not adjusted for inflation, it has lost one-third of its value since 1997.⁶⁶ This simultaneous decline and dissolution of welfare funds mean that a major piece of the early childhood nutrition-funding puzzle is missing for many of the children most in need of intervention.

Even where programs have been adequately funded, there may be a need for additional long-term planning. For example, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grants have funded the creation of many promising new state programs, but RTT-ELC comes with a time horizon. In 2018, states will face new challenges when the four years of federal funding provided by the grants expire and providers and their partners are forced to seek other funding sources to continue the programs.⁶⁷ As with any grant maker, federal policy makers must consider exit strategies, program sustainability, and the potential unintended consequences of their investments.

Rewrites and Rollbacks

Many of the difficulties farm to ECE and other early childhood healthy eating programs face are a natural result of the realities of scarce resources and the inherent difficulty of confronting complex problems in complicated settings. However, there are also challenges posed by active efforts to roll back the scope and funding of these programs or to alter them in sometimes fundamental ways.

The power of politics to shape the entire farm to ECE policy ecosystem is starkly apparent in recent Congressional action to reauthorize the **Child Nutrition Act (CNR)**. Legislation is currently pending in both the House and the Senate, but the measures differ significantly.

On January 20, 2016, the Senate Agriculture Committee approved its version of CNR, with generally moderate changes. The measure includes several provisions that are consistent with the positive early food trends discussed above: it would expand the scope of Farm to School Grants to early care and education programs participating in CACFP, summer food service, and after school programs and would double mandatory funding for Farm to School Grants to US\$10 million annually.⁶⁸ The full Senate has not yet considered the measure.

However, on May 18, 2016, the House Education and Workforce Committee approved more sweeping reauthorization legislation, which is currently pending



consideration by the full House. The House measure alters the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which rolls back the number of schools eligible for universal free meals.⁶⁹ This legislation would also release certain states from following federal nutrition standards and would roll back nutrition standards for all schools.⁷⁰ For example, under current law, schools where 40 percent of students qualify for reduced lunch may provide free lunch to any and all students. The proposed House measure would raise the threshold to require 60 percent of students to qualify for reduced lunch before an institution could provide free lunch for all, thereby greatly reducing the reach and impact of CEP.⁷¹

The Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization also has the potential to alter the **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** significantly. The Senate Agriculture Committee’s version of the bill would continue to provide fresh fruits and vegetables at current FFVP schools, but would allow schools new to the program to serve frozen, dried, or canned produce in the first year of participation. A comparatively modest change to the 2010 CNR, the Senate measure would require schools to transition to fresh fruits and vegetables within four years. However, the version approved by the House Education and the Workforce Committee would be a more severe revision. Under this measure, all FFVP schools would be permitted to serve “all forms” of produce, and, if enacted the law, explicitly states that the program is “no longer limited to only fresh fruits and vegetables.”⁷² This would undermine the very intention of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Finally, it is important not to underestimate the level of complexity that federal policy encounters when the rubber hits the road. To be successful, federal programs must interface with a highly varied cultural, political, and logistical terrain. Many of the most promising opportunities, valuable lessons, and difficult challenges are found at the state and local level.



State Level Programs and Policy Efforts

The Momentum of Farm to School

Local efforts, often beginning at the community or regional level and bubbling up to local or state policy changes, are working to expand food system initiatives to promote family wellness, child outcomes, and local economic development. The broad concept of farm to school appears to be gathering steam among state-level policymakers, with farm to ECE as a strong focal point for health and wellness advocates looking at early intervention strategies.

Having begun at the local level with a few pilot programs in school districts in California and Florida in the late 1990s, F2S now reaches more than 42,000 schools (42 percent of schools) across the country.⁷³ The most recent USDA Farm to School Census shows that these activities engage over 23.6 million students, and that schools now spend US\$789 million on locally grown food.⁷⁴ Providers at the ECE level are hoping to take more action around farm-fresh food and food-based education. Of the nearly 1,500 early childcare providers surveyed by the National Farm to School Network, 54 percent were already incorporating some aspect of farm to ECE, and another 28 percent planned to start farm to ECE activities.⁷⁵

According to the most recent available data, as of October 2014, 46 states (including the District of Columbia) have proposed F2S legislation and 40 states (including DC) have enacted it.⁷⁶ In 2014, the number of resolutions and proclamations recognizing, celebrating, and encouraging F2S programming increased by 57 percent over similar bills from prior years combined.⁷⁷ This tracks with trends of growing state support for food hub facilities, the establishment of statewide food system departments, and school gardens—legislation promoting the latter increased by 46 percent in 2014 over all previous years combined.⁷⁸



The overall arc of progress over the past 20 plus years should not obscure the fact that child and food systems policies encounter a great diversity of circumstances on the ground in each state. The following profiles seek to provide a useful sample of how these trends are playing out across several different policy, cultural, and funding landscapes.

Progress and Evolution at the State Level

Farm to school and farm to ECE programs are developing most rapidly in states like Oregon and Vermont, where there is a confluence of hospitable political culture and strong local food systems. Such progress points to what may one day be possible elsewhere, but it is important to note that even here these policy movements are a relatively new and evolving process.

Vermont

As early as 1995, Vermont classrooms were experimenting with curricula that used gardens as a teaching element.⁷⁹ The state's Farm to School Grant program was established in 2006 through the **Rozo McLaughin Act**, which encouraged collaboration between schools and farmers/providers, education programs for farmers, and technical assistance for childcare providers to learn more about this approach.⁸⁰ Over the years, Vermont's F2S stakeholders have worked together to promote the growth of the movement through supportive policies and guidelines across the state, for which it has been recognized as one of the states that is most engaged in farm to school activities with 78 percent of school districts reporting F2S involvement and 99 percent of those serving local foods.⁸¹ Farm to school local purchasing efforts (5.6 percent of all school food purchases) also contributed US\$1.4 million to the Vermont economy in the 2013/2014 school year.⁸²

In recent years, stakeholders participated in a systems mapping process that allowed them to find and pursue a tipping point scaling F2S. This process led to the identification of the goal of 75 percent of Vermont schools purchasing 50 percent of their food from a socially just, sustainable, regional food system within the next 10 years.⁸³ These goals are being pursued with on-the-ground action and policy change as identified by the community partners. However, an independent evaluation suggests that a goal of this magnitude may be unrealistic for the food supply chain and economic structure—even for a state that is so conducive to F2S efforts.⁸⁴

Washington

Washington State is another leader in its commitment to child nutrition and learning policies. Thanks to longstanding buy-in by policymakers, Washington State has a well-developed network of state and local government agencies, nonprofits, school districts, and private organizations that work together to improve school food, establish links between farms and schools, and introduce policies to support farm to school activities.⁸⁵



The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) plays a strong role in innovating and building these partnerships, which often begin with region-specific pilot programs.⁸⁶ WSDA programs include:

- **Farm to School Mobile Workshops:** Mobile workshops provide opportunities for farms and schools to understand one another's operations better, and to coordinate local supply chain solutions. Sessions include farm and food hub visits and hands-on kitchen trainings for foodservice staff.
- **Farm and School Food Service Trainings:** Washington Farm to School is developing and providing farm trainings on institutional markets (including product needs), how to approach schools, and food safety and insurance requirements. School food service trainings include direct purchasing, preparing fresh produce, and seasonal menu planning.

Washington State is unusual in that its state legislature has created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, which conducts nonpartisan research to inform legislative decision-making with practical data.⁸⁷ The Institute conducted an evaluation of Washington's **Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP)**, which provides food assistance to children beginning at ages three and four. The Institute found that ECEAP's impact on test scores is almost twice as large as the average effect in other states' early childhood programs.⁸⁸

It is illustrative that among the 2016 Food and Farming State Legislative Priorities identified by the Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network, there was only one priority in which they have been "disappointed": that funding for the **Farm to School and Small Farm Direct Marketing Programs** were maintained at the same level rather than being doubled.⁸⁹ In light of the uphill battles found in some other states, this would seem to be a comparatively mild disappointment.

Minnesota

Perhaps one of the best models for a comprehensive approach to farm to school is found in Minnesota, where the movement has greatly accelerated over the past several years. The number of school districts participating in farm to school practices rose from 18 districts in 2006 to 268 districts in 2014.⁹⁰ Additionally, the USDA Farm to School Census shows that 51 percent of Minnesota school districts now engage in F2S activities, spending an average of 13 percent of their budgets on local agricultural products and reaching 416,501 students.⁹¹

Farm to ECE initiatives in Minnesota benefited from general interest and a receptive political environment, from Governor Mark Dayton on down. However, the catalyst appears to have been a 2010 Minnesota Department of Health report that examined various nascent efforts, identified opportunities, and led to the formation in 2011 of a cross-sector Farm to School Leadership Team.⁹² This formalized team allowed F2S efforts to crystalize due to increased communication and collaboration, reduction of competition for funding sources, and elimination of duplicative or conflicting messaging on F2S issues.



Team products have included production and screenings of a documentary film on Minnesota Farm to School efforts; a statewide database of farmers who market to schools; Farm to School Month media tours of school cafeterias and local farms to raise awareness of farm to school among policymakers; and Farm to Cafeteria workshops that have trained 1,370 producers and food service professionals.⁹³ As a result, in 2013 the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) created a Farm to School Grant Program, and in 2014 expanded eligibility for childcare settings. To date, Farm to School grants have been awarded to 57 institutions, totaling US\$1.46 million and leveraging US\$3.5 million additional funds through local school districts and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Since 2014, MDA has also funded US\$2 million in state-level **Value Added Producer Grants**, which prioritize grant applications by agricultural producers who market local foods to schools.

An assessment of Minnesota’s Farm to School Leadership Team experience attributes much of its success to frequent evaluation and adjustment.⁹⁴ Additionally, informal collaborations were solidified by using outside facilitators and placing dedicated farm to school coordinators at several key partner organizations. This team structure is now being replicated by stakeholders establishing a Farm to Childcare Coalition in Minnesota.

While each state’s policy ecosystem is different, elements of Minnesota’s approach appear portable to other states. For example, legislation in Wisconsin created a Farm to School council to advise the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.⁹⁵ It also established a full-time Wisconsin Farm to School coordinator position, as well as a Wisconsin Farm to School grant program.⁹⁶

Similarly, at least 12 states have implemented lists of participating schools and producers like Minnesota’s directories.⁹⁷ Similar F2S promotional events are also spreading, like the “New York Harvest for New York Kids Week,” which includes classroom food-tastings, school garden activities, cafeteria features on New York farm products, and student visits to farms and farmers markets.⁹⁸

District of Columbia

One of the more recent changes in local policy impacting the health and wellness of young children is the **DC Healthy Tots Act** passed in 2014. The Act extends the benefits of the **DC Healthy Schools Act of 2010**⁹⁹ to children in early care settings, including in-home facilities. Centers or facilities providing care to 50 percent or more low-income children must participate in CACFP, in return for which they will receive higher reimbursements for adopting stronger nutrition standards, serving local produce, local funds to offer an additional meal to children who spend a full day at their center, technical support to implement provisions of the Act, and the opportunity to apply for grants to engage in more physical activity, plant and manage gardens, enhance nutrition education, and implement “Farm-to-Preschool” programming.¹⁰⁰



Though implementation is in the very early stages (the Act went into effect in early 2015), the Healthy Tots Act stands to benefit from and add to the host of other local policies (pending and approved) advancing healthy food environments, such as acts to support farmers market participation, improve access to and quality of grocery stores, promote and support urban farming, create a local food policy council, and enact a comprehensive sustainability vision for the District.¹⁰¹

Challenges and Lessons Learned at the State Level

While F2S and farm to ECE programs are gaining footholds across the US, conditions are not always entirely favorable. Missouri presents an intriguing test case for childhood nutrition policy, as it evolves under political conditions very different from Washington or Minnesota.

Missouri

Improving childhood nutrition is an urgent issue in Missouri: according to the University of Missouri's Missouri Hunger Atlas 2016, the percentage of households experiencing hunger has more than doubled over the past decade to 17 percent, the highest increase in the United States.¹⁰² Nearly one million residents are currently facing food insecurity, including one in five Missouri children.¹⁰³ The independent Ferguson Commission, which was set up in the wake of 2014 civil unrest, has made ending childhood hunger one of its Signature Calls to Action—a necessary step to resolve social and economic conditions that impede progress, equality, and safety in the region.¹⁰⁴

In response, Missouri policymakers have recently begun to take action to address this crisis. The National Farm to School Network recognized Missouri as one of three states that had enacted particularly comprehensive Farm to School legislation in 2014.¹⁰⁵ Similar in form to exemplars like Minnesota, Missouri has passed legislation creating a farm to school program that is authorized to establish a farm to school taskforce, a central program coordinator, and funding options for farm to school activities.¹⁰⁶

Yet F2S initiatives do not operate in a vacuum. Even as they pass farm to school legislation, Missouri lawmakers have consistently undermined that legislation's ultimate goals by cutting funding and rolling back other programs that impact nutrition and food security. For example, a law passed in 2015 enforced stronger TANF restrictions, thereby removing 2,766 families, including 6,310 children, from the program rolls.¹⁰⁷ Legislators also reduced eligibility for unemployment benefits from 20 weeks to 13 weeks.¹⁰⁸ On April 1, 2016, Missouri ceased providing food stamps to the first 26,000 of up to 60,000 adults to be removed from that program.¹⁰⁹



On April 29, 2016, Governor Jay Nixon condemned these decisions and announced a push to end Missouri child hunger in three years through avenues that do not depend on the state legislature. Under this strategy, the No Kid Hungry Missouri campaign



will partner with the national non-profit organization Share our Strength, along with a coalition of state agencies and community-based organizations, to increase access to school breakfast, after-school snacks, and summer meals.¹¹⁰

Pennsylvania

Even in states like Pennsylvania, where farm to school policies have deeper roots, the movement's continued or universal success is by no means guaranteed. Previously, Pennsylvania was an early leader in farm to school initiatives. In 1995, Penn State University and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) collaborated on **Project PA**, to provide training and assistance on

healthy nutrition and menu planning for Pennsylvania School Food Service personnel. Project PA then combined PDE funding with **USDA Team Nutrition grants** (which support the implementation of USDA's nutrition requirements and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in those meals served at schools and childcare institutions)¹¹¹ to create new distance and face-to-face education strategies promoting a team approach to healthy eating in families and communities. A holistic farm to school initiative was established in 2006 with the **Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools Act**—but crucially, funding for the program was left as wholly discretionary for each annual budget.¹¹²

In the years since then, ongoing budget crises and political gridlock have rendered funding for farm to school programs in Pennsylvania unstable, along with funding for adjacent programs in education, agriculture, and agriculture extension services. These programs limped along through the recent nine-month impasse over a 2015 budget, which did not conclude until March 2016.¹¹³ Fortunately, the final state budget for 2016-2017 saw no change in funding for preschool programs and US\$10 million in additional funding for Early Intervention, which provides services and supports to families with children ages zero to five who have developmental delays



or disabilities, even though there remain funding gaps for home visiting programs and childcare services.¹¹⁴

Research by the Center for American Progress shows that Pennsylvania has somewhat mitigated its state funding difficulties regarding childcare and early learning through thoughtful use of other funding sources. In particular, leaders have leveraged Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge funds to increase alignment across a broad spectrum of programs serving children from prenatal to third grade (P-3). Viewing school nutrition along with other interventions through the P-3 lens, diverse funding sources can be used to increase cross-sector collaborations, evaluate existing initiatives, and determine next steps for alignment.¹¹⁵

Both examples are included here to point out just some of the ways state budget battles trickle down to limit dollars for comprehensive farm to school and farm to ECE activities.

Creative Solutions and Alternative Approaches

A common theme emerging in states like Missouri and Pennsylvania is that when the fiscal, policy, or political landscape poses obstacles, those working in the farm to ECE and broader farm to school space must be creative.

North Carolina

While successes in several states highlight the benefits of cooperation among many disparate agencies, North Carolina somewhat undercuts this lesson with an alternative model. At first blush, North Carolina's political environment may seem as though it would be less conducive to farm to ECE and F2S initiatives than states like Washington or Minnesota. However, F2S here has managed to avoid many of the political pitfalls found in other politically conservative states like Missouri.

Over 70 percent of school systems in North Carolina participate in farm to school, with 64 percent of these programs reaching related early learning sites and purchasing over US\$1.3 million in produce directly from farmers.^{116,117} North Carolina was an early adopter in 1997, testing the school market for locally-grown strawberries, and then launching a statewide program offering US\$1,000 start-up grants to help schools to purchase from farmers. The state offered US\$500 grants in the program's second year, and by the third year had achieved successful operations without grant support.¹¹⁸



The unusual character of North Carolina’s approach may have been influenced by its initial guidance from the US Department of Defense Merchandising Office (no longer involved). North Carolina has built a uniquely centralized approach to farm to school, housing it exclusively under the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Even as states like Michigan experiment with food hubs that develop infrastructure in informal or voluntary ways,¹¹⁹ North Carolina has already built one of the largest F2S distribution systems in the country, transporting over 1.5 million pounds of produce during the 2011-2012 school year alone.¹²⁰ While North Carolina does face many of the same shortfalls in infrastructure and facilities as other farm to school states, this centralized approach may lower some barriers and transaction costs that discourage schools in other states from participating.

A reputation for efficiency may be one of the factors that has allowed F2S in North Carolina to flourish through many years and changing political winds. North Carolina policymakers have often discussed F2S in terms of an investment with reasonable costs. For example, a 2010 state law directed a government agency to evaluate the costs of child nutrition programs in North Carolina. The resulting report noted that North Carolina’s F2S program is a model of effectiveness for other states and actually recommended additional funding for farm to school to increase impact for children while controlling “indirect costs” for the state.¹²¹



Similarly, in the 2012 Support Procurement & Farm to School Funds Act, the state legislature demonstrated its willingness to make investments in F2S infrastructure, including facilitation by a North Carolina Procurement Alliance, in order to reduce costs and increase efficiency in the long-term.¹²²

This may point to ways for more fiscally conservative policymakers to embrace farm to ECE through a new lens—as efficient and effective programs whose reasonable startup costs can generate concrete return on investment (ROI) through its impact on both child health and local economies. It is important to note that current progress in North Carolina builds upon early childhood education investments made as far back as 1993, when the Smart Start public-private partnership began assessing

community needs and coordinating early education services.¹²³ The progress also connects with incentives for compliance with state QRIS and other licensing requirements and a variety of health and wellness policies.¹²⁴

Illinois

Similar to Missouri, political issues heavily impact progress in Illinois. The state has a vast economy that is the fifth-largest in the United States,¹²⁵ yet Illinois ranks 24th in the United States for childhood hunger, and 21 percent of its children live in poverty.¹²⁶ Similar to Pennsylvania, large state funding shortfalls and political uncertainty have impacted efforts to address these problems statewide. For example, in 2015 a state budget stalemate stretched over 100 days and threatened to eliminate federal WIC benefits for 50,000 low-income women and children, because the state distribution organization had to shed staff and close its doors.¹²⁷ In 2014, the Education Law Center at Rutgers University ranked Illinois as having the sixth most regressive education funding system in the country.¹²⁸

In part to meet such challenges handed down from the state level, service providers and policy makers in the city of Chicago have made their own innovations in funding early childhood learning and wellness. These local-level initiatives are now being replicated elsewhere in Illinois and in other states, including Minnesota.

For example, Chicago city providers have worked together across sectors to create a Child-Parent Center (CPC) model. This holistic, two-generation approach helps early learning centers remain afloat in troubled fiscal waters by blending diverse portfolios of federal, state, and private resources—including Title I, Head Start, Illinois Early Childhood Block Grants, and social impact bonds—to finance various aspects of their programming.¹²⁹

The CPC model also addresses the complexity of the issues surrounding early childhood education and nutrition by requiring each individual site to identify partnerships with community organizations that best fit the particular needs of the parents and children in its district. This allows CPCs in bilingual communities, for example, to offer English-as-second-language classes alongside its child food services.¹³⁰





Connecting the Dots

Reflecting on where farm to ECE sits in the policy and funding landscape, National Farm to School Network’s farm to early care and education associate Lacy Stephens remarks that it simply “needs to be part of the bigger picture.” In the preceding review of policy activity, it is clear that there is a commitment to embedding health and nutrition into our policy architecture. However, policy and practice need to be better connected and aligned in order to not only link good food to quality early learning experiences, but also to support and empower the people who make these efforts happen.

Within current policy there is much to work with, and stakeholders interviewed for this project agree that we need to begin with what we have. There is both funding and motivation within the Head Start system to define quality education as both fundamental skills and competencies combined with the conditions needed to sustain them, including nutritious food. There are funding and training mechanisms for practitioners in early education and in food systems to learn more about and test farm to ECE concepts using USDA and CCDBG grants and other sources of funding for teacher and parent training and support. There is, however, limited funding to bring all the actors together and ensure that pilots are tested, evaluated, and supported on a larger scale. There is also a greater need for more training and support for all stakeholders, for formalized community engagement and participation in these efforts, and for examining and improving equity of access, implementation, and outcomes measurement. Some considerations and recommendations for how to leverage current resources and what other tools and investments are needed to connect the dots are outlined below.

Head Start

Leverage Competitive Processes

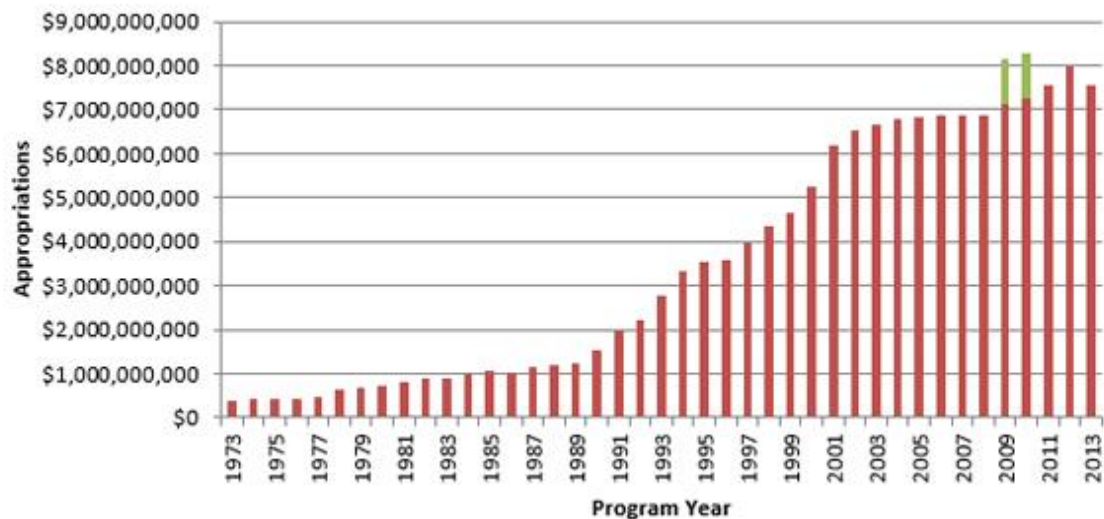
As the vignettes in Chapter 1 illustrate, Head Start offers great opportunity for experimentation with good food because its health and nutrition requirements provide a welcoming structure for farm to ECE. The target demographic of Head Start also means that CACFP dollars can be used to receive financial reimbursements for meals served to participants. Jeffrey Capizzano of the Policy Equity Group points out that a new competitive process for securing continued Head Start funding (the **Designation Renewal**) opens the door for more innovation. In reapplying for Head Start funding, organizations can make the case for farm to ECE as an innovation that can improve quality of care and curriculum. With Head Start funding at an historically high level (see Figure 2), and with little possibility that more will be authorized in the near future, maximizing all that Head Start offers is critical for the farm to ECE movement.



Collect and Share Data about Current Farm to ECE Efforts in Head Start

There is no available data on how many Head Start centers participate in farm to ECE activities, but one option for reaching all of those children is to share those resources and experiences from current models with other Head Start programs, encouraging them to look more critically at adopting farm to ECE initiatives. To do this successfully, more research would be required to point out **the cost and educational benefits of farm to ECE** and how it helps Head Start programs meet their instructional, nutrition, family engagement, community partnership, and other requirements. In this space, foundation and corporate grant funding would be especially helpful. This documentation could also serve to spread the idea out to non-Head Start centers, since just 42 percent of children who are actually eligible (as of 2013) are able to participate in Head Start program.¹³¹

Figure 2. Head Start Funding Over Time*¹³²



*Federal recovery dollars indicated with green bars.

Quality Rating and Improvement System

The first early childcare and education quality rating and improvement system was developed in Oklahoma in 1998 as a way to standardize ratings and improvement metrics across childcare centers. As of June 2016, 43 states and Washington, DC, have implemented QRIS programs, though in California, Kansas, and Florida, the programs are coordinated by counties or localities rather than by the state. Seven states and two territories are in the planning stage, and Alabama and three territories are currently piloting QRIS programs for potential expansion in the future.¹³³

QRIS not only provides a method for quantifying and communicating the quality of early childhood and school-age care programs but also establishes metrics for improving these programs. Generally, QRIS standards address:

- Physical environment (classroom size, class size, health, safety).



- Qualifications and opportunities for staff professional development.
- Relationship building and communication between teachers, students, and families.
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum and classroom practices.
- Evaluation and monitoring of the program.
- Ongoing improvement over time.

While the actual standards vary by state, in general, states base QRIS standards on their childcare and early education licensing programs, with additional benchmarks required to be met in order to achieve higher quality ratings. In addition, some states have differing standards for various types of facilities.

Despite these variations among QRIS standards, there are five elements common to all QRIS programs:

1. Establishment of program standards.
2. Support for programs and their staff through technical assistance and training by the administering body.
3. Financial incentives for participation.
4. Assistance with monitoring and tracking quality improvement.
5. Consumer education that uses a recognizable method of communicating the quality of a program, such as designating a number of stars based on quality rating.

Elevate the Potential of Farm to ECE for Better Ratings

Although QRIS standards are largely voluntary for ECE programs (provided they meet the basic requirements for licensing), centers are incentivized to participate and to increase their ratings through financial incentives, such as higher childcare subsidy reimbursement for caring for low-income children, financial bonuses or grants for program improvements, and through the benefits of consumer recognition of the center as a high-quality facility.

For the farm to ECE movement, QRIS offers the possibility of directly linking farm fresh food and curriculum with the standards and licensing that **help sites improve their ratings and connect with parents**. Within current standards, relevant requirements fall more directly under the rubric of health and safety, but can be creatively expanded to include professional development, parent engagement, cultural competence, and evaluation and improvement with the support of farm to ECE practitioners.



Help Practitioners Meet Health and Safety Requirements

There is certainly interest in and commitment to the short- and long-term potential for farm to ECE to build a generation of healthy and educated children, as seen in the Chapter 1. Additionally, in a recent survey of state QRIS administrators, 77 percent of respondents said that they want to include HEPA (healthy eating and physical activity, including breastfeeding and limited screen time) promotion more fully in QRIS standards, signaling that these issues are becoming a priority for many states. **Farm to ECE can help early learning centers move toward more rigorous outcomes across components of QRIS** in a way that goes beyond obesity prevention to lifestyle development and improved family and community well-being. What is needed is to create more intentional connections among policymakers, ECE advocacy organizations, food systems organizations, anti-hunger and poverty alleviation organizations, and other social justice advocates to raise awareness about this potential and the steps involved, as well as continue to document the benefits of farm to ECE for educational quality.

Head Start programs have not, at present, been uniformly incorporated into QRIS nationwide, and Head Start programs are not required to participate in QRIS unless the state requires it of programs that receive childcare subsidies.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, the central Head Start office has identified Head Start program participation in state QRIS as a priority, and states are increasingly working to streamline Head Start center participation in QRIS. This integration may occur in various ways. For instance, states may align QRIS standards with existing Head Start standards to facilitate QRIS involvement by Head Start programs, rather than requiring them to meet an entirely different set of standards.

In addition, some states, such as Maryland, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, automatically award high quality ratings to programs that meet Head Start standards. Because this integration is fairly new in most states, there is little information documenting the results of streamlining QRIS and Head Start standards, although evaluation will likely occur in the coming years. Again, the growing connection between QRIS and Head Start settings will help further the integration of healthy eating, and the farm to ECE movement is poised to offer guidance and resources for making this happen in a way that sets the stage for lifelong habits.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Support Stronger Nutrition Training and Education for Providers

With CACFP, leverage points are found not only in federal reimbursements for meals for low-income children, but also in training and education. CACFP sponsoring and participant organizations must engage in new participant and annual training on a variety of topics that can help staff implement programs more effectively. CACFP also encourages organization staff to obtain professional development certificates that dive into more specific education in nutrition, programming, and other management issues. These programs help build ownership and a culture that understands and promotes the connection between healthy food and early education.



Help Reduce Concerns about Cost and Work Burdens in Farm to ECE

There are some caveats with CACFP that should be touched upon, though they relate to perception more than anything else. Interviewees who work with care providers noted that there is some feeling among providers that complying with CACFP is too difficult. Suzanne Henley of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in DC points out that in her experience people want to give children the best, but, in terms of CACFP regulations, there are many misconceptions about requirements relating to the cooking facilities, staff responsibilities, and meal standards that keep providers from leveraging CACFP. These worries could be put to rest with introductory education about how CACFP works. Without the supports CACFP offers, however, it is very difficult for centers serving low-income communities to afford healthier, fresh food alternatives.

Educate Stakeholders about Additional Funding and Resources: USDA

Farm to School Grant Program

With USDA's proposed expanded funding for and support of farm to ECE, a new space may be opening for connecting to resources and for taking a more holistic look at 'Farm to' movements. Right now, USDA Farm to School grants are reaching into the preschool space informally through grants touching on larger systems, but this is still limited and experimental. However, a greater commitment to farm to ECE on behalf of USDA can be seen in the inclusion of farm to ECE (for their purposes, Farm to Preschool) questions in its most recent Farm to School Census.¹³⁵ The USDA also recently added a farm to childcare specialist to its farm to school team. Finally, USDA has incorporated regional staff who are knowledgeable in CACFP and able to connect with farm to ECE stakeholders on this topic. These are necessary, if preliminary, resources for institutionalizing farm to ECE.



Team Nutrition Training Grants

Team Nutrition Training Grants are made available to help care facilities and schools meet the requirements of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Awarded to state agencies, funds are designed to build capacity and infrastructure for long-term healthy eating and physical activity habit formation.¹³⁶ Grants can be used to implement and assess training programs, nutrition education, and technical assistance to ensure application of nutrition standards for meals and snacks in school and care settings creatively.¹³⁷ Some states have used funds to develop healthy environments, such as Wisconsin's use of recipe and cooking contests, Montana's implementation of active play before meals, and Colorado's development of a

training curriculum to help schools develop wellness policies and meet updated meal standards.¹³⁸

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV)

Known as the Federal Home Visiting Program, the MIECHV program **funds state and tribal governments for visits to at-risk families from health professionals, social services, and child development professionals to support child development** from birth to kindergarten entry. The visits cover healthy child development milestones, breastfeeding and nutrition, parenting techniques, and setting personal/professional/educational goals with the mothers. Though further afield from the previously-mentioned programs, MIECHV offers opportunities—similar to those provided by Early Head Start—to bring education and information into the home of vulnerable infants and mothers.¹³⁹ With a focus on nutrition, parenting, and parental goals, the program also provides the potential to link up farm to ECE with general health and maternal health efforts that could widen the farm to ECE conversation.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The WIC program also targets new mothers and children under five, as well as pregnant women. With the goal of improving the health of women and children at nutritional risk, WIC can also be a vehicle for farm to ECE. **WIC provides financial supports for buying nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care**, all of which can benefit from information on farm to ECE core components and how this combination of efforts works to improve well-being and educational attainment. Reaching approximately eight million children in fiscal year 2015, WIC is often a part of farm to ECE because program coordinators share information about how WIC services can support healthy eating. Additionally, healthy eating can also support WIC in sustaining gains over time.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)

Likewise, SNAP reaches low-income families and individuals with supports that help with the purchase of healthy food. SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed) offers a variety of **resources that encourage families to make food and lifestyle choices that promote health within a limited income**. Materials can serve to reinforce the principles of farm to ECE in the home, while professional development resources can augment community knowledge about the role of farm to ECE and how it helps families.

New York is using SNAP-Ed to fund better access to farm fresh foods directly in early childcare settings. Through the Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings program, the state of New York works with a group of pilot childcare centers receiving CACFP funding and serving families benefiting from SNAP.¹⁴⁰ By hiring a program manager who worked with families and farmers, a market was set up to offer produce and information for children and families, and registered dietitians were made available for consultations.¹⁴¹ Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machines were acquired to





process SNAP participant purchases, and participants were given a US\$2 Fresh Connect coupon for every US\$5 SNAP purchase. Participating farmers also accepted WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Vegetable and Fruit checks.¹⁴²

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

NIFA offers **information and grants to promote the long-term viability of agriculture** in the US. There are some grants available for obesity prevention in youth and for building a research base for health and well-being. Lesser known to the farm to ECE and education quality sectors, NIFA could provide opportunities for creative funding efforts, especially if the right partnerships (such as working with academic institutions, people of color-led organizations, or tribal institutions) are used to gain access to this system.¹⁴³

Caveats

In any of the funding mechanisms that rely on legislation, practitioners must be wary of trade-offs. At the time this case study is being written, CNR is under review with competing versions in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate. The House version seeks to undermine several advances in available funding, nutrition guidelines, and food access points, and the consequences of an ongoing battle over these more controversial differences between the House and Senate versions are unknown.¹⁴⁴

Stephens warns of the subtle trade-offs that can influence progress in healthy food if advocates are not careful, referring to a previous experience:

Even when you think about the National School Lunch Program, when the most recent changes to guidelines [were made], there was funding to help support it, but that funding came out of the same pool as SNAP program funding. So you still have that tradeoff. It's great that they're prioritizing school lunch because it's such an important access point, but it's still coming from other federal nutrition programs that are just as vital for the holistic health of children and for food access. To support farm to ECE in the long term, we have to think about other funding streams, like leveraging education dollars.

Find a Common Language

One of the gaps identified by interview participants was between the farm to ECE (and farm to school in general) advocates and quality education advocates. For many, this gap is partly due to capacity and also the fact that professionals in both fields must navigate their respective systems in the quickest and most effective way possible, leaving little room for network building in more exploratory endeavors. **There is also very little funding for bridge building across sectors**, as donors frequently reinforce silos through their own program funding guidelines. Because



farm to ECE and quality education advocates frequently do not work together, there are different cultures and languages that must be learned in order to forge partnerships.

Sherri Killins of the BUILD Initiative points out some of the unintended consequences of this difference:

The language in health, the language in early learning, the language in farm to ECE—it's all different. We've got to figure out what's the goal for the child. Sometimes I think the language of food insecurity plays better. Farm to ECE feels privileged; it feels like it is a privileged opportunity. You're trying to say it's a basic opportunity, and it's a basic right to the extent that the food is fresh and better for you. But people don't look at it like that. If you're not living in an area where you can drive by a farm, then farm to ECE feels like somebody else's work, not yours.

Finding a common language, something that is built upon finding shared goals and values, is important not just for partners, but for educating policy and other decision makers. Kris Perry of the First Five Years Fund (FFYF) notes that FFYF's language is bipartisan by design, because her organization knows that different stakeholders view the issues through their particular lenses. But, linking back to the idea that everyone wants the best for children and that the urge to support healthy and safe children is not a partisan issue, Perry recommends framing better child outcomes within the language of returns on investment:

We refer to the spending for early childhood education as an investment because the return is so great. We tend to focus heavily on research and data when we message about early childhood education so that people know that it's been tested and found to be a very effective strategy. It's high quality early education for improving the outcomes that children have throughout their lives. We tend to frame early childhood education in big terms, referring to the life-long benefits of a good education and how it's a useful part of the economy.



However, interview participants largely agree that if farm to ECE is to work holistically, it is most likely to happen in spaces like Head Start, where there is



structure and greater opportunity for uptake and family and community engagement. Diane Harris of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) points out,

Evaluation of farm to school programs has shown that there are potentially many different beneficial outcomes, from impacts on children's health to their ability to learn, all the way to impacts on local economies and the environment. Different stakeholders will focus on different benefits, depending on their DNA. Farm to ECE proponents will benefit by being able to talk about the importance of these programs from various perspectives, depending on their audience.

This, again, points to the need for shared goals and values, which can be found at the intersection of farm fresh food and quality early childhood education. But, there need to be intentional opportunities for linkages to be identified and nurtured.

Learn from State and Local Partnerships

Despite reliance on federal funding, there is greater flexibility at the state level to incentivize partnerships and bring about policy change that is more creative and attuned to the complexities of a farm to ECE model. However, there is less funding at the state level, making those efforts costly in terms of time and financing. Often, state level actors simply can't make farm to ECE a priority due to lack of support, often because of other demands on state finances.

Yet, it is in communities that the examples of farm to ECE are happening, with or without significant funding. Harris notes that the efforts around farm to ECE have begun at the state level, building coalitions and partnering with state agencies, especially where the ground work has been (to varying degrees) laid out by state farm to school initiatives. While practices and principles of farm to school do not always directly translate to farm to ECE, there are lessons to be learned and local resources that can be used to build capacity and networks.

For some interview participants, partnership with state and local agencies is critical, because these staffers are the ones doing the work. Interviewees point out that this work isn't just about writing new legislation, but developing it in a way that helps agencies' staff members get approval and do their jobs more efficiently. This benefit then goes back into communities, who can face less bureaucracy because agency staff are already on board and serving as advocates.

Look for Unlikely Allies

As we increasingly understand the holistic nature of farm to ECE, there are other models and different types of partners this space can look at to both develop a movement and become part of other systems addressing complexity. Some allies are more naturally interested in farm to ECE, such as anti-obesity and healthy living

“If you want equity, you have to be intentional.”

Sherrill Killins,
Director of Systems
Alignment and Integration,
The BUILD Initiative

advocates, farmer support groups, and farmworker justice movements. But other networks such as women’s rights; children’s rights; climate change and the environment; and faith-based anti-hunger, and ethical investing movements can also be explored for possible overlapping objectives. Such connections are important, not only for learning lessons in building and sustaining a movement, but also in having a wide base of support for educating policymakers and engaging in policy advocacy and reform.

Hospital community benefit programs were also mentioned as possible partners. Under the Affordable Care Act, nonprofit hospitals must now conduct participatory community health needs assessments and develop community-approved plans for addressing the most pressing local health needs. In the assessment and implementation plans, farm to ECE could raise the issue and take part in advocating for this approach as one solution to health concerns in the area.

Certainly, farm to ECE needs to focus on its core and concentrate on building a strong link between the farm and food system sectors and early education. Nevertheless, additional allies can help to guide expansion of this burgeoning movement and possibly facilitate access to and education opportunities with policy makers and funders who can help support improvements in narrowing research and support gaps.

Address the Current Barriers

There are a few barriers to keep in mind as momentum around farm to ECE builds. The big challenge on the minds of practitioners and policy analysts is the coming **change in administration** at the federal and local levels. For example, CCDBG, which could keep funding going, is, nonetheless, a static mechanism that doesn’t factor in cost of living or demographic shifts. As Congress eyes allocating more funding through states via block grants, what is allocated and how it can be used could bring new difficulties to farm to ECE practitioners.

There could also be little action on the proposed Preschool for All and related funding, including possibly no additional funds for Head Start.

At both federal and local levels, recommendations are for advocates to **get involved in transition planning**, working with others to ensure that strategies developed by whoever wins office in the fall elections are informed by the research and outcomes of what has been achieved so far with farm to ECE. On this, Kris Perry of the First Five Years Fund advises,

A foundation, in particular, can weigh in with the transition team about the importance of farm to ECE in any future appointments around Health & Human Services, or Education, and make sure that whoever comes into these big leadership roles has an awareness or a passion about food policy, so that it doesn’t get, frankly, low lighted. It just hasn’t really risen to the top of

anybody's list, except maybe at USDA, so doing something during these big political transitions could be very timely.

Another issue that is a barrier to progress regardless of politics is **equity in accessing healthy food and understanding what opportunities and support are available to make farm to ECE a reality**. As has been noted, there is a perception that farm to ECE is a privilege, something financially and pragmatically out of reach. Not only does this perception limit testing by smaller or less networked care and education providers, but it also perpetuates a scarcity mentality by those with financial resources. Limited demand or interest convey the idea that communities do not want or need farm to ECE, so funding goes elsewhere.

However, affordable healthy food for children and families is not a privilege. It is a necessity for health and educational stability, and many consider it a human right.

Whatever one's perspective may be, farm to ECE is about lowering the barriers that currently exist for connecting good food to quality education. These include streamlining or combining reporting requirements; making more resources available for interested community members in different languages and providing guidance that is easy to understand; and thinking about transaction costs ranging from time needed to complete applications and do trainings to the out-of-pocket costs of upgrading kitchens to handle scratch cooking and fresh food storage.

Another equity problem noted by Sherri Killins of the BUILD Initiative is simply becoming more connected to the farm to ECE partnerships and networks that already exist. To apply for funding and support often means networking with those already part of the movement, familiar with the concept in practice, or familiar with the funders. Smaller and under-resourced groups will often lack the connections to better-known programs that benefit from relationships with the right funders and implementation partners. How do bigger programs like Head Start become more accessible to smaller programs? How can available resources support more diversity in the process of accessing policy benefits?

Culture is also a barrier. While the examples in the vignettes have been creative in their ability to integrate culturally appropriate and familiar foods and seasonings, nutrition guidelines are homogenous. This continues to put the responsibility on the shoulders of practitioners to make thoughtful connections between its student population and the foods they are served.

Killins recommends having more conversations with stakeholders like farmers and care providers to understand their needs and their challenges better, noting that "...what you see in early childhood programs is a mirror of the opportunity network in those communities. Community is where food is going to be, or not be."





Action for Moving Forward

Recommendations for leveraging opportunities and addressing gaps and challenges can be divided into three general categories:

1. Engage in broad research on outcomes, short- and long-term impacts, and models for replication and scale.
2. Support bridge building between the food systems and the ECE sides of farm to ECE, as well as between farm to ECE stakeholders and other successful social movements.
3. Promote policy advocacy and political engagement.

Research. Further research on tested practices and successful (and unsuccessful) outcomes will help continue to build a body of knowledge about why policy makers, funders, and other potential supporters should recognize the importance of farm to ECE. There are several areas in which more research is needed to help make the case for farm to ECE:

- **Short- and long-term outcomes.** Knowledge on both health and educational impacts of the model are needed to justify further investment in funding and policy reform. Short-term outcomes help move the process forward, but ultimately, the field needs to know how lives are changed across generations. This research should include not only impacts on children and families, but also on community health and well-being and financial sustainability of local farmers and others involved in the local pipeline of farm to school and farm to ECE.
- **True cost.** Farm to ECE benefits from different government funding opportunities, which help lessen dependence on foundation dollars. However, the complex nature of government funding means that understanding the true cost of farm to ECE, with and without subsidies, is still something that needs to be documented and analyzed. Sustainability and the ability to build business models around farm to ECE cannot be determined until these costs become more transparent for planning and evaluation purposes.
- **Streamlining and efficiencies of scale.** Given the diverse federal and private funding streams that are involved in making farm to ECE a reality, approaches to streamlining applications for and reporting on funds would go a long way towards helping providers focus their time and money on resources for children and staff. Models and systems for helping simplify the administrative requirements of farm to ECE would lower costs for providers. This type of streamlining, in and of itself, could require research on feasibility considering the distinct requirements each type of funder has for its own accountability and transparency.



- **Bundle resources for families.** Farm to ECE will only have lasting impact if it also becomes part of family approaches to health and well-being. For financially vulnerable families, burdens of time and cost need to be reduced as much as possible in order to sustain their interest in healthy eating over time. Part of a research agenda for farm to ECE should include gathering existing and creating necessary new materials and tools that let families know about their rights and options and help guide them through the processes of gaining access to healthier food and knowledge about it.

The focus on documenting outcomes must include both health and educational attainment, reinforcing the causal link. This is a long-term undertaking that needs to start now, using the small cluster of pilot organizations testing out farm to ECE across the country to help report on the process and also provide a subject base for seeing the impacts of the strategy over time.

Bridge building. Connecting to other efforts is also imperative, not only to learn, but also to leverage. Farm to ECE has much to learn from other movements that have grassroots and national strategies, and from those that have been able to forge partnerships with unusual allies such as corporations. More importantly, the farm and ECE portions of farm to ECE need more intentional spaces for connecting and learning from one another. Bridge building can be advanced through:

- **Convenings and similar knowledge-sharing efforts.** Meetings off-site and away from day-to-day work enable better integration of ideas and resources and foster more creative thinking about how to work collaboratively.
- **Co-funding.** Potential partners need support to undertake experiments in working across sectors and testing out possible alliances in new and uncomfortable spaces. Targeted funding will help reduce anxieties about performing to certain expectations, putting the focus on building relationships and creating shared agenda.
- **Training on equity in Farm to ECE.** As noted above, there are challenges to making farm to ECE accessible for vulnerable populations, and in understanding how farm to ECE plays out in different communities. Supporting guided efforts in understanding and improving equity in the specificities of farm to ECE can help bring stakeholders together and provide more information for keeping equity front and center as the movement grows.

Advocacy. At this moment in time, the US is politically divided. Yet, as interview participants noted, everyone can agree on the importance of seeing children succeed. Using this shared idea, farm to ECE advocates need to proactively advance a dialogue that heads off any possible cuts in funding for the next legislative season. Stakeholders also need to become more involved in transition planning as fall elections loom. A few options for ensuring a presence during any transitions include:



- **Engage in transition planning.** Foundations can play a lead role in transition planning, especially larger foundations with a presence in DC and other political centers. However, all stakeholders can join coalitions and contribute their ideas for including farm to ECE in the next federal administration and in new administrations at state and local levels. Additionally, as people transition out of and into new positions, a transfer of knowledge will be important to maintain momentum and not lose any possible gains that have been made in terms of educating policymakers and their staff members.
- **Host public dialogues.** Public gatherings can help keep stakeholders informed, and allow them to contribute to idea-generation. Stakeholders such as parents and children are also key advocates when meeting with policymakers.

Conclusion: Paths to the Future

Farm to ECE has many trends working in its favor, making for a generally positive policy environment that has allowed this work to expand to every state. Experiences in states like Minnesota and Washington show how supporters can increase adoption and impact through investing in promotional activities like National Farm to School Month, cafeteria visits, and multimedia campaigns to secure community and policymaker buy-in. They also illustrate how successful initiatives generally enlist the efforts and counsel of those who may have policy authority.

Difficult, but relatively “tame,” logistical problems like food distribution, can be managed either through investing in sophisticated central planning as in North Carolina or more decentralized networks of coordinators embedded in several key participating agencies, as in Minnesota. Either way, it is important to develop robust systems for information sharing and information management, such as directories of agricultural producers and participating institutions. An ambitious vision like Vermont’s can drive great results—but success also requires careful advance planning of costs and returns, as in Washington State, followed by a continual process of consistent evaluation and adjustment.

While farm to ECE, benefiting from farm to school, has achieved great success in a short time, this part of the movement is still a new one. How will these programs evolve to better reach the children who need them most, even ones we tend not to think about? One clue may be found in New Mexico, the same state that, in 2001, originated one of the first pieces of statewide farm to school laws. In 2016, a state legislative committee reported out the New Mexico-Grown Produce in School Meals Act with a recommendation to pass. The bill died in the full House, but may point a way forward: it would have provided funds to purchase and distribute fresh fruits and vegetables, not only to school districts and charter schools, but to juvenile detention centers as well.¹⁴⁵ This example is offered here to remind us that there are many children who do not benefit from attending formal center-based programs or

programs that qualify for the supportive funding and assistance detailed in this report. These include children in the foster system or in immigrant detention facilities, or simply in families unable to afford care outside the home. As advocates build the case for farm to ECE, they should also keep the path clear for the benefits of farm to ECE to reach those in more vulnerable spaces, being sure to offer the quantitative and qualitative lessons that make F2S as broad and inclusive as possible.

If built on strong foundations, along with the creativity and courage to adapt to complexity, early food programs may continue to push the envelope to identify and serve the most vulnerable children in society.



Notes

¹ In this project, Good Food is defined as food that is just, green, healthy, and affordable as outlined by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

² These core components represent criteria used by different stakeholders, and are not meant to be full representative of all farm to ECE components and activities. It also does not mean to exclude organizations that are only engaged in some of these practices.

³ "InBrief: The Foundations of Lifelong Health," Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010, <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-foundations-of-lifelong-health/>

⁴ Saida Mamedova, and Jeremy Redford, "Early Childhood Program Participation, from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012," (Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education, 23, 2013).

⁵ Ibid. Number does not include children that may have multiple care arrangements (1.7 percent).

⁶ Farm to School is also designed to support local, small-scale farmers and build up community-based food systems. See: "What is Farm to School?" National Farm to School Network, <http://www.farmentoschool.org/about/what-is-farm-to-school/>; Todd Oder, "How Farm to School Programs are Chipping Away at Childhood Obesity," Mother Nature Network, March 20, 2013, <http://www.mnn.com/food/healthy-eating/stories/how-farm-to-school-programs-are-chipping-away-at-childhood-obesity>

⁷ This report uses the definition of farm to ECE developed by the National Farm to School Network: "...food-based strategies and activities that support healthy development and learning goals in all types of early childcare and education (ECE) settings (e.g., preschools, childcare centers, family childcare homes, Head Start/Early Head Start and programs in K-12 school districts)." This definition is used with the understanding that not all providers or practitioners will or need to strictly adhere to any one definition or approach. See <http://www.farmentoschool.org/our-work/early-care-and-education>

⁸ "Childhood Obesity Facts," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>

⁹ As of the writing of this document (Summer 2016). See Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Christian Gregory, and Anita Singh, "Household food security in the United States in 2013," *USDA-ERS Economic Research Report 173* (2014) <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/2137663/err215.pdf> See also "Child Hunger Facts," Feeding America, <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/child-hunger/child-hunger-fact-sheet.html>

¹⁰ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Christian Gregory, and Anita Singh, "Household food security in the United States in 2013," *USDA-ERS Economic Research Report 173* (2014) <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/2137663/err215.pdf>





¹¹ “Early Child Care: Daycare Is the New Frontier for Obesity Prevention,” Harvard University School of Public Health, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-prevention/early-child-care/>

¹² Laura Bellows, and Jennifer Anderson, "The Food Friends: Encouraging Preschoolers to Try New Foods," *YC Young Children* 61, no. 3 (2006): 37

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “CACFP provides aid to child and adult care institutions and family or group day care homes for the provision of nutritious foods that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children, and the health and wellness of older adults and chronically impaired disabled persons.” See the USDA Food and Nutrition Service website for more details <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program>

¹⁵ Marjorie Wechsler, David Kirp, Titilayo Tinubu Ali, Madelyn Gardner, Anna Maier, Hanna Melnick, and Patrick Shields, *The Road to High-Quality Early Learning: Lessons from the States*, (Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute, 2016), <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/our-work/publications-resources/the-road-to-high-quality-early-education-lessons-from-the-states/>

¹⁶ “The Benefits of Farm to School,” National Farm to School Network, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf>

¹⁷ “Farm to School in Early Childhood Builds Healthy Kids with Bright Futures: Results from a National Survey of Early Care and Education Providers”, National Farm to School Network, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/early-childhood-survey-results>

¹⁸ James J. Heckman, "Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy," *The Heckman Equation* 7 (2012).

¹⁹ Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Christina Weiland, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Margaret R. Burchinal, Linda M. Espinosa, William T. Gormley, Jens Ludwig, Katherine A. Magnuson, Deborah Phillips, and Martha J. Zaslow, "Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education," (Ann Arbor, MI: Society for Research in Child Development, 2013), <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Evidence%20Base%20on%20Preschool%20Education%20FINAL.pdf>

²⁰ Marjorie Wechsler, David Kirp, Titilayo Tinubu Ali, Madelyn Gardner, Anna Maier, Hanna Melnick, and Patrick M. Shields, "The Road to High-Quality Early Learning: Lessons from the States," (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016) <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/our-work/publications-resources/the-road-to-high-quality-early-education-lessons-from-the-states/>

²¹ For the purposes of this discussion, Wicked Problems are defined as complex, ill-defined, and impossible to solve. They are also interconnected to multiple social issues across sectors. See Horst WJ Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1973): 155-169

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²³ Matthew C. Benson, “Exploring Extension Involvement in Farm to School Program Activities,” *Journal of Extension* Volume 52, Number 4 (August 2014)

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http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Presentation_handouts.pdf and “Our History,” The Edible Schoolyard Project, <https://edibleschoolyard.org/node/78>

²⁵ US Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, *No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference 2002*

<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbreference/reference.pdf>

²⁶ See more about the two-generation approach at “The Two-Generation Approach,” Ascend at the Aspen Institute, <http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/pages/the-two-generation-approach>

²⁷ “President Obama’s Early Learning Initiative,” US Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecl/early-learning/early-learning-initiative>

²⁸ “Community Food Systems: Farm to School Grant Program,” US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-school-grant-program>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Child and Adult Care Food Program,” US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program>

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Appendix A: Interview Participants

Name	Title	Organization
Matt Anderson	Warehouse Manager / Field Operations Manager	CKC Good Food
Amy Bachman	Procurement and Sustainability Manager	DC Central Kitchen
Afia Bediako	Community Health Advocate and Farm to Early Care Manager	Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation
William Berry	Head Start Cook	Norris Square Community Alliance
Rosalba Bonilla-Acosta	Maryland State Director	CentroNía
Tracey Capers	Executive Vice President, Programs / Organizational Development	Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation
Jeff Capizzano	President	Policy Equity Group
Catalina Cruz	Head Cook	CentroNía
Billo Diawara	Teacher	CentroNía
Dennis Derryck	Founder/President	Corbin Hill Food Project
Diana Endicott	Founder and Director	Good Natured Family Farms
Natasha Frost	Staff Attorney	Public Health Law Center, Mitchell Hamline School of Law
Angela Gibbs	Health and Development Specialist	Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation
Merrill Ann Gobetz	Bistro Kids/Education District Manager	Treat America Food Service
Pakou Hang	Executive Director and Co-Founder	Hmong American Farmers Association
Alexis Glasgow	Farm Share Coordinator and Former Head Start Parent	
Diane Harris, PhD, MPH, CHES	Health Scientist and Team Lead - Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Suzanne Henley	Healthy Tots Management Analyst	Office of the State Superintendent of Education - District of Columbia Government
Silvina Hopkins	Founder and Director	Bambini Play and Learn
Cricket James	Sales Specialist/Account Manager	Russ Davis Wholesale
Jon Jensen	Director, Center for Sustainable Communities and Associate Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies Program	Luther College
Haleisa Johnson	Early Childhood Program Coordinator	Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative—NICC Calmar
Dave Kayoum	Director of Operations	CKC Good Food

Sherri Killins	Director of Systems Alignment and Integration	The BUILD Initiative
Derek Kilmer	Owner/Operator	Kilmer's Farm Market
Huguette Lareche	Director	Brevoort Children's Center
Rebecca Lemos-Otero	Executive Director	City Blossoms
Carmen Luciano	Head Start Cook	Norris Square Community Alliance
Ann Mansfield	Project Coordinator	Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative—Iowa State University Extension and Outreach - Region 4
Erin McKee	Farm to Institution Project Director	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Delores Mims, MEd	Director, Edwards L. Cleaveland Children's Center	Brooklyn Kindergarten Society
Rosa Moraes	Director of the QIN-HUB Standards and Compliance, CentroNía Institute	CentroNía
Jerome Napson	Director of Early Learning	Norris Square Community Alliance
Myrna Peralta	President & CEO	CentroNía
Kris Perry	Executive Director	First Five Years Fund
Cindy Petsche	Family and Community Partnership Specialist – Enrollment	Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation
Nilda Pimentel	Head Start In-kind Consultant	Norris Square Community Alliance
Angela Prokop	Head Start Nutrition Coordinator	Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties
Shanna Putnum-Dibble	Elementary Schools Learner Advocate	West Side Child Center
Omaira Santiago	Family/Health Coordinator	Norris Square Community Alliance
Julia Schindlmayr, MS RD	Registered Dietitian	FixEat Nutrition and Health Services LLC
Krista Scott	Senior Director of Child Care Health Policy	Child Care Aware of America
Linda Shak	Associate Program Officer for Children, Families, and Communities Program	The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Margaret Smith	Outreach Coordinator	Common Market
Lacy Stephens, MS, RDN	Farm to Early Care and Education Associate	National Farm to School Network
Natalie Talis, MPH	Policy Associate	National Farm to School Network
Denise Tapscott	Family and Community Partnership Specialist – Enrollment	Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation

Yoshiko Yamasaki	Health Nutrition and Facilities Specialist	Norris Square Community Alliance
Yao Yang	Organizer and Food Hub Co-Manager	Hmong American Farmers Association
Amy Yaroch, PhD	Executive Director	Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition
Laurie Yohn	General Manager	CKC Good Food
Bea Zuluaga	Director, Food and Wellness Department	CentroNía
Marguerite Zauner, MPH	Senior Health Improvement Project Manager – Early Childhood	BlueCross BlueShield of Minnesota