

# Farm to Early Care & Education for Growers



*Basic information for growers interested in partnering with early care and education sites*

## What is Wisconsin Farm to ECE?

Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education (WI Farm to ECE) increases access to local foods, gardening, hands-on learning, and family engagement opportunities in all ECE settings.

Early care and education (ECE) sites are increasingly connecting with local farms and food producers to purchase local foods for their meals and snacks. **Below is some basic information so that you can better understand these new potential partners and marketing opportunity!**

## What is early care & education?

Early care and education refers to any site that serves children ages birth to 6 years, and includes group child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start, Early Head Start, and 4K programs in K-12 school districts.

Food and nutrition is a pivotal part of early care! While in care, children eat multiple meals and snacks, depending on



*Children munch on local carrots at an ECE site in Wisconsin*



*Some ECE sites are already supplementing their food purchases from distributors and grocery stores with a CSA*

when and how many hours they are in attendance. ECE providers understand the importance of serving healthy food, and support children's development of lifelong healthy eating habits.

Although sites must comply with certain state and federal regulations around nutrition and learning, each site is very unique in its size, staffing, facilities, curriculum, philosophy, and menus. This is great because it allows sites to adopt farm to ECE practices that best suit their needs.

**There are more than 10,000 early care and education programs in Wisconsin, and hundreds are already engaged in farm to ECE.**

## Why Farm to ECE is a good market opportunity

- **Small site sizes:** ECE sites have the flexibility to purchase smaller quantities of food - a great fit for market or CSA farmers.
- **Flexible food purchasing:** In addition to smaller site sizes, ECE sites often have more autonomy in food purchasing.
- **Year-round operation:** Most ECE sites operate year-round: a perfect opportunity to pair seasonal summer produce with children's appetites, or for an ECE site to serve as a CSA pickup site.
- **On-site kitchens:** ECE sites often have an on-site kitchen, staff, and equipment to process and store local products.
- **Family engagement:** The emphasis on family engagement in ECE settings allows a farmer to share knowledge and products with a larger audience, far more than just the children.



*Every day, ECE sites need to supply fruit and veggie snacks for their kids: a perfect opportunity for local apples!*

## Key considerations when working with ECE sites

- What products does the site currently use that can be easily substituted with a local variety?
- Are there foods that the site would be interested in that reflect the population it serves?
- Would the site be interested in purchasing Cosmetically Imperfect Seconds?
- What equipment does the site have available to process ingredients?
- What are the site's delivery needs, including number of deliveries, packing requirements, and on-site storage options?
- Would the site be interested in farm visits or farmer in the classroom visits?

## Prepare your business

- Ensure you meet licensing and labeling requirements for all products you grow and sell.
- Clearly communicate your product pricing, quantities, and availability throughout the year.
- Prepare to share your food safety and liability insurance documentation.
- Understand your willingness/ability to engage with children or families at the ECE site.
- Decide if the ECE site may make a good CSA pickup or mini-market site.
- Find more resources to prepare your business to sell to institutions in the [Wisconsin Farm to School Toolkit for Producers](#).

## Questions? Comments? Get in touch!

Contact our Farm to ECE team at [wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org](mailto:wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org). Visit our website at [rootedwi.org](http://rootedwi.org) for more Farm to ECE resources.

*Thanks to Rebecca Breda, Abbe Braun, Vanessa Herald, Alyn Turner McCarty, and Brittany Zerbe for their review of this piece.*

*This project is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.*

