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

METHODS

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

- Family and Consumer Sciences– offering nutrition and food preparation classes, teaching preschoolers how to eat healthier
- 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

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
- creating healthy lifestyles through good nutrition and life-long eating habits
- providing opportunities to build family and community engagement

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 with other stakeholders. By working together, they can increase awareness and participation in farm-to-school programs.

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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

