

A Guide to

Farm to Preschool

in Home-based Child Care Sites

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank several individuals and organizations for their input into this guide. CHIP and CHC staff for strategic direction, editing assistance, advice on content, and for their continued support and encouragement; the five Lemon Grove childcare providers for implementing Farm to Preschool at their sites, and for their friendship and collaboration during the pilots' five months period; the YMCA Child Care Resources staff for resources, supplies, and guidance; the Cuyamaca College Intergenerational Garden for demonstrating what successful Farm to Preschool looks like; Marianne West and her Lemon Grove Gardening Club for providing knowledge and expertise to the Gardening section; and all of the organizations and individuals whose resources were used or consulted during the making of this guide – thank you for your expertise.

The author would like to specially acknowledge Occidental College's Urban & Environmental Policy Institute in Los Angeles. Their Farm to Preschool Program began as a two-year pilot program in 2009 and is continuing to expand. The program was designed to influence early childhood eating habits and expand the farm to school network of programs to bring farm fresh foods to a range of child care and preschool programs in underserved areas of Los Angeles and San Diego counties. Its program model has been adapted in other states and with multiple cultures.

Background about the Hunger Fellowship

The [Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship](#) program is an 11-month fellowship created by the [Congressional Hunger Center \(CHC\)](#) for emerging leaders that are dedicated to fighting poverty and hunger. Fellowship participants are first placed into a field site for 5 months working with a local organization, then at a policy site for 6 months working with a national organization. At both organizations fellows carry out specific anti-hunger or anti-poverty work.

Background about the Field Site

[Community Health Improvement Partners \(CHIP\)](#) is a San Diego based non-profit collaboration of healthcare systems, hospitals, community clinics, insurers, physicians, universities, community based organizations and the County of San Diego working together to assess and address priority health needs in different communities. CHIP utilizes a well-documented collective impact model to bring together traditional and nontraditional partners to develop a common understanding of complex community health problems and their root causes, then work with partners to develop a joint approach to solve them.

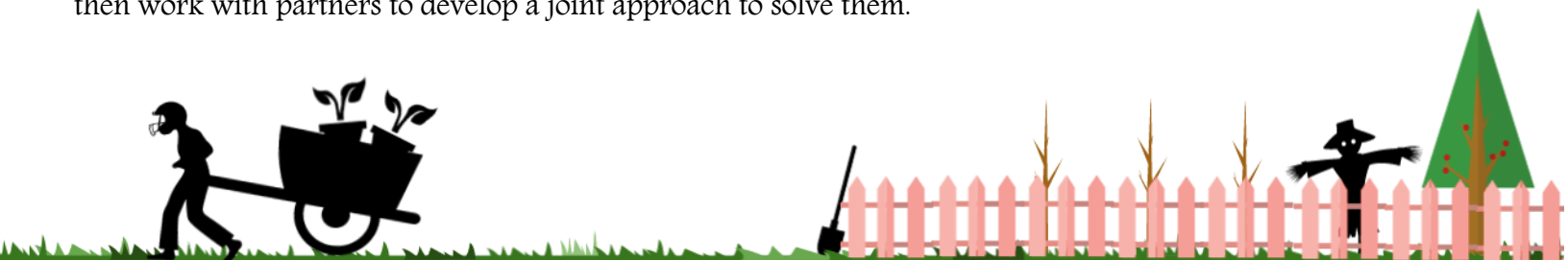


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Introduction

The **Lemon Grove HEAL Zone** is a project facilitated by Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP), with funding by Kaiser Permanente. The HEAL Zone is a collaborative of Lemon Grove residents, CHIP, and community partners and stakeholders using a systems-based approach to focus on environmental and policy changes to build a city where people eat better and move more as a part of daily life. Drawing from CHIP's collective impact model, the Lemon Grove HEAL Zone brings together representatives of business, community, early childhood, faith, healthcare, local government, media, schools, and service organizations, to implement 44 healthy eating and active living projects.

According to data gathered by the Healthy ONES studyⁱ funded by Kaiser Permanente, 46.3 percent of Lemon Grove residents are obese. Lemon Grove has the second highest obesity rate in all of San Diego County. Childhood obesity rates in Lemon Grove are just as high with 43 percent of students in grades 2, 3 and 6 overweight or obese. Reports from the Center on Disease Control on promoting healthy eating and physical activity show interventions encouraging healthy habits in very young children are often the most successfulⁱⁱ. Improving the food and physical activity environments in early childhood settings, especially home-based childcare, is a high priority among public health and child advocates because many young children spend much of their time there.

Lemon Grove HEAL Zone's Early Childhood sector seeks to positively impact the food and physical activity environment in Lemon Grove's licensed child care sites, including center-based and home-based sitesⁱⁱⁱ. This guide for implementing Farm to Preschool in home-based child care sites is designed to improve health outcomes of young children in child care homes. .

Implementation of Farm to Preschool has been well-documented in private and school based child care centers, but not in home-based sites. The pilots described in this toolkit were the first home-based providers in Lemon Grove to implement the Farm to Preschool curriculum.



All contents in this guide, unless otherwise indicated, are drawn from lessons learned and best practices utilized from 5 home-based child care pilot sites which elected to incorporate the Farm to Preschool curriculum into their daily activities. The pilots were conducted in Lemon Grove between the months of September to February 2014.

The purpose of this publication is to serve as a guide for nutrition educators and home-based childcare providers to incorporate the Farm to Preschool curriculum into a home-based childcare provider's daily activities, or into their own daily activities, respectively. This guide assists in the initial process of identifying and contacting home-based childcare sites interested in starting Farm to Preschool, and during implementation of Farm to Preschool when providers encounter challenges limiting Farm to Preschool's effectiveness at their sites.

The guide offers a toolkit for how to identify and contact interested home-based childcare providers, case study reports, technical assistance resources, and advice to nutrition educators and home-based childcare providers for overcoming the challenges unique to home care providers, such as engaging parents, funding constraints, increasing age-appropriate physical activity, and gardening.



About Farm to Preschool

Occidental College's Farm to Preschool Program works to connect early care and education settings (preschools, Head Start, center-based, programs in K-12 school districts, and family home care programs) to local food producers with the objectives of serving locally-grown, healthy foods to young children, improving child nutrition, and providing related educational opportunities. The Farm to Preschool curriculum is designed to expose children to healthy, local fruits and vegetables, thereby influencing the eating habits of young children while their preferences are still forming. Other goals of Farm to Preschool include creating healthy lifestyles through good nutrition and experiential opportunities such as gardening, and improving healthy food access at home and within the community. Program activities serve preschoolers, child care providers, parents and family members, as well as communities.

Goals of the program include incorporating locally grown fruits and vegetables from farmers and farmers' markets into preschool meals and snacks and providing age- and culturally-appropriate nutrition curricula for preschoolers and their parents. The curriculum includes *Harvest of the Month* activities, taste tests, cooking demonstrations, field trips to farms and farmers' markets, "Discovery Labs", and a workshop series for parents.

The Farm to preschool program can help to increase children's preferences for and consumption of fruits and vegetables, and also help to address the issue of childhood obesity.

For more information on Occidental College's Farm to Preschool program, visit

<http://www.uepi.oxy.edu/our-projects/farm-to-preschool/>

For more information on Farm to Preschool programming, visit <http://www.farmtopreschool.org>



About Harvest of the Month

Harvest of the Month was initially created by several local school districts in California as part of a broader nutrition education effort targeted to low-income students. Recognizing the value of this approach, the California Department of Public Health adopted Harvest of the Month in 2005, launching a statewide effort that is standardized, cost-effective, replicable, and available to all. Occidental College then adapted Harvest of the Month to be used with preschoolers.

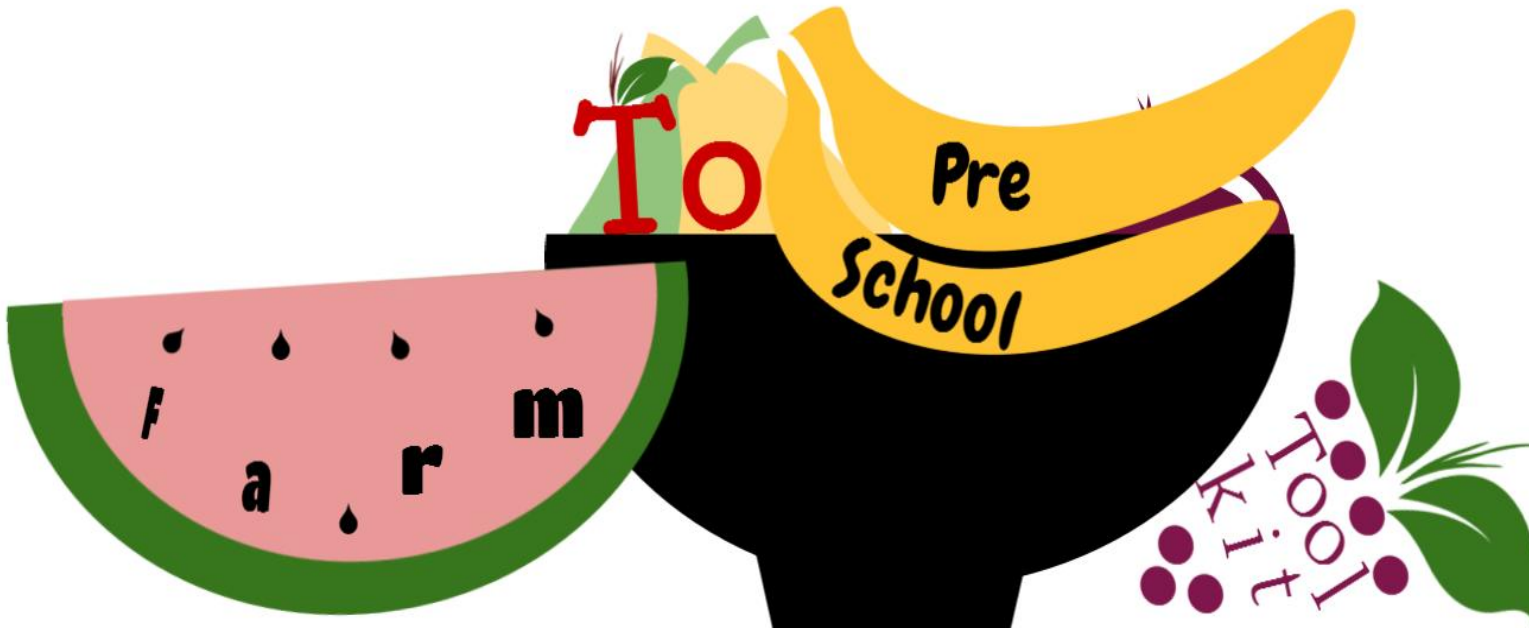
For more information about Harvest of the Month, visit <http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>

About “Discovery Labs”

“Discovery Labs” is a term coined by Occidental College for the set of activities in the Farm to Preschool curriculum designed to develop childrens’ motor skills and reasoning skills through handling, touching, weighing, and measuring of the produce of the month.

For a sample of a “Discovery Lab” curriculum please refer to Appendix M.





Assessing Opportunities in Your Community

To start, ask this question: “Do I already have a home-based child care site in my community who would be willing to start Farm to Preschool?”

If **no**, then stay in this section and read about how to find providers.

If **yes**, then go on to the next section, Outreach.

1. Finding interested providers

The first step is to find out how many child care providers are licensed in your area of community. To find out the total number of childcare providers in your area, a simple google search “list of licensed childcare providers in [your city]” might be fruitful, or searching for “childcare resource services in [your city]” might be also helpful if you do not already have access to a list of child care providers in your area.

Another good resource can be your local child care resource and referral (R&R) agency located in every state. To locate your R&R visit <http://childcareaware.org> For the Lemon Grove pilot sites, the local R&R is the YMCA Childcare Resource Service (CRS). CRS has had a long working relationship with providers in the area through its resource and referral department , and were able to provide the list of child care providers to start the pilots.

2. Assessing opportunities

Once you have a list of all the childcare providers with their addresses and contact information, you can begin to pare down the list to licensed home-based child care sites, and assess each site’s eating and physical activity environment to get a sense of the need for Farm to Preschool in your area.

A simple survey that asks providers about the type of childcare site they are operating, and their sites’ eating and physical activity environment is a good method for paring down your list. Questions such as what type of foods are served to the children, how foods are served (single serve vs. family style), how many minutes of physical activity the children are getting each day are all important questions to incorporate into your survey.



For reference or replication, please **refer to the NAPSACC survey in Appendix A**. This survey was used to ask Lemon Grove providers about the type of childcare site they have, and the sites' eating and physical activity environments. The survey is available in English and Spanish.

Best Practice Tip #1

Ensuring a high response rate to surveys is a challenge. Adding incentives for completing the survey can help increase the response rate. Small incentives like a soccer ball, hoola hoop, gardening tools, seed packets, or whatever else you think a provider would need to enhance the eating and physical activity environment

In addition to sending a survey to providers, consider adding an introductory letter with the following information:

- Explanation of who you (and your organization) are
- Goal and purpose of initiating contact
- Purpose of the survey and how data will be used
- Providers' role and responsibility with the survey and information given
- Deadline for survey responses
- Incentive(s), if any, provided for completing survey
- Link to an online copy of the survey

Once you have an introductory letter and survey you would like to use, you could send the packet via:

- Mail. The introductory letter and survey could be sent to providers along with a prepaid envelope and a return label addressed to you or your organization.
- Email. Provide the introductory letter's information in the body of the email. Provide a link to



3. Following up with surveys

Follow up with providers 2 to 3 weeks prior to the deadline via email. Reiterate in the email who you are, the purpose of contact providers again, followed by a link to the electronic survey. Incentives providers will receive for completing the survey, how it will be given, and when providers will receive their incentives are also good information to incorporate into your follow up email.

For providers in Lemon Grove who completed the survey, their incentives were children's physical activity equipment such as hoola hoops, soccer balls, and bouncy balls. Once survey responses were turned in, providers were invited to an introductory workshop where they received more information about Farm to Preschool, participated in select activities from the curriculum, and received their incentives at the end of the workshop.

Analyze survey responses once they are returned to determine which home-based childcare provider might be willing to start Farm to Preschool at their site.

While any home-based provider is more than welcome to adopt Farm to Preschool, it is best to identify sites that could benefit the most from the curriculum.

Sites benefitting the most from Farm to Preschool could be those that report

- Providing under 30 minutes of outdoor physical activity to the children
- Serving sugar-sweetened beverages, energy drinks, sports drinks, and/or high-processed, calorie dense foods for breakfast, lunch, dinner and/or snack.
- Allowing more than two hours of screen time
- Having trouble with meal planning
- Not having enough nutritional education or physical education materials for children, parents, and/or staff.
- Having little opportunities to incorporate local produce into menus
- Having desire to start an edible garden but may not know how to start

Once you have identified potential sites to work with, it is time to start contacting providers to see if they would be interested in starting Farm to Preschool at their sites.



Outreach

Phone calls are the best option for initial contact. Please see Appendix B for a sample call template for the initial calls.

Things to consider as you are preparing for an initial call

Incentives

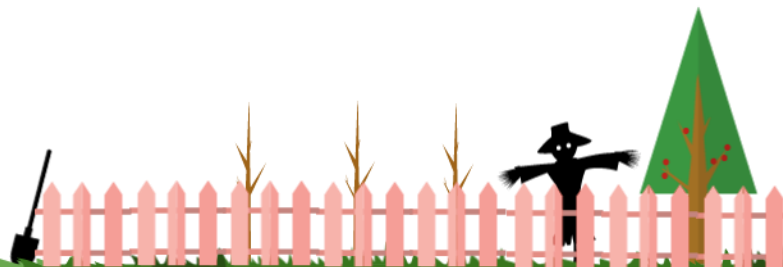
It is nice to have a clear incentive for providers who finish the curriculum identified before you make cold calls. The incentive should be something that will benefit providers' business, or something that will help the provider run their business more smoothly and effectively. Providing monetary rewards or compensation upon completing of Farm to Preschool is discouraged.

The incentive for childcare providers in Lemon Grove was to be awarded priority referral status. When a child care provider finishes the program, their childcare service is added to a list that YMCA CRS keeps for parents who call in requesting referrals for child care services. Those who have completed the Farm to Preschool curriculum and have adopted a Wellness Policy into their site will be among the first sites to be referred to parents calling in for local child care services. This is a significant incentive, especially in a community with strong competition among providers.

Developing your pitch

Tailor messaging to each provider's needs. Review the survey responses and determine how the curriculum could address needs providers have identified. Use that information to explain how the curriculum could be beneficial to them, and to increase the likelihood of their participation. Elements of the curriculum to emphasize depending on the provider's needs:

- Curriculum provides nutrition education for providers, children, and parents.
- It is free and can be tailored to providers' needs so they do not have to spend a lot of money to do weekly activities in the curriculum.
- Activities in the curriculum are scheduled for once a week. The goal of the curriculum is to consistently expose children in different ways to fruits and vegetables (preferably local).



- Even if providers are not able to consistently engage children in weekly activities from the curriculum, the provider can still incorporate fruit and vegetable exposure into their daily activities (see Time Constraint section for ideas).
- Tastings of Produce of the Month can be eligible to be subsidized by the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) if childcare provider is enrolled in it.
- All Farm to Preschool activities are designed to meet Desired Results Developmental Profile – Revised (DRDP-R) standards California has in place for licensed childcare providers to track the growing literacy, English, cognitive, mathematical, physical developments of children under their care.
- Since the curriculum is pre-planned, all activities are described in detail for easy replication and little extra work is required of providers.

Answering machines and Emails

When providers do not answer your call, leaving a message or emailing is a good back up option. Messages for emails or answering machines should include the following:

- An explanation of who you are, and what organization you are representing (if any)
- A 1-2 sentence overview of what Farm to Preschool is
- A brief summary of types of activities included in Farm to Preschool and how often activities are done
- Information about how the provider can benefit from Farm to Preschool
- The incentive for providers who implement and complete Farm to Preschool
- Your plans for following up

Once you have providers interested in more information about Farm to Preschool, it is time to schedule the first in-person meeting to go over the curriculum and see if providers want to integrate it into their daily activities.



First Meeting

Preparing for the first meeting

Items to bring (Appendix C)

- 🍒 Curriculum of the month
- 🍒 Farm to Preschool Users' manual overview pages
- 🍒 Tutti Frutti physical activity energizers

During your first meeting

Key topics to include.

- 🍒 Briefly repeat overview of what Farm to Preschool is, the purpose of the curriculum, and the important role child care providers have in introducing their children to a healthy lifestyle.
- 🍒 Review the pricing of supplies listed in the curriculum.
- 🍒 Make sure providers know they do not have to buy any of the resources if they do not feel comfortable buying them.
- 🍒 Walk providers through the curriculum of the current month to get an idea of the activities they could do with the children.
- 🍒 Let providers know that the curriculum is supposed to be sustainable even when you are no longer there to provide assistance. While you can facilitate some of the activities with providers and their children initially, you would want to step away from leading the activities, and allow the provider to do it themselves eventually.
 - 🌱 Tip: If the provider has no time or is not consistently exposing their children to fruits and vegetables, it might take longer to ensure the curriculum will be sustained. Work on providers' time schedule and be patient about seeing concrete changes in the children's behaviors and preferences.
- 🍒 Assure them that you are going to work on their schedule and you are there to help them in any way possible and to connect them to any resources they might need.



Wrapping up your first meeting

At the end of the meeting ask the provider if they'd like to commit to participating in Farm to Preschool.

If they say yes, then

- Figure out the appropriate frequency and method to meet in person and check in via phone or email for non-urgent matters.
 - If provider indicates phone calls as the best way to check-in when you're not on site, ask the provider for appropriate times to call.
 - If the provider indicates email as the best way to check-in on, be sure to not inundate your provider with lengthy or frequent emails. Let your emails be friendly, short, and to the point.
 - If your provider indicates other methods of communication (i.e. texting), then ask, if possible, best times for contact, and secondary methods of contact if you believe the first method will be challenging for maintaining regular contact.
- Ask providers if they have any concerns or issues after meeting with you, and if there are any initial technical assistance you can provide that will help them start Farm to Preschool.
- Give them your contact information, and let them know they can contact you whenever the need for assistance arises.

Let the provider know when you plan to contact them next.

Best Practice Tip #2

It is better to give your providers one months' worth of the curriculum at a time. This allows for regular monthly meetings, which is best for regular check-ins, establishing a trusting relationship, and regular provision of in-person technical assistance.

If they say no, then

- Thank them for their time and allow them to still keep all the resources you have given them.
- Give them your contact information in case they change their mind.



Following up with your first meeting

For providers who have agreed to start Farm to Preschool at their childcare sites, you can follow up by:

- Visiting providers who might have indicated they needed initial technical assistance during the first in-person meeting to help them start Farm to Preschool.
- Contacting the provider 3 weeks after your first meeting for a check-in via their preferred method of contact.

Potential follow up topics

- If you have resources to give, let providers know you can give it to them at the next in-person meeting.
- Ask providers if they had an opportunity to do a Farm to Preschool activity.
 - If so, what was it and how did it go?
 - If not, tell them you understand. Ask if there is anything you could assist them with that will help the provider do Farm to Preschool more consistently or easier the next time.
 - Record their answer, which is likely to be a good indication of the type of technical assistance they may require.
- Ask the provider if they would like to schedule an in-person meeting with you for either sometime in the 3rd week or sometime in the 4th week so you could give them next month's curriculum and additional resources and guidance you may have to offer.



Future Meetings

Future in-person meetings should not exceed an hour. An hour allows for quality technical assistance while respecting providers' time and avoiding interference with providers' daily routines.

In-person meetings can be broken down into 3 main components.

- Introducing the provider to the curriculum of the month
- Talking to provider, establishing a relationship, and trying to obtain a clear sense of the provider's constraints. This understanding can help you determine how best to support the provider as s/he integrates Farm to Preschool as seamlessly as possible into their daily activities.
- Giving provider resources/supplies as needed, or indicated by provider

Try to keep in-person visits to once a month. Phone calls or emails would be easier ways to check-in when in-person visits are not necessary, or when you do not need to give the provider curriculum materials, or additional resources. Limit the phone calls and emails to at most 2 to 3 times a month so as to not overwhelm the provider.

- If during telephone/email check-ins you find yourself with a lot of information to relay to the provider, consider saving some of the information for the next in-person meeting.



Ensuring Sustainability

Setting goals:

When providers set goals for the concrete changes they like to see happen during their involvement in Farm to Preschool, they are more likely to sustain their participation beyond the first year. Goal setting and tracking progress toward those goals builds accountability for when there is no longer technical assistance provided. Ask providers what they hope to see changed by the end of the curriculum and make sure to acknowledge progress and help them stay on track.

Potential goals:

- Identifying snack or meal items that you would like to transition to locally grown foods that are raised as close to your residence as possible.
- Finding a farmer, farmers' market, grocery store, or wholesaler to connect you to local foods. Ask your local Cooperative Extension for help making these connections. (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>)
- Reaching out to Master Gardeners, or a local nursery or hardware store for donations or other support for starting an edible garden.
- Creating a support team that includes potential collaborators such as parents and other providers.
- Having children enjoy one Harvest of the Month fruit or vegetable so much that they want to eat it regularly.
- Having children taste test at least a bite of every new food that is introduced to them.

Wellness Policies

Adding a wellness policy to the provider's child care policy plan once they have completed Farm to Preschool may be a good method to ensure sustainability after you are no longer providing assistance. The wellness policy will send the message to parents that the provider's center is dedicated to creating a healthy eating and physical activity environment for kids. Also, the provider can use the policy as a guide for improving their site's nutrition and physical activity environment and attracting more parents.

Please see Appendix D for an example of a wellness policy.



Building Rapport with Providers

Building relationships with your providers is important because a solid connection with providers creates the foundation for smooth and effective work. The more comfortable you and the providers feel in each other's presence, the more you will be able to help.

While you may be coming to the providers from an extensive background knowledge about Farm to Preschool, gardening, child care, or other areas of expertise, please remember that no one knows the children, the needs of the site, or the parents better than the providers themselves. Going in to the meetings humbled is crucial to building a trusting relationship with the providers.

Best Practice Tip #3

Part of being humbled by the work you do involves not assuming what your providers are and are not capable of until they tell you what they feel like they are or are not capable of. Even after establishing a long and trusting relationship with the providers, it is still not the best practice to assume.

If you do like to draw from your area of expertise and provide suggestions to providers, it is most effective to consider the effects it may have on the people your providers are interacting with the most on a daily basis. Consider how your suggestions are going to impact the parents, the children, the provider, and the child care site.

If you do not know how your suggestions are going to impact the wider audience, then it is best to ask your provider. They will provide the best answer.



Asking providers for feedback about suggestions, or advice you have made and whether it is appropriate for them to carry out is a good way to ensure a positive working relationship, and to build trust between you and your provider.

Best Practice

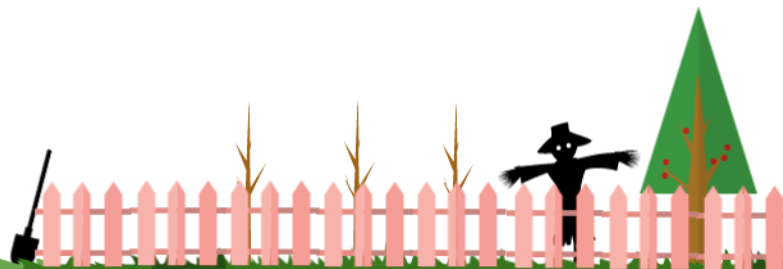
You make a suggestion to a provider about how to engage parents in the form of a question that also elicits feedback from the provider (“What do you think if for the parent engagement piece we have parents do x, y, and z? Do you think that would be a good idea?”). This way the provider can have the opportunity to offer feedback as well as share information you may not have thought about. This is a best practice because you are involving the provider in the decision making process, and are allowing the provider to still have their power and control over decisions regarding their business.

Situation to avoid

You make a suggestion to a provider about how to engage parents in the form of a statement (e.g. “For the parent engagement piece let’s have the parents do x, y, and z”, or “I think for the parent engagement piece we should do x, y, and z”). You find out afterwards from your provider that your idea is not applicable to the child care site because you do not have a relationship with the parents. It is possible that the suggestion would not be seen as thoughtful or sincere, and could be misinterpreted as too aggressive.

Being able to provide small incentives are likely to enhance the relationship you have with your providers. Based on needs indicated by providers, you could provide:

- 🍒 Small trowels
- 🍒 Fruit/vegetable/farmers market children’s books
- 🍒 Planting boxes
- 🍒 Stuffed fruit toys
- 🍒 Seed packets
- 🍒 Watering cans
- 🍒 Farm to Preschool supplies
- 🍒 Hoola hoops, soccer balls, or other outdoor activity items



It is also important to have a good understanding of where your providers are coming from, the sorts of constraints they face, problems areas they have on a day-to-day basis, the children’s personalities. This is so that you can begin to think more like your provider instead of an outsider, and to help your provider in the most effective way possible.

Some good questions to consider or to ask your provider.

- What is a day in the life like?
- What is the hardest part about running your day care center?
- Do you wish you have more of one/two resource(s) in particular?
What are they and could I give them to you?
- What kind of foods do the children like to eat?
- What do the children like to eat? Do not like to eat?
- Do the children’s parents eat healthy?
- How often do you see the children?
- Do the children try to have at least one bite of a new food every time it is put in front of them?

Speak to the provider’s level of understanding, and be sure to provide resources that could help them deepen their current knowledge on healthy eating and age-appropriate physical activity education.

Refer to Appendix E for more resources on educational materials for providers.

Beginning a support group for your providers or having providers join in a preexisting support group could create opportunities for providers to seek advice, network, or share Farm to Preschool experiences with others who are in the same industry. The support group could motivate providers to try successful activities, avoid unsuccessful methods of implementation, and create more sustainability at each site because providers will have each other to turn to for help, support, and motivation.

The childcare industry is competitive. A support group would not necessarily detract away from individual provider’s business since all providers in the support group would be implementing Farm to Preschool. The support group would provide additional resources for each provider to utilize if desired.



Providing Technical Assistance

Once you have met with your providers enough times to have a basic understanding of some of the constraints they are working with, you can begin to tackle challenges that are limiting the effectiveness of Farm to Preschool in providers' sites, reducing children's exposure to local produce, or preventing children from maintaining healthy lifestyles at the child care site.

Some of the technical assistance areas common when working with providers are:

- Funding constraints
- Lack of gardening knowledge
- Limited physical activity for children
- Picky eaters
- Parent engagement
- Time constraints

The following pages provide ideas for technical assistance to address each of the listed areas.



Funding

For some home-based child care providers securing funds for implementing any new program can be challenging, especially if the site has just started. The Farm to Preschool curriculum and technical assistance are provided to you free of charge. However, there are associated costs to a successful implementation of the Farm to Preschool program, such as books, science and gardening tools for hands-on learning and exploration, and local produce for taste tests and other food preparation. Costs will vary based on several factors, such as books and supplies a site may already have, shipping costs, etc. We suggest using www.amazon.com and www.neatsolutions.com for purchasing books and Lakeshore Learning (www.lakeshorelearning.com) for science tools. However, you may use any sources for these resources appropriate to your specific site.

In the curriculum the term “Discovery Labs” is coined by Occidental College for the set of activities in the Farm to Preschool curriculum designed to develop childrens’ motor skills and reasoning skills through handling, touching, weighing, and measuring of the Harvest of the Month. An example of a “Discovery Labs” lesson can be found in Appendix M.

In the Farm to Preschool training manual from Occidental College’s website, the “Discovery Labs” also include materials such as plastic trays, tweezers, a scale/balance, magnifying glass and cup, and a big screen microscope. To see the list of Occidental College approved supplies visit:

http://www.farmtopreschool.org/documents/FarmtoPreK_TrainingManual.pdf

If funding is an issue there are less costly ways to enhance the Farm to Preschool experience as well. See the next page for a list of recommendations for substituting supplies and ways to subsidize food costs associated with implementing the curriculum.



Supplies

Finding substitutions for supplies listed in the Farm to preschool curriculum and “Discovery Labs”

Books:

Check your library for any books related to farmers’ markets, fruits, and vegetables. At the end of the day, it’s more about exposure to healthy fruits and veggies than about specific content in the book. Providers can make up their own story from magazine cutouts of fruits and veggies if they wish.

Harvest of the Month flash cards:

Homemade Harvest of the Month flash cards made from magazine cut outs of vegetables, and fruits glued to colored cardboard paper are just as effective as the real ones.

Discovery lab equipment:

Providers can make do without any of the discovery lab equipment. For scales providers can have kids weigh them with their hands; for rulers, providers could use string to wrap around

Food

Taste testing is an important component of the curriculum because it gives children a low-commitment opportunity to try new fruits and vegetables.

Farm to Preschool’s Harvest of the Month is designed around seasonal produce. Because seasonal produce is often cheaper, tastings of the Harvest of the Month should be relatively inexpensive compared to other non-seasonal fruits and vegetables available in stores. One or two pieces of Harvest of the Month produce is usually needed for tastings because the produce itself is cut into smaller pieces for the children to nibble.



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) can be a good method to obtain relatively inexpensive, seasonal, local produces for Harvest of the Month tastings as well as to support a regional farmer. As a member of a CSA, you pay for an entire season upfront in order to help support a regional farmer's cost of planting and growing, and equipment maintenance. In return, the payment represents your "share" of crops you will receive from that farmer. Your share is usually a box of seasonal vegetables that the farmer drops off weekly or biweekly during your region's growing season.

- For more information about CSAs and how to find and compare local CSAs near you, go to : <http://www.localharvest.org/>
- In San Diego county The International Rescue Committee provides the most affordable option for CSAs at the time of this writing (January 2014).
- There is usually enough food in a CSA that two childcare sites might find it ideal to split a box.

CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program) participation for licensed providers is another good way to reduce food costs in addition to providing nutrition education for providers. CACFP is a federal nutrition program that pays for nutritious and healthy snacks and meals to eligible children who are enrolled at participating daycare centers, home-based childcare sites, afterschool programs or homeless shelters.

For more information on CACFP and how to enroll, refer to Appendix F.

For more information on resources to help with funding constraints, refer to Appendix G.



Gardening

An edible garden is a garden where fruits, vegetables, herbs, legumes, and/or fruit trees are grown for personal consumption. An edible garden can range from a small herb garden on a windowsill, to cherry plants grown in a small pot, to raised bed gardens, to a small farm in the backyard.

An edible garden is beneficial in a child care setting for reducing food costs and providing hands-on experiences for children to learn about where their food comes from. It is also an excellent method for exposing children to local produce consistently.

Before starting an edible garden, consider the following questions:

- 🍒 What grows well in your region?
- 🍒 What is the quality of the soil where you want to start planting?
- 🍒 How big is your garden going to be?
- 🍒 Where do you want to place your garden?
- 🍒 Where on your property do you get the most sunlight?
- 🍒 What kind of produce do you want to plant and how much sunlight does it need?
 - 🌿 Is your garden able to provide adequate sunlight?

Refer to Appendix H for how to start an edible garden based on size of land available for gardening.



Physical Activity

Physical activity does not always have to involve running, jumping and playing outdoors. While those types of activities are encouraged if the provider has enough space or if weather permits, for smaller sites that may not have enough space for children to run around, or for bad weather days, physical activity can still be done indoors or in tight areas.

A best practice for increasing children's physical activity is to first decrease recreational screen time to 2 hours at the most each day for children above the age of 2. For children under the age of 2, there should be no screen time at all. Decreasing recreational screen time allows more opportunities for children to be active, and for younger children to increase their range of movements, coordination and motor skills.

Another way to increase the amount of physical activity is to break up the day with periods of physical activity where kids can do small activities that energize them while also getting them to move around. Children will still receive all the health benefits from 30 minutes of active play even if their day is broken up into 10 minutes of energizers done 3 times a day.

Providers could lead the children in children appropriate yoga sessions throughout the day to keep them physically active. Yoga is beneficial for children of all ages because it enhances the children's flexibility, strength, coordination, and body awareness. Children also learn techniques for positively handling stress, and self-care through yoga.

Playing indoor games with the children that involves getting up and moving around is another good option. Games such as Duck, Duck, Goose, Simon Says, or Hide and Seek can all be made into mini sessions providing physical activity.

If provider is willing and has transportation, walking around malls, museums, or the library can also be good ways for children to get physical activity.

Refer to Appendix I for kid appropriate yoga ideas and quick energizers for the children to do.



Picky Eating

Have everyone be exposed to new foods

Children learn and take their lead from role models. If parents and providers eat fruits and vegetables, the children will be more likely to eat them too. In addition, parents and providers can allow kids to learn control and independence by allowing kids to learn how to serve themselves. Remind children to obtain smaller portions first, then go back for seconds.

Cooking is a great way to introduce children to produce and expand their produce horizons. Involve the children in even the simplest food preparation activities, such as washing produce or adding ingredients into the meal. Kids like to try foods they help make, so letting them help you cook is a great way to encourage children to eat fruits and vegetables. Children also feel good about doing something “grown-up.” Give them small jobs to do, and praise their efforts.

Involving the children in produce shopping and letting them pick the produce is an excellent way for kids to touch and smell the produce and become more familiar with a variety of fruits and vegetables.

Provide an environment that makes eating new foods easy

Have healthy options accessible and within reach for children at snack time. Having a plate of fruit, some veggie dip and cut up vegetables, or some cheese and crackers with grapes in plain sight is a good way to expose children to more fruits and vegetables. This way you are giving children the choice to sample the healthy fare at their own pace.

Reducing or eliminating sweets, cookies, chips, and/or soda from plain view will support your efforts to increase vegetable and fruit consumption. If children are not ready to completely give up their sweets and junk food just yet, serving children progressively less sweets and junk food at snack or meal times and progressively more healthy options could be a good way to start. This method requires some firmness from the role model if children get upset.



Children’s cultural backgrounds influence their taste buds

Everyone’s comfort food is different, and what a child will or will not eat at the child care site will be influenced by what the family eats at home. Take this into account when developing ways to encourage children to try new foods or when doing a taste test activity. If possible incorporate the new food into a comfort food that the child is used to eating if they do not want to try the new food by itself.

For example if the new food is bok choy, then depending on what the child is used to eating at home the bok choy could be prepared into a stir fry, could be used in soups, incorporated into pasta dishes, used as filling in burritos and tacos, or served with meats and rice or bread.

Eating new foods takes time, patience and persistence

Some children don’t always take to new foods right away. Offer new fruits and veggies many times, and perhaps let children choose how much of the new food to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice. When kids develop new taste for foods, it’s easier to plan family meals.

If given the option and children refuses to eat the new food, then perhaps incremental tastings would suffice. Have children take a few nibbles from the whole produce the first time they eat it then leave it at that. Repeat this step until children are willing to eat a little piece of the new produce. Then repeat this step until children are willing to eat a little bit more and a little bit more of the produce.

For more resources on picky eating, refer to Appendix J.



Parent Engagement

If there is no established line of communication between parents and providers

It is beneficial for nutrition educators to know that one of the more effective lines of communication with parents is through print. After a long day of work parents are not likely to want to stay any longer than they have to in order to talk to providers about healthy habits. Parents are more likely to be receptive to reading resources they receive from providers because parents could do it on their own time.

Questions for the provider to consider when engaging parents.

- Do the parents already engage in healthy living habits?
- What does the provider hope to change by engaging parents in nutrition education?
- What are some topics parents might be interested in learning more about, or what topics does the provider feel could be beneficial for the parents to learn?

The following ideas could be incorporated into monthly newsletters to send home to parents, messages tacked onto a bulletin board mounted in a visible area at the provider's site, or other forms of print or visual media.

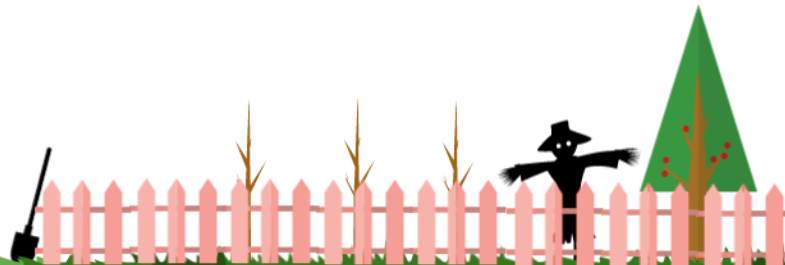
- Send home information on each month's Harvest of the Month produce along with 1 or 2 Farm to Preschool activities parents could do with their children at home.
- Send home with the children a small sample of Harvest of the Month produce.
- Fill plastic bags with the amount of sugar, salt, and/or fat children have eaten in a day to show parents.
- Help children create conversation pieces on healthy eating for them to take home.
 - Provider gives small handout to parents on health benefits of a new produce children ate during the day.
 - Have children bring home their drawings of new produce they have tried, along with a list of questions parents could ask their children about the new food.

Questions to ask older kids:

- Did you like the new food?
- How did the new food taste? Sweet? Sour? Bitter?
- How did the fruit feel on the outside?
- How did it feel in your mouth when you ate it?
- Have you tried other food that tastes like that?

Questions to ask younger kids:

- Did you like the new food?
- What color was it?
- Was it big or small?
- Was it hard or soft?
- Was it sweet? Sour? Bitter?



If there is a line of communication between provider and parents, but it is not strong.

Providers should feel encouraged to continue:

- Offering resources on healthy living to parents.
- Providing nutrition education opportunities to children.
- Engaging children in activities that could facilitate conversations on healthy eating or physical activity at home.

If engaging parents is important to the provider, then keep in mind that it takes longer to influence set behaviors in adults than it is to influence children's. Do not be discouraged if parents are not shifting their families towards healthier living habits fast enough. The provider could instead choose to refocus their efforts on the children under their care. Often times the most effective way to engage parents in nutrition and physical education is through their children.

For more parent engagement resources, refer to [Appendix K](#).



Time Constraints

As you can imagine, child care providers are busy people and often have their hands full taking care of the children in their care to stick to the curriculum every week.

- Given their time constraints, providers can instead look for small teachable moments where they can incorporate the lessons, they do not have to follow the curriculum word for word. Consistency is more important than adhering to the curriculum.
- Changing children's preferences takes a long time, especially when child care provider is busy. Try to get to know what kind of activities the provider does with children when they are not doing Farm to Preschool and see if there are opportunities to incorporate exposure of fruits and veggies into those activities.
- Role modeling behavior goes a long way. Even if providers do not have time to consistently do Farm to Preschool activities, they can still expose children to healthy eating habits by showing children how they have adopted healthy living habits into their own daily activities.
- Healthy food matching game: have children help cut out pictures of foods from different magazines, and newspapers. Then have children paste the cutouts on a sturdy sheet of paper or cardboard. Then children can play a flash card game where they identify which food is healthy and which is not.
- Reward kids with stickers
 - When children try new fruits and vegetables, provider could reward them with a sticker.

The provider may not see the children on a daily basis. Taking this into account, it is okay if the provider does not consistently do Farm to Preschool activities due to their unpredictable schedule. Success in Farm to Preschool is less about doing Farm to Preschool activities than it is about creating an environment where the children is regularly exposed to nutrition education and positive messaging on physical activity and healthy eating habits whenever they are with the provider.



CASE
Study
Reports

The title is presented in three stacked, rounded rectangular boxes. The top box is teal and contains the word 'CASE' in a white, serif font, enclosed within a decorative, sunburst-like border. The middle box is brown and contains the word 'Study' in a white, serif font. The bottom box is yellow and contains the word 'Reports' in a black, serif font, set against a background of horizontal dashed lines, similar to a notebook page.



Background

Onika resides in a one-story single family home and runs her daycare site with her mother. She has four years of childcare experience from running a previous site. Her house has a spacious front yard and backyard where the children she watches play. At the time of this writing, Onika is creating a 25-by-35-foot edible garden in her backyard. Her site is enrolled in CACFP.

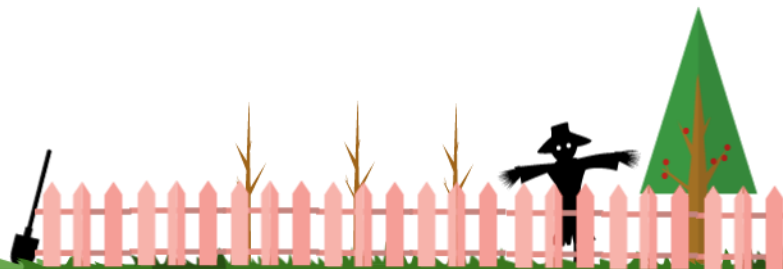
Onika currently cares for 12 children between the ages of 11 months and 10 years. She sees and takes care of the children in the mornings and afternoons, seven days a week. She reports that it is rare to have all 12 children at her site at one time. At most, four to five children are at her site on any given day.

The children receive at least 30 minutes of outside physical activity when weather permits. For meals and snack times she serves vegetables and fruits as well as a starch, along with 100% juice with no added sugar, and water. Children serve themselves and eat family style during mealtimes and snack times.

Onika has received gardening supplies, seed packets, an herb garden starter kit, as well as pamphlets on healthy eating and increased water consumption during the pilot. YMCA Childcare Resource Services provided all of the supplies the fellow gave to Onika. For a list of items given and their prices, refer to Appendix L.

Assets and Opportunities

Onika is aware of the benefits of healthy eating and age-appropriate physical activity. She has started to grow an edible garden in her backyard and involves her daycare children in gardening activities. Her daycare site has ample space in the front and back of her home for children to play in, and fruits and vegetables comprise the majority of meals and snack food items she serves to children.



Main Challenges and Solutions to Address

- Due to funding constraints, Onika did not purchase the supplies listed in the Farm to Preschool manual. Rather than following the Farm to Preschool curriculum week by week, she has adapted the curriculum to focus more on gardening and finding small, teachable opportunities to expose her kids to fruits and vegetables and the Produce of the Month.
- Onika on several occasions indicated the need for gardening support. The fellow connected Onika to a local Master Gardener in Lemon Grove. The Master Gardener is in the process of recruiting volunteers to help Onika and the other providers in the pilot on their garden work. The fellow made the connection with the Master Gardener because the Master Gardener is a part of the Lemon Grove HEAL Zone.

For future Farm to Preschool projects, master gardeners can be found through www.ahs.org/gardening-resources/master-gardeners. A connection to a local home and gardening store where providers can purchase gardening tools and supplies at a reduced rate would also be helpful to providers.

- Onika has a busy personal schedule as well as a busy daycare schedule. It has been hard for her to incorporate Farm to Preschool into her daily activities at times. The fellow provided Onika with a small herb garden starter kit before Onika started her back yard garden. The herb garden kit, given to the fellow by YMCA CRS, is an easy and simple way to involve children in gardening and to teach them the basics about where their food comes from. The fellow also encouraged Onika to continue finding small teachable opportunities to teach the children about healthy eating when she does not have time for actual Farm to Preschool activities. Meal times, for example, are teachable opportunities to engage children in trying new foods when they display picky eating behaviors.
- While Onika's own children eat all of the fruits and vegetables served to them, a few of her daycare children do not and pick out unfamiliar foods from their plates. Onika always encourages the children to nibble on new foods and to try a few bites. If encouragement does not work, she does not push the children to try any more. A fruit plate is usually within sight of the children during the day. Onika has a good basic understanding of how to engage with children who display picky eating behaviors, but she indicates more resources could be provided on this topic.



Rita

Background

Rita resides in a single family home with a spacious backyard measuring 35 x 50 feet. She is the only staff member working at her site. Rita has 15 years of experience in a day care setting on a military base as well as working in an adult day care center. Her site is enrolled in CACFP and WIC. At the time of this writing, Rita wants to start an edible garden in a part of her backyard.

Rita is currently taking care of five kids between the ages of 15 months and seven years. She is also caring for two foster children in addition to her daycare children. Rita sees her daycare children regularly Monday through Friday from 7 am to 5pm. She spends a total of 50 hours a week with her children. On most days, three to four kids are present at her site.

Her daycare children receive 45 minutes to an hour of outside play, and healthy items like fresh produce, whole grains, and 1% milk are served at meal times and snack times.

The fellow gave Rita a watering can, seed packets, a set of gardening tools, plastic scales for weighing fruits and vegetables, a magnifying glass, child-sized tweezers, and a bendy ruler during the duration of the pilot program. YMCA Childcare Resource Services provided all of supplies the fellow gave to Rita. For a list of items given and their prices, refer to Appendix L.

Assets and Opportunities

Rita's backyard is spacious enough to not only have enough room for children to play in, but also for a small edible garden. Rita is health-conscious like Onika, and serves healthy meals and snacks to the children.



Main Challenges and Solutions to Address Them

- Due to funding constraints, Rita did not buy any Farm to Preschool supplies. The fellow however provided Rita with all of the discovery lab equipment. Prior to obtaining lab equipment, Rita tried to find teachable opportunities to expose her daycare children to healthy living habits, mainly during meal and snack times. Rita also provides squishy fruit toys for her daycare children to play with.
- Rita wanted to start her own edible garden in the backyard, but did not have the time or resources to do so. The fellow connected Rita to the same local Master Gardener as the one Onika was introduced to. The fellow also gave Rita a set of gardening tools, 2 seed packets, and a watering can to start her garden. The fellow did not have an opportunity to follow up with Rita after the connection.
- Rita's schedule is hectic and busy. The fellow often provides suggestions and tips to Rita on more effective Farm to Preschool implementation with her busy schedule in mind. Usually the fellow does not elicit follow up to the suggestions and advice given to Rita unless the fellow felt like the suggestion is beneficial for Rita to act on. Times when the fellow asked for follow up have been for issues where it is within Rita's control to change or affect. The Master Gardener connection is one such issue. The fellow keeps encouraging Rita and other providers to utilize the connection because it is something all of the providers have indicated a need for. The connection addresses an issue which Rita and the other providers can change easily, more so than other challenges faced during implementation. The fellow does not follow up as consistently with suggestions made to address parent engagement issues, or picky eaters for example. The fellow believes these areas require much more time, patience, and trial and error to affect.

When addressing challenges for future Farm to preschool implementation, consider the lowest hanging fruit if possible, something that the provider has control over. This is beneficial for building up yours, and the provider's confidence to tackling challenges during implementation. Empowering providers and helping them tackle challenges that are within their control is a sustainable way of exposing children to healthy living and eating habits.



Background

Katie resides in a one story single family home. She is the only staff at her daycare site at the time of this writing. The provider has experience as a HeadStart teacher for children three year olds and younger, as well as experience working for her local district as a state preschool teacher. Katie's backyard is 1300 square feet and is divided into a play area for her daycare children and a potential site for an edible garden. Katie currently has a raised bed garden where she grows strawberries, and a small herb garden. She is not enrolled in CACFP.

Katie is taking care of five children, two of whom are her own. The children's ages range from 14 months to three years old. She sees her daycare children Monday to Friday from 7 am to 5:30 pm. Katie spends 50 hours with her daycare children per week.

Children receive on average one hour of outdoor play time each day. During mealtimes Katie portions out food to the children, and she tries to serve meals with a majority of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Assets and Opportunities

Her daycare children having ample age-appropriate physical activity is not a problem. Katie also tries to serve healthy meals as often as possible to her daycare children, but indicates the need for more recipes on cooking quick and healthy meals.



Main Challenges and Solutions to Address Them

- Her daycare children are picky eaters and do not eat the meals they do not like, especially meals containing vegetables. Katie has found success pureeing vegetables into fruit smoothies to serve to the children. Meal planning has been challenging for her because of her busy schedule. Her daycare children's changing palates leaves Katie wanting more ideas and recipes for quick and healthy meals that do not involve pureeing foods.

The short time frame of the pilot projects did not allow the fellow to adequately address all challenges met. The toolkit however tries to provide solutions for unaddressed challenges like this one. The fellow would have provided Katie with resources from this guide's "resources for providers" section in Appendix E.

- It has been difficult for Katie to engage the children in Farm to Preschool activities because her daycare children are not yet preschool age, and because of her overwhelming schedule. Katie has simplified the curriculum to focus more on increasing the children's produce recognition and their fruit and vegetable vocabulary. Katie reads books containing healthy messages to the children but does not currently use any of the ones listed in the Farm to preschool supplies list. The fellow provided a children's book on farmer's markets, fruits and vegetable stickers, children's activity book on fruits and vegetables, and a set of stuffed fruit toys for the children (refer to Appendix L for list of items and their prices) to Katie. The supplies are meant to increase Katie's participation in Farm to Preschool given the fact her daycare children are very young. The supplies provide more age-appropriate activities for her daycare children to do that still relates to basic Farm to Preschool messaging.

- Katie finds consistently engaging the children in Farm to Preschool activities a challenge. Being the only provider to take care of five children at her site, her main priorities do not often involve Farm to Preschool. The fellow gave Katie a small herb garden kit in the hopes that it could provide a low-effort option to expose Katie's daycare children to local, healthy foods. Future opportunities for children to taste test herbs growing locally in Katie's home is also a big incentive for giving Katie the herb garden kit.



Darishma

Background

Darishma resides in a one story single family home. She is the only staff at her daycare site at the time of this writing. Darishma has extensive experience taking care of children, starting from the time she was young and cared for her siblings. Her house has a 30 by 30 feet backyard with a 15 by 6 feet edible garden she has started in November.

Darishma is taking care of two children at the time of this writing, but had been taking care of four children prior. The four children's ages range from 11 months to eight years old. She used to take care of the older children Monday through Thursday from 2 to 6pm. Darishma takes care of her current 2 youngest daycare children sporadically twice a week for four to seven hours at a time.

Darishma serves her daycare children organic baby foods and local produce, whole grains, and almond and 1% milk on a daily basis.

Assets and Opportunities

Prior to starting Farm to Preschool at her site, Darishma has already been serving healthy snacks and meals to her daycare children. Darishma is a licensed children's yoga instructor and does yoga with her daycare children. She has a backyard big enough for a small edible garden which she has started to plant at the time of this writing. Darishma also participates in a CSA.



Main Challenges and Solutions to Address

- Darishma's current daycare children are still too young to engage in activities from Farm to Preschool. Instead she incorporates Farm to Preschool messaging into her daily activities and help her daycare children focus on produce recognition and increasing the fruit and vegetable vocabulary.

The fellow suggested to Darishma to incorporate more activities about fruits and vegetables into her daily activities like arts and crafts. Darishma helped her daycare children create a thanksgiving tree where the children wrote down on colorful leaves what they were thankful for. The fellow made the suggestion to alter the tree activity such that the children could write on cutouts of their favorite fruit or vegetable to attach to the tree.

- While Darishma's childcare site already creates a healthy environment for her daycare children to grow in, some of the children's home environments are not as healthy. Darishma has tried to engage the parents in a dialogue about healthy eating habits but has not been successful. This has been especially hard because she only takes care of the children long enough to provide them a midafternoon snack

The fellow did not have enough time to address this challenge, but this guide has provided parent engagement resources for future implementation in Appendix K.



Endnotes

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ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for a Healthier Nation. Retrieved from: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/publications/pdf/pp-ch7.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Home-based child care site is defined as a site where the provider operates their child care center out of the same establishment as where they are currently living.

^{iv} Shein, Christopher. The Vegetable Gardener's Guide to Permaculture. (January 15, 2013). Timber Press.

^v McKusick, Tom. (January 5, 2013). Seeds versus Starter Plants. Retrieved from <http://blog.northerngardener.org/day-5-seeds-vs-starter-plants/>

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^{viii} United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. (n.d.) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Retrieved from: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/why-cacfp-important>



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Appendix A:

NAPSACC Survey and Introductory Letter



Appendix B:

Sample Cold Call Template



Appendix C:

Items to Bring to First Meeting



Appendix D:

Example of a Wellness Policy



Appendix E:

Nutrition Related Materials for Providers



Appendix F:

CACFP FAQ and Enrollment Resources



Appendix G:

Funding Constraints Resources



Appendix H:

Gardening Resources



Appendix I:

Physical Activity Resources



Appendix J:

Picky Eating Resources



Appendix K:

Parent Engagement Resources



Appendix L:

Farm to Preschool Supplies Given to Providers



Appendix M:

Sample “Discovery Lab” Curriculum

