

# WASHINGTON D.C. FARM TO ECE ROADMAP

Farm to ECE Roadmap Committee

June 2023

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) connects young children and their families to local food and local food producers by purchasing and serving local food and offering food, farm, and nutrition-related educational opportunities in ECE settings. Washington D.C. has a robust foundation of farm to ECE policy and partnerships. However, to advance equitable access to sustainable and comprehensive farm to ECE, farm to ECE leaders recognized the need to identify and advance a roadmap to inform and guide the future of farm to ECE. Farm to ECE stakeholders from across sectors came together to identify the root cause barriers to farm to ECE participation and priority approaches to eliminating barriers and increasing farm to ECE participation. Through this process, stakeholders identified key objectives, strategies, and tactics to guide the next phase of farm to ECE in Washington D.C.

The priority objectives include:

- Objective 1: Promote farm to early care and education as a vital strategy to growing healthy children and building healthy communities.
- Objective 2: Increase ECE market opportunities for local producers by strengthening local food infrastructure and accessibility.
- Objective 3: Increase opportunity for ECE providers and families to be leaders in farm to ECE and local foods through meaningful engagement
- Objective 4: Advance policies that increase funding of and access to resources for farm to ECE initiatives and practitioners

## BACKGROUND

Farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) connects young children and their families to local food and local producers through hands-on experiential learning and local food procurement in the ECE setting. Farm to ECE looks different in every community but generally includes the purchasing and serving of local foods in ECE meals and snacks along with food, farm, and nutrition-related education opportunities. Farm to ECE adapts to all types of ECE settings, including child care centers, family child care, Head Start, preschool, and more.

According to the National Farm to School Network, farm to ECE offers the following benefits:

- Enhanced experiential education
- Family and community engagement
- Health and wellness for children, families, and caregivers
- Achievement of programmatic and learning standards
- Increased access to healthy, local foods and high-quality education opportunities
- New and diverse market opportunities for farmers and strengthened local food systems

Funding for farm to ECE initiatives at the center level often comes out of program's general funds. However, there are some funding streams, including the Local5 and Wellness Grant components of the DC Healthy Tots Act that provide financial support for purchasing local foods and providing educational opportunities. The Association of State Public Health Nutritionist's (ASPHN) Farm to Early Care and Education Implementation Grant (FIG) has funded farm to ECE coordination, network development, and resource creation in Washington D.C.

## **ROADMAP PURPOSE**

Through the FIG work, Washington D.C. has built a robust foundation of farm to ECE partnerships, outreach, and resources. However, farm to ECE stakeholders recognized the need to advance systems and policy change that support sustainable, equitable, and broadly reaching farm to ECE initiatives. With support from the FIG program, farm to ECE stakeholders collaborated in a facilitated process to identify a shared goal, objectives, strategies, and tactics to advance farm to ECE in Washington D.C.

This document is intended to help prioritize farm to ECE efforts and provide a platform and shared vision to bring together stakeholders. The Roadmap may also be helpful in eliciting future funding and developing collaborative funding proposals. The Roadmap is anticipated to be a living document. As farm to ECE partnerships and efforts evolve, the Roadmap and Roadmap implementation can shift in response to the environment and stakeholder input and needs.

## **ROADMAP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

As leaders in the Farm to ECE Implementation Grant, representatives from FreshFarm and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education collaborated and consulted on the Roadmap planning process. The Washington D.C. Farm to ECE Roadmap Committee is central to the Roadmap development process. The Roadmap Committee is composed of key stakeholders from partner organizations working in farm to ECE or in systems and fields that intersect in farm to ECE work. A complete list of Roadmap Committee members is included at the end of the document. The Farm to Early Care and Education Providers Coalition was also consulted throughout the process. The providers provided valuable insight into their needs and experiences as farm to ECE practitioners. The Roadmap development process is outlined below.

**Farm to ECE Root Cause Analysis.** The process started with two separate meetings focused on identifying the root barriers to sustainable, equitable, and comprehensive farm to ECE implementation in Washington D.C. One meeting involved the Roadmap Committee and the other involved the Farm to ECE Providers Coalition. Each group started with each individual sharing the values that they hold when it comes to farm to ECE implementation. The intent of this exercise was to identify shared values of farm to ECE and prioritize values-aligned farm to ECE approaches. The word cloud on the following page depicts the values that emerged in the dialogues.



After sharing values, each group went through the process of identifying barriers to farm to ECE. For each barrier, the group asked and responded to the question of why that barrier exists, repeating this question until the group got to what seemed to be a “root cause” of that barrier. Through that process, seven root cause themes emerged.

### **Barriers to Farm to ECE: Root Cause Themes**

- Decision-makers and the public do not recognize the value and importance of early care and education and thus don't provide as many funding and support opportunities as K-12 schools.
- Families do not have intentional experience with or exposure to local, healthy food options and may not have time and capacity to participate in food education or to offer new, less familiar foods.
- Early care and education staff may have limited experience with or exposure to local, healthy food options.
- Providers are unaware of or do not have the capacity to access the resources available to support local food and nutrition initiatives (including the Child and Adult Care Food Program).
- Food and nutrition activities and initiatives are not explicitly included in existing curricula or educational requirements or priorities.
- Early care and education sites can't achieve the “economy of scale” required to make local food purchases economical.
- Both early care and education providers and farmers have limited time and capacity to develop individual purchasing relationships.

**Stakeholder Solutions Meeting.** With the root cause themes identified, a broader group of stakeholders was invited to participate in a Stakeholder Solutions Brainstorming Meeting. For each root cause barrier identified, the participants provided specific examples of activities and initiatives that were already happening to address that barrier and what needs to happen in the future to address that barrier. From there, each participant identified up to four priority solutions from the many ideas that emerged that would have the greatest impact on advancing farm to ECE in Washington D.C.

**Roadmap Committee Organizing:** With the prioritized solutions that emerged from the Stakeholder Solutions session, The Roadmap Committee then organized and sorted the priority solutions based on emergent themes. These themes and associated priorities developed into the objectives, strategies, and tactics detailed in the Roadmap.

# WASHINGTON D.C. FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ROADMAP

**Goal:** Ensure equitable access to the benefits of sustainable, comprehensive farm to early care and education (ECE) initiatives for all children, families, farmers, and ECE communities in Washington D.C.

## GOAL DEFINITIONS:

- **Equitable Access** ensures differences across geography, financial status, language, race, or culture do not determine the ability to participate in or benefit from farm to ECE initiatives.
- **Sustainable** farm to ECE initiatives are embedded in the approaches and everyday activities at an ECE and are not dependent upon a single individual or specific funding stream.
- **Comprehensive** farm to ECE is adapted to a site's interests and needs, but include a variety of aligned local food education and procurement initiatives.
- **The ECE community** encompasses all staff at ECE sites, including educators, food service, and administrators, as well as the organizations, individuals, and families that support and connect with ECE sites and stakeholders.

## OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

### OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTE FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AS A VITAL STRATEGY TO GROWING HEALTHY CHILDREN AND BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**Strategy:** Align, coordinate, and collaborate with other nutrition, health, and child wellbeing programs and agencies.

Tactics:

- Collaboratively develop resources to support families in accessing local food
- Increase promotion and awareness of WIC and SNAP as a resource for local foods and use at farmers' markets
- Collaborate with WIC to embed farm to ECE resources in mobile app (WICSmart) for families

**Strategy:** Provide tools for a variety of stakeholders to "tell the story" of farm to early care and education importance and impact

Tactics:

- Develop a communications toolkit for ECE providers to promote farm to ECE including social media posts, take homes resource for families, one-pagers, etc.
- Create a template (e.g., Google form) to capture farm to ECE success stories to utilize in promotional materials
- Designate Farm to ECE Week/Month to celebrate farm to ECE successes and raise awareness

**Strategy:** Ensure existing farm to ECE resources are accurate, accessible, and easy to use

Tactics:

- Create a centralized place to access educational resources that support farm to early care and education
- Update existing agency and partner websites to make farm to ECE content more visible and easy to find
- Ensure educational offerings are offered online and in virtual formats

## **OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASE ECE MARKET OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL PRODUCERS BY STRENGTHENING LOCAL FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESSIBILITY**

**Strategy:** Address barriers to transportation and distribution of local food to early care and education sites

Tactics:

- Increase aggregation points for local producers
- Leverage the network of farmers' markets as aggregation points for producers and local food access points for early care and education sites
- Include ECEs in city purchasing contracts or purchasing partnerships with K-12 schools (leverage piggybacking on existing contracts)

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**Strategy:** Facilitate connectivity between producers and early care and education sites

Tactics:

- Develop an approved vendors list of farmers and a customer database listing of early care and education sites
- Hire a value chain coordinator at the agency level to facilitate connections between providers and farmers

**Strategy:** Engage more producers in farm to early care and education initiatives

Tactics:

- Include outreach and education to farmers on the benefits and viability of farm to ECE sales
- Support exposure for children and connection for farmers through on-site farm field trips

## **OBJECTIVE 3: INCREASE OPPORTUNITY FOR ECE PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES TO BE LEADERS IN FARM TO ECE AND LOCAL FOODS THROUGH MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT**

**Strategy:** Create meaningful opportunities for families to engage in and drive farm to ECE and local foods initiatives

Tactics:

- Integrate farm to ECE content into existing family engagement activities
- Engage families in the planning and design of farm to ECE initiatives at the state, community, and ECE site level to ensure initiatives, networks, and systems meet families' needs without adding additional burden
- Offer food educational opportunities in multiple formats, including online options

### **OBJECTIVE 3: INCREASE OPPORTUNITY FOR ECE PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES TO BE LEADERS IN FARM TO ECE AND LOCAL FOODS THROUGH MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT (CONT.)**

**Strategy:** Empower ECE providers and educators to utilize farm to ECE initiatives as a tool to meet their goals and aims

Tactics:

- Build an accessible, low-barrier, low-commitment peer support network where providers can connect with one another to collectively share knowledge and resources related to farm to ECE
- Allow centers to include teachers in meals so they can be models and use mealtime as an educational opportunity
- Engage ECE providers in the planning and design of farm to ECE initiatives at the state, community, and ECE site level to ensure initiatives, networks, and systems meet providers' needs without adding additional burden
- Identify connection between farm to ECE initiatives and learning standards and how farm to ECE activities can support learning goals (E.g., outdoor learning, nutrition education, social-emotional development)

### **OBJECTIVE 4: ADVANCE POLICIES THAT INCREASE FUNDING OF AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES FOR FARM TO ECE INITIATIVES AND PRACTITIONERS**

**Strategy:** Include targeted public and private funding for farm to ECE initiatives at agency and programmatic levels

Tactics:

- Develop and fund (or continue to fund) farm to ECE programming and staff at state agencies
- Increase reimbursement for local food purchasing through the Child and Adult Care Food Program Healthy Tots Local5
- Increase funding and support for farm to ECE technical assistance and content expertise from ECE support organizations (e.g., community and outreach partners)
- Engage in advocacy to advance national funding for farm to ECE
- Increase local organizations' knowledge and capacity to operate farm to ECE services
- Cultivate and support private philanthropic investment in farm to ECE

**Strategy:** Provide clarity and streamlined opportunities for ECE providers to apply for and access funding

Tactics:

- Increase outreach and strategic communication about existing funding opportunities
- Create centralized webpage with up-to-date information on available funding streams
- Provide technical assistance to ECE providers and support organizations to apply for grants

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROADMAP IMPLEMENTATION

The Roadmap Committee recommends the following next steps to move forward with Roadmap Implementation:

- Create a working group to hold collective responsibility for developing and implementing action steps.
- Hold roundtable or discussion sessions to get feedback from and learn more about the priorities of ECE providers, farmers, and parents.
- Use roundtable opportunities to promote and gain buy-in for farm to ECE activities (e.g., sample local produce) and identify additional key stakeholders who value and are interested in prioritizing farm to ECE.
- Use the Roadmap as a reference tool and guide for future funding offerings and for developing funding proposals.
- Identify other venues and avenues to share the Roadmap to build awareness of and potential partnerships around farm to ECE.

## WASHINGTON D.C. FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ROADMAP COMMITTEE

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