

Opportunities for Extension with Farm to Preschool

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INTRODUCTION

The CDC's 2016 Early Care and Education (ECE) State Indicator Report provides information about state efforts to address childhood obesity in the ECE setting. The report found:

- about 1 in 4 children aged 2 to 5 years are overweight or have obesity
- 64% of children aged 3 to 5 are cared for in non-parental care arrangements, such as child care centers, family child care homes, pre-kindergarten classrooms and Head Start programs.

Many early care centers and preschools are looking for solutions to address the health and wellness issues their young participants face. Farm to Preschool activities provide new opportunities for innovation and collaboration to strengthen our local food systems. Extension involvement in Farm to Preschool can address the new Extension Impact Areas, while setting the stage for future generations to reap the benefits of nutritious local food, engage communities and support the local agricultural economy.

AIM

Learning Objectives for Extension Professionals:

- Understand the basic methods of Farm to Preschool implementation
- Understand the benefits of implementing Farm to Preschool activities within Ohio
- Promote opportunities for Farm to Preschool programs within OSU Extension

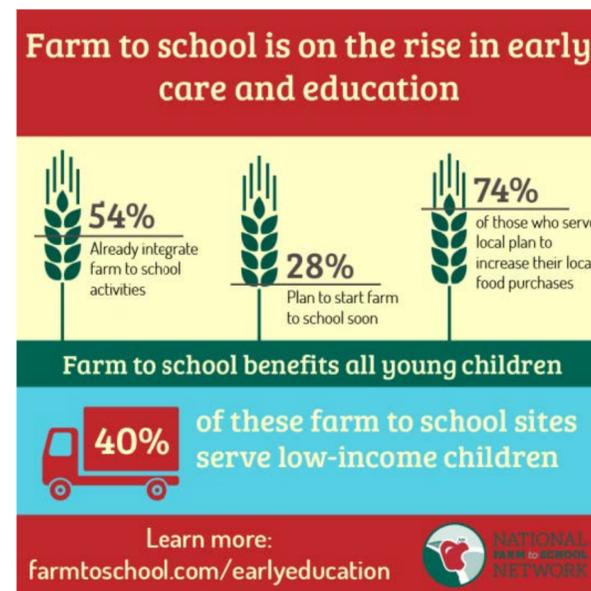


Source: Erivan79, Wikipedia

METHODS

Farm to Preschool can include activities from all Extension Program Areas:

- Family and Consumer Sciences- offering nutrition and/or garden-based curricula, parent workshops, implementing preschool wellness policies which address Farm to Preschool principles
- 4H Youth Development- connecting teens with service project opportunities at school gardens and summer camps, delivering STEM programming in preschools
- Agriculture and Natural Resources- providing technical support at school gardens and connecting Master Gardener Volunteers, promoting field trips to farms, farmers' markets and community gardens, promoting and increasing access to local foods for providers and families
- Community Development- connecting local food sources to preschool sites, influencing policies at the local, state or national level, collaboration on USDA grant opportunities



Source: 2015 National Farm to School Network survey of early care and education providers. Respondents included 1,500 providers serving 183,369 young children in 49 states and Washington, D.C.



USDA Undersecretary of Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon participating in a hands-on lesson about local foods Source: USDA Blog Photos

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

As OSU Extension professionals evaluate future program offerings, they are encouraged to consider Farm to Preschool as a way to address the new Extension Impact Areas.

Thriving Across the Life Span

- influencing the eating habits of young children

Health and Wellness

- creating healthy lifestyles through good nutrition and experiential opportunities such as gardening

Engaged Ohioans, Vibrant Communities

- improving healthy food access at home and within the community

Sustainable Food Systems

- influencing policies to address the childhood obesity epidemic through a local food lens

Farm to Preschool Activities Can Improve Extension Partnerships

Farm to Preschool is an opportunity for Extension Professionals to network within extension, by leaning on the knowledge and skills of staff and educators across program areas. Implementing Farm to Preschool programs takes input from all program areas- FCS, ANR, CD and 4H, and can help strengthen partnerships with local governments, educational agencies like Head Start and other early care providers, local farmers and producers, and more.



Source: Adobe Stock

CONCLUSIONS

Farm to Preschool is a win-win-win solution.

Students win because Farm to Preschool provides access to nutritious local foods. Farm to Preschool activities also provide students with hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition.

Local farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers win because Farm to Preschool can serve as a significant financial opportunity by opening the doors to an institutional market worth billions of dollars.

Communities win because Farm to Preschool benefits everyone from students, teachers and administrators to parents and farmers, providing opportunities to build family and community engagement. Buying from local producers and processors creates new jobs and strengthens the local economy.

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