



# Results of the 2020 Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey

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## What is Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education?

Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) works to build and sustain healthy, empowered communities through meaningful connections and relationships across and within ECE, food systems, and supporting partners. Farm to Early Care and Education offers increased access to local foods, gardening, hands-on learning, and family engagement opportunities to children, families, and providers in the early care setting. These activities support the health and educational experience of children aged 0-5 in all types of ECE settings including preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, and 4K programs in K-12 school districts. Farm to ECE promotes quality education through four main types of activities, including:

- Cultivating and tending to gardens,
- Buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals and snacks,
- Facilitating hands-on learning and play in nutrition, food, and agriculture, and
- Engaging families in health and wellness.

The Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Work Group aims to ensure ECE providers and families with young children have access to local foods and to resources to help every child develop lifelong healthy eating habits and that Wisconsin producers have a viable market for their product through collaboration with early childhood and farm to school providers. Learn more about Wisconsin Farm to ECE from Rooted (<https://www.rootedwi.org/for-educators/farm-early-care-education>) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (<https://dpi.wi.gov/community-nutrition/cacfp/farm-2-ece>).

## **Introduction to the Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey**

In early 2020, the second Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey was conducted in the state. Developed by Rooted and supported by the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group, the goals of this survey were to:

- Gather data for farm to ECE participation in the state and compare to baseline data gathered in 2017
- Learn about existing farm to ECE activities taking place at sites across the state
- Assess challenges and successes in starting and implementing farm to ECE activities
- Determine trainings, resources, and networking tools to help providers start or grow farm to ECE activities, with a goal of making farm to ECE accessible to all children in Wisconsin.

This project was funded by the WK Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.

## **Survey Methods**

The 2020 Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey was based on the WI Farm to ECE Survey conducted in 2017 and was structured to collect specific information in the four focus areas of Wisconsin Farm to ECE: gardens; finding, buying, preparing, and serving Wisconsin-grown foods; curriculum and experiential education; and family and caregiver engagement. Additional questions were added to the finding, buying, and preparing local foods section of the Wisconsin survey to determine the specific purchasing practices, sources, and needs of Wisconsin early care sites.

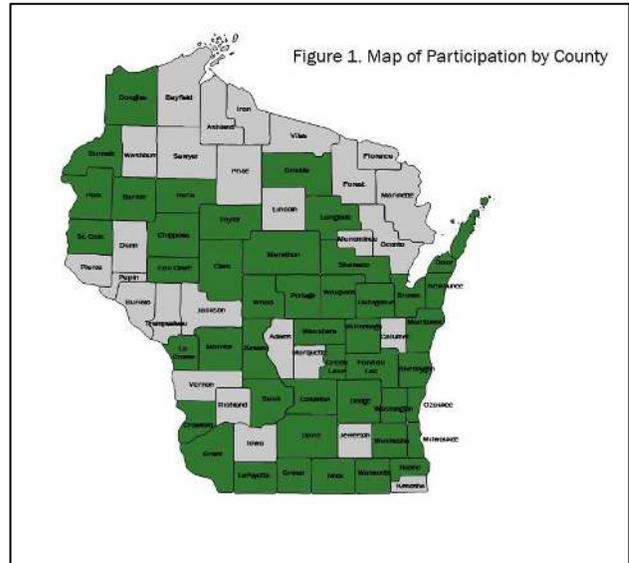
The survey was disseminated via email through various channels in Wisconsin, including the ten offices of Wisconsin's Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, the Wisconsin Farm to

School and Farm to ECE Newsletter, the YoungStar listserv, and the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group. The survey was open during the spring of 2020.

## Summary of Survey Findings

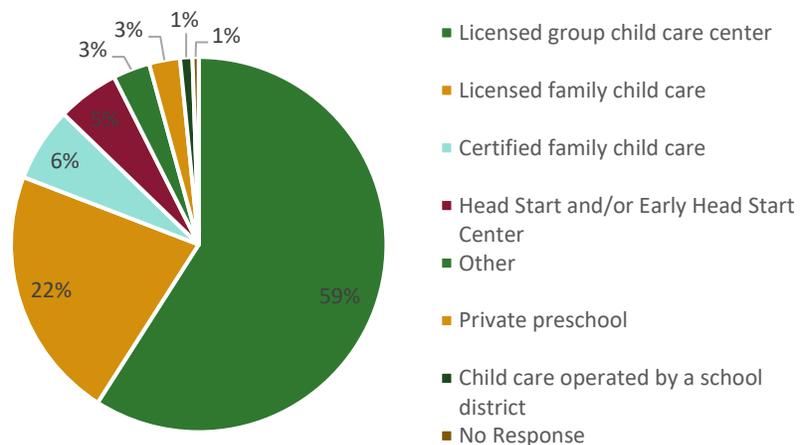
### Survey Responses & Demographic Information

This Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey summary includes results from 188 qualified respondents. Data from duplicate and partial responses was removed, as were responses from entities that did not meet the criteria of an early care and education site. Responses were received from across the state, with representation from 44 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties. Providers reported similar levels of services to suburban (34%), rural (41%), and urban (46%) populations, with only 3% of providers indicating service to tribal populations. Survey responses were received from a wide range of sites and centers representing different program models. Licensed group child care centers (59%) and licensed family child care centers (22%) represent the largest groups of respondents. Head Start and/or Early Start Centers (5%), Certified family child care (6%), private preschools (3%), and child care operated by a school district (<1%) were also represented in the survey results. Less than 1% of respondents self-reported their sites as in the process of licensure or certification, or not licensed or certified.



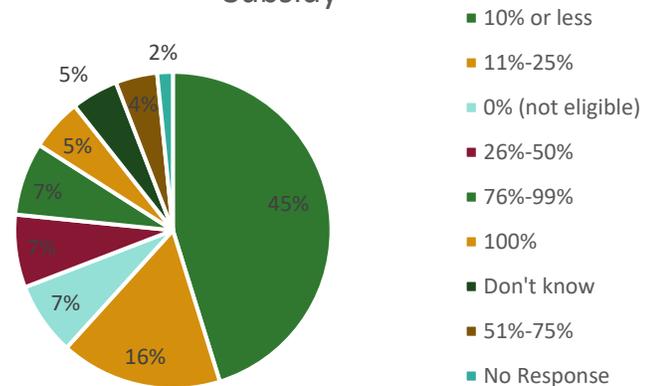
Licensed capacity and average daily attendance data were collected as a proxy for site size and capacity. Based on enrollment data provided by survey respondents, an average total of 12,179 Wisconsin children are served each day by the ECE sites represented in this survey.

Figure 2. Program Models of ECE Sites Participating in Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey



Use of Wisconsin Shares, the state child care subsidy program, by families enrolled in care was used as a proxy to determine provider service to low-income and underserved populations throughout the state. Providers were asked what percentage of children they serve use Wisconsin Shares to access services at their center. Fourteen providers (7%) reported between 76-99%

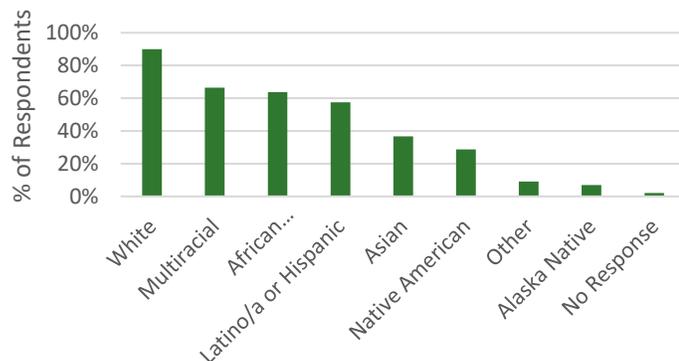
Figure 3. Percent of Children at the Site Served by the Wisconsin Shares Childcare Subsidy



of children at their sites use Wisconsin Shares. On the other end of the spectrum, just under half (45%) of respondents indicated that 10% or fewer of the children at their sites use Wisconsin Shares. Five percent of respondents (9 sites) did not know the percent of children accessing services through Wisconsin Shares at their site.

Wisconsin Farm to ECE aims to promote racial and social equity and ensure all Wisconsin's children have access to high quality education and nutritious foods. Survey respondents were asked about the populations served by their programs. Some providers indicated they do not collect this information from families. Multiple providers included comments indicating they are open and inclusive of serving all races, but currently only have white children enrolled at this time.

Figure 4. Populations Served by Survey Respondents



The survey included questions about participation in federal nutrition programs, quality rating improvement systems, and program accreditation. Over half of respondents (65%) indicate participation in the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), commonly referred to as the "Food Program" by Wisconsin providers. The majority of respondents (88%) report participating in YoungStar, Wisconsin's Quality Rating and Improvement System, or another QRIS program, and 20% of respondents indicate accreditation through a national, local (City of Madison), or other program.

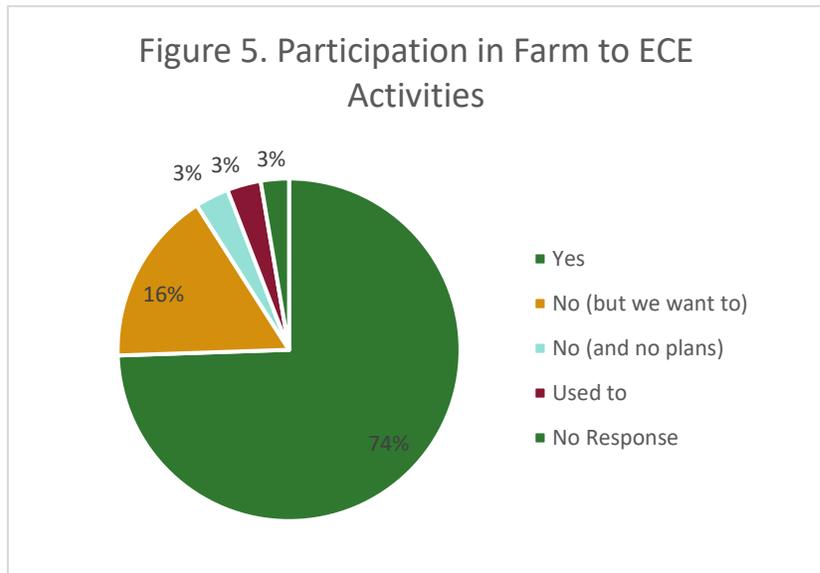
## Participation in Farm to ECE Activities

### *What is Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education?*

Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education (WI Farm to ECE) increases access to local foods and enhances the quality of education in all ECE settings through a variety of activities including:

- Building on-site gardens,
- Buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals and snacks,
- Facilitating hands-on learning and play in food, nutrition, and agriculture, and
- Engaging families in health and wellness.

One of the main functions of the survey was to determine how many ECE sites in Wisconsin currently engage in farm to ECE activities or are interested in doing so. Survey respondents were provided with the above definition of Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education and asked if they participate in farm to ECE activities. The majority of survey respondents (140 / 74%) indicated they do engage in some form of farm to ECE.



Thirty-one respondents (16%) indicate they do not currently conduct farm to ECE activities but want to in the future. 3% of respondents indicated they used to conduct farm to ECE activities, but no longer do and 3% indicated they currently conduct no activities and do not plan to in the future.

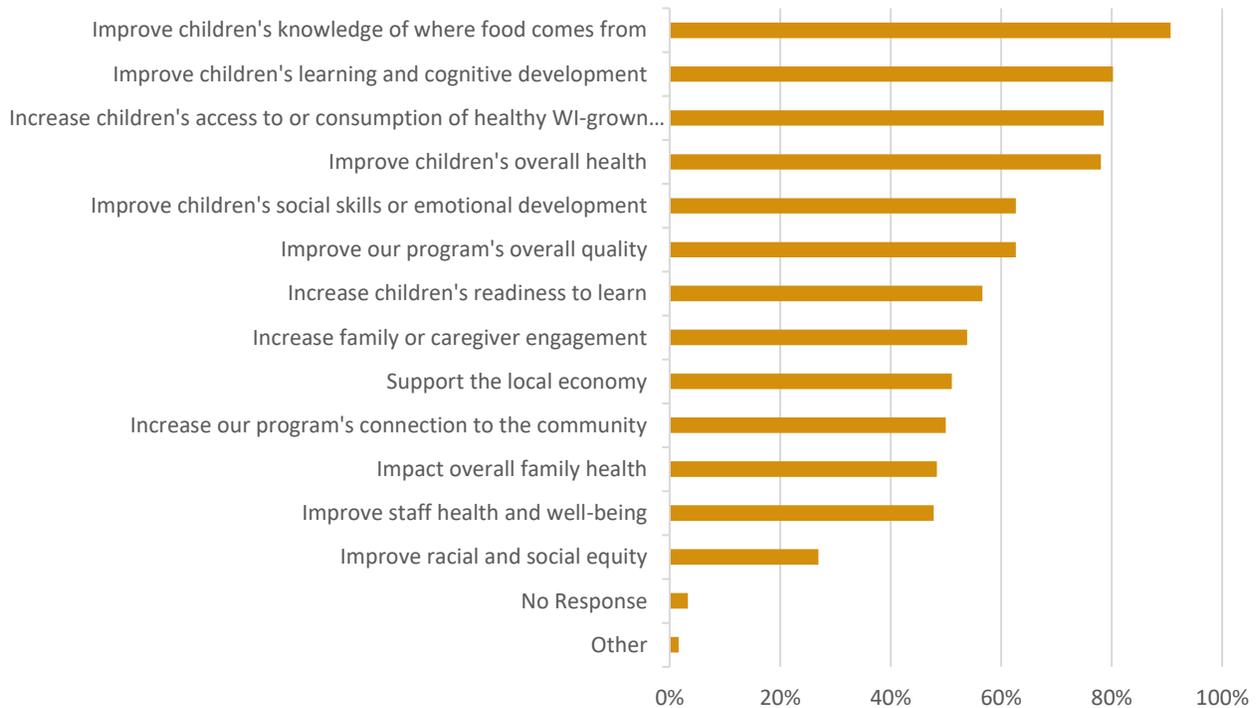
There is an important note about the 16% of respondents who indicated they do not currently engage in farm to ECE activities but want to in the future. Responses to open-ended survey responses by this cohort indicate some in this group already engage in some sort of farm to ECE activity (established gardens, local food education, taste tests, etc.), but do not formally recognize these activities as 'farm to ECE'.

All survey participants, regardless of farm to ECE participation, were asked to identify the benefits of farm to ECE activities. The four top benefits selected relate specifically to child outcomes of farm to ECE and include: improving children's knowledge of where food comes from (91%); improvement of children's learning and cognitive development (80%); increasing children's access to or consumption of healthy, Wisconsin-grown foods (79%); and improving

children’s overall health (78%). Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicate the ability of farm to ECE activities to improve the overall quality of their ECE site or center. All benefits can be seen below in Figure 6. Other benefits of farm to ECE provided by respondents include:

- Improving children’s willingness to try new foods
- Increasing children’s environmental stewardship

Figure 6. Benefits of Farm to ECE Programming



All survey respondents were asked their preferred method for learning more about farm to ECE activities. This question was included to help the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group and partners understand which training vehicles can be most effective for reaching current and future farm to ECE providers in the state. The top three responses represent print

Figure 7. Preferred Methods for Learning About Farm to ECE





## Use of Gardens in the ECE Setting

Gardens are a favorite farm to ECE activity as they offer a setting for hands-on nutrition education, experiential education, access to fresh produce, and opportunities for family engagement. Whether on a window sill in the classroom or in a raised bed outside, gardens help shape the nutrition environment of early care and education sites around Wisconsin. Even better, fruits and veggies from the garden are great for use in meals and snacks too. Farm to ECE providers were asked four questions specific to gardens in the ECE setting. The purpose of these questions was to assess the specific garden activities used by providers, the challenges and barriers faced in using gardens, and needed resources to help implement more gardens in the future.

As indicated by Figure 10, farm to ECE providers engaged in a wide variety of garden-related activities. Farm to ECE gardens include edible plants like vegetables, herbs, and perennial fruits, as well as non-edible plants. The most common activities are implementing edible or non-edible gardens (75%), using garden-grown foods in meals or snacks (67%), and using windowsill or in-classroom gardens (65%). Another use for gardens reported in the survey is sharing garden food with families and the community.

Farm to ECE providers were asked about the barriers and challenges they experienced when establishing or using gardens in the ECE

Figure 10. Garden Activities Reported by Sites Engaged in Farm to ECE

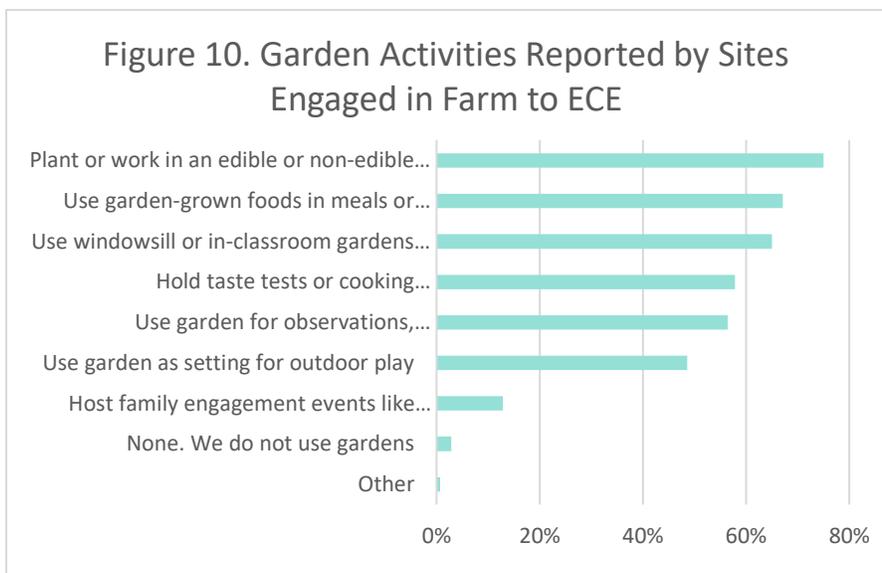
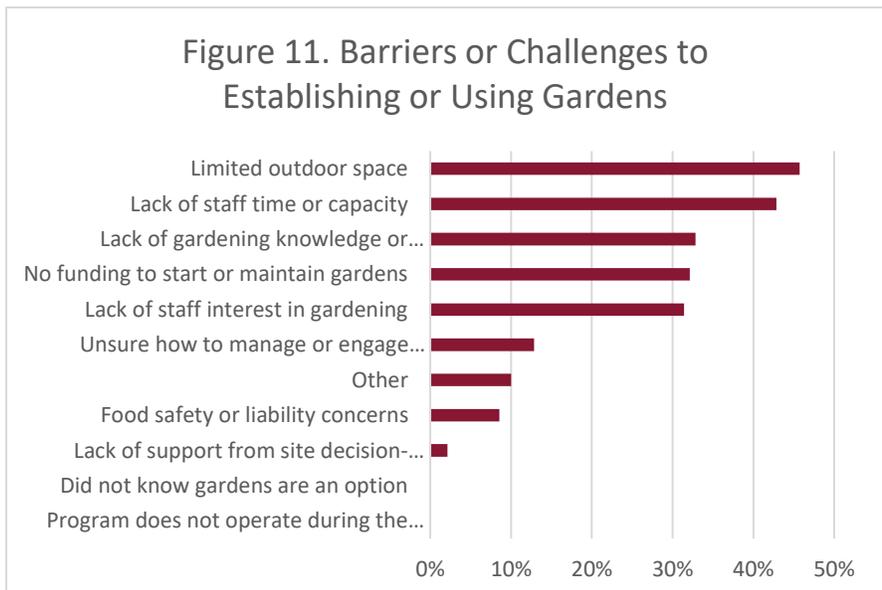
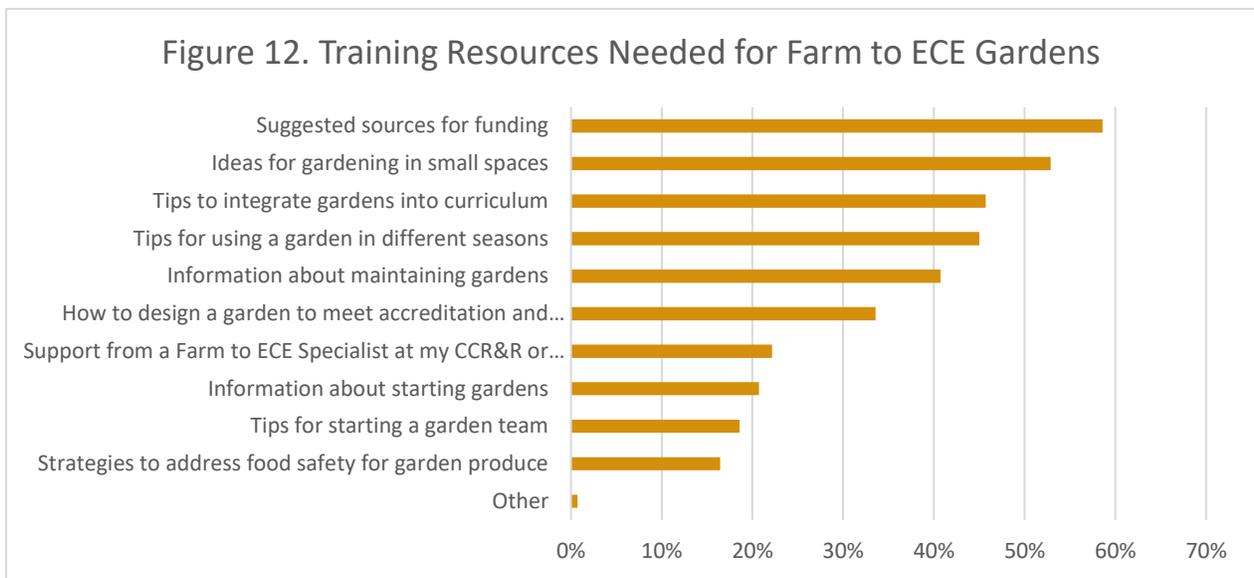


Figure 11. Barriers or Challenges to Establishing or Using Gardens



setting. The primary barrier reported was limited outdoor space (46%). Lack of staff time or capacity for starting or implementing gardens (43%), lack of gardening knowledge or expertise (33%) and limited funding for starting or maintaining gardens (32%) were also commonly reported barriers to using gardens. Other reported barriers include: challenges with pests and wildlife in the garden; lack of staff availability on weekends to maintain the garden; and having multiple centers to look after.

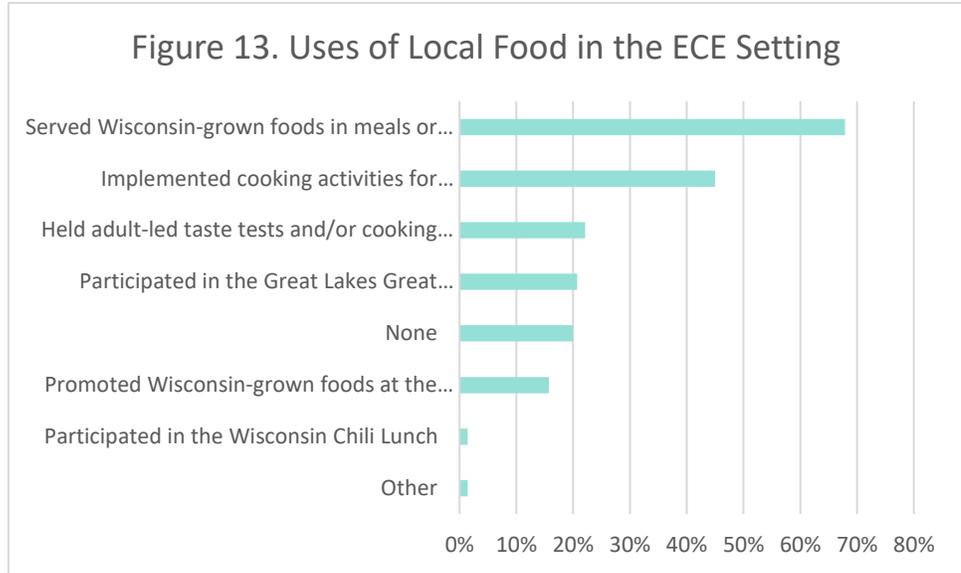
Farm to ECE providers indicated a wide variety of resources, trainings, and support to help implement garden activities in the future. Resources that address funding (59%), gardening in small spaces (53%), integrating gardens into curriculum (46%), and gardening in different seasons (45%) were most highly ranked. Other resources suggested by respondents included: funding and personnel.



## Use of Locally-Grown Food in the ECE Setting

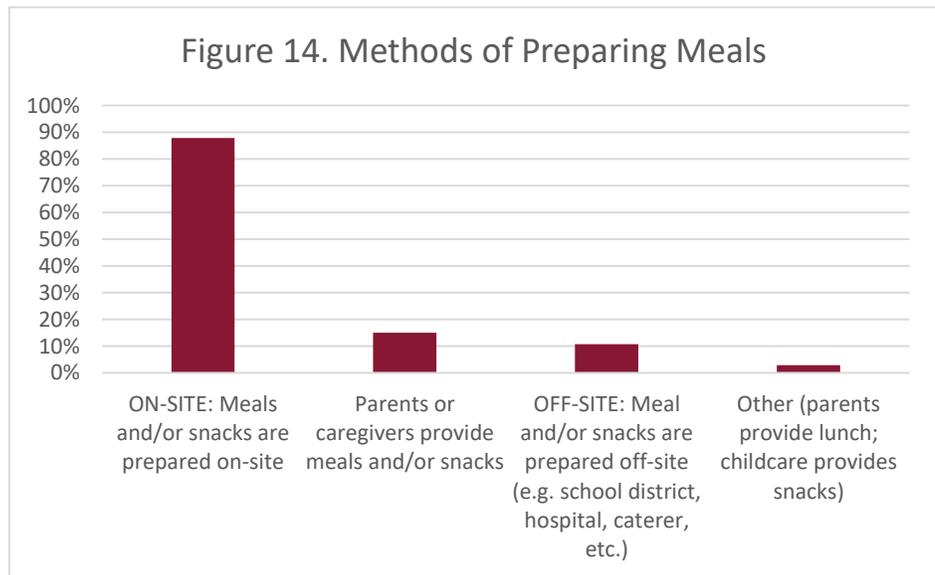
Buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals, snacks, and taste tests is a core farm to ECE activity. Early care sites have the opportunity to fill meals and snacks with a wide variety of Wisconsin-grown fruits, vegetables, dairy products, proteins, and whole grains to benefit child health and support Wisconsin’s farmers. Local foods can be purchased in a wide variety of ways, like from local farmers, farm stands, farmers’ markets, grocery stores, through distributors, or a weekly produce box through a Community Supported Agriculture share. Even if meals and snacks are not an option, sites can engage children in seasonal food taste tests, a great way for children to try new foods.

The 140 Farm to ECE providers who are engaged in farm to ECE activities were asked about practices for finding, buying, preparing, and serving Wisconsin-grown foods at ECE sites. In this survey, the terms “Wisconsin-grown food” and “local food” refer to all foods grown and processed in Wisconsin. For ECE sites on a state border, local foods may also include foods grown nearby in neighboring states. This survey inquired deeply about the methods for purchasing and preparing all foods and dairy products at ECE sites, including local foods, to better understand these food service environments and provide support for incorporating local foods



Of those engaged in farm to ECE, serving Wisconsin-grown foods in meals or snacks (68%) and implementing cooking activities using locally-grown foods (45%) were the primary method farm to ECE providers engaged with local foods. Taste tests, cooking demonstrations, local food promotion, and the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch were additional practices for utilizing Wisconsin-grown foods. Other reported ways providers engaged with local foods included: shopping at local farmers’ markets.

Farm to ECE providers were asked a series of questions about food purchasing and preparation practices. Food purchasing and preparation varies among ECE sites, and depends on the program, facilities, partnerships and policies of each center.



Of the survey respondents, preparation of meals and snacks primarily takes place onsite at the ECE center (88%), with 11% of respondents reporting food preparation takes place off-site. 15% of respondents report parents or caregivers are responsible for providing meals or snacks. Some sites report a combination of meals prepared onsite, offsite and/or provided by parents. No sites reported no meals or snacks are provided.

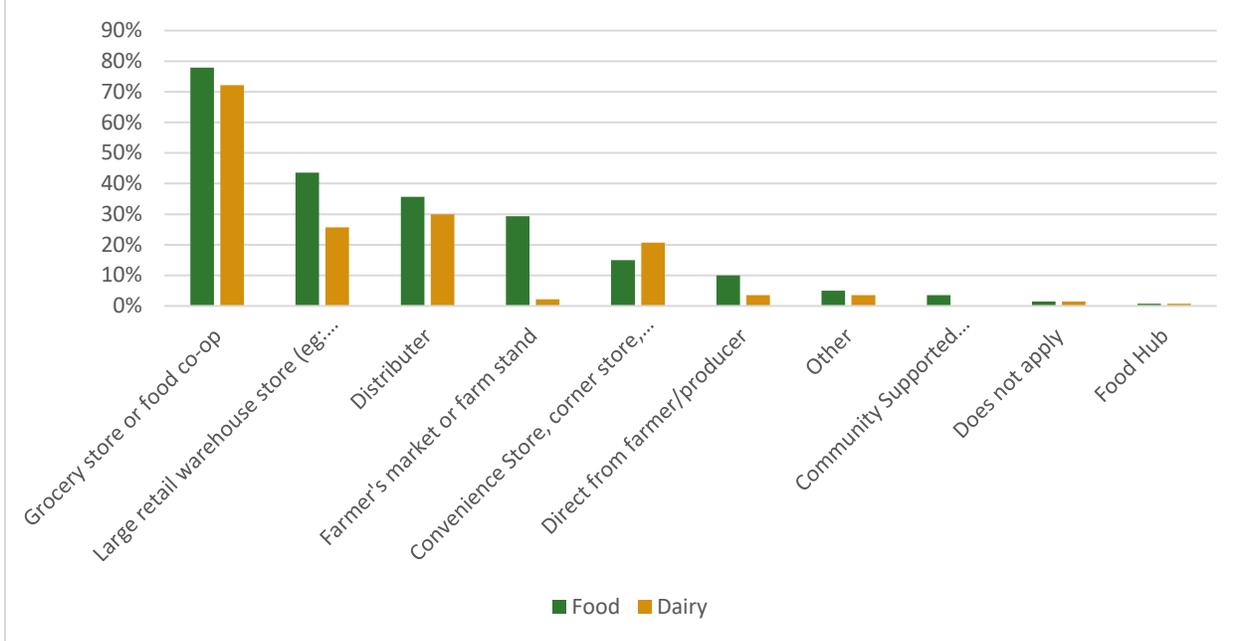
Of the 123 sites that report preparing meals onsite (n=123), 79% report using scratch cooking or fresh cooking practices and 31% report using heat-and-serve practices featuring mostly prepackaged and/or pre-cooked foods. Sites were able to report using both practices simultaneously. The presence of an on-site chef or cook was reported by 50% of respondents preparing food onsite. 3% of respondents reported using “other” practices all of which indicated parents provide lunch and providers provide snack.

For meals prepared offsite (n=15), 40% of offsite meals were prepared by a food service kitchen within a site’s larger organization including by college food service at a central campus kitchen or by a hospital kitchen facility for an ECE site housed within a hospital. 20% of respondents indicated offsite meals were purchased from a caterer, and 13% indicated meals were prepared by a local school district.

Farm to ECE providers were asked about their practices for purchasing both food and dairy items for meals and snacks at their ECE sites. The question did not ask participants to differentiate between purchases of local food items and non-local food items. Instead, this question sought to better understand the method of all food purchases. Grocery store or food co-op are the predominant purchase locations for foods (78%) and dairy items (72%) for meals and snacks, followed by large retail warehouse stores for foods (44%) and distributors for dairy items (30%). Indicators of local food purchasing include 29% of respondents purchasing food at a farmers’ market or farm stand, 10% of respondents purchasing food direct from a farmer or producer, and 4% of respondents accessing foods through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

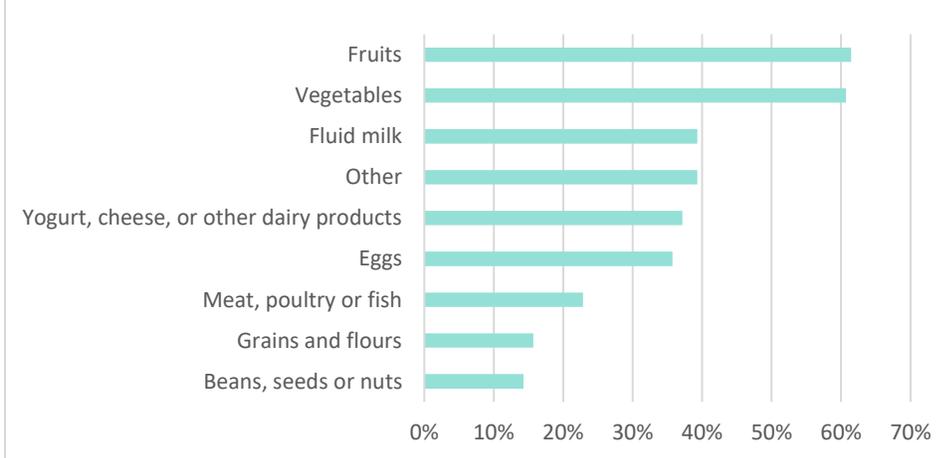
Also of note, 21% of respondents reported purchasing dairy items at a convenience store, corner store, or gas station, while only 15% report purchasing food items at such locations. This may indicate a preference for convenient access to perishable dairy products, and an opportunity to increase purchases and consumption of Wisconsin-produced fluid milk.

Figure 15. Practices for Purchasing Food & Dairy for Meals and Snacks

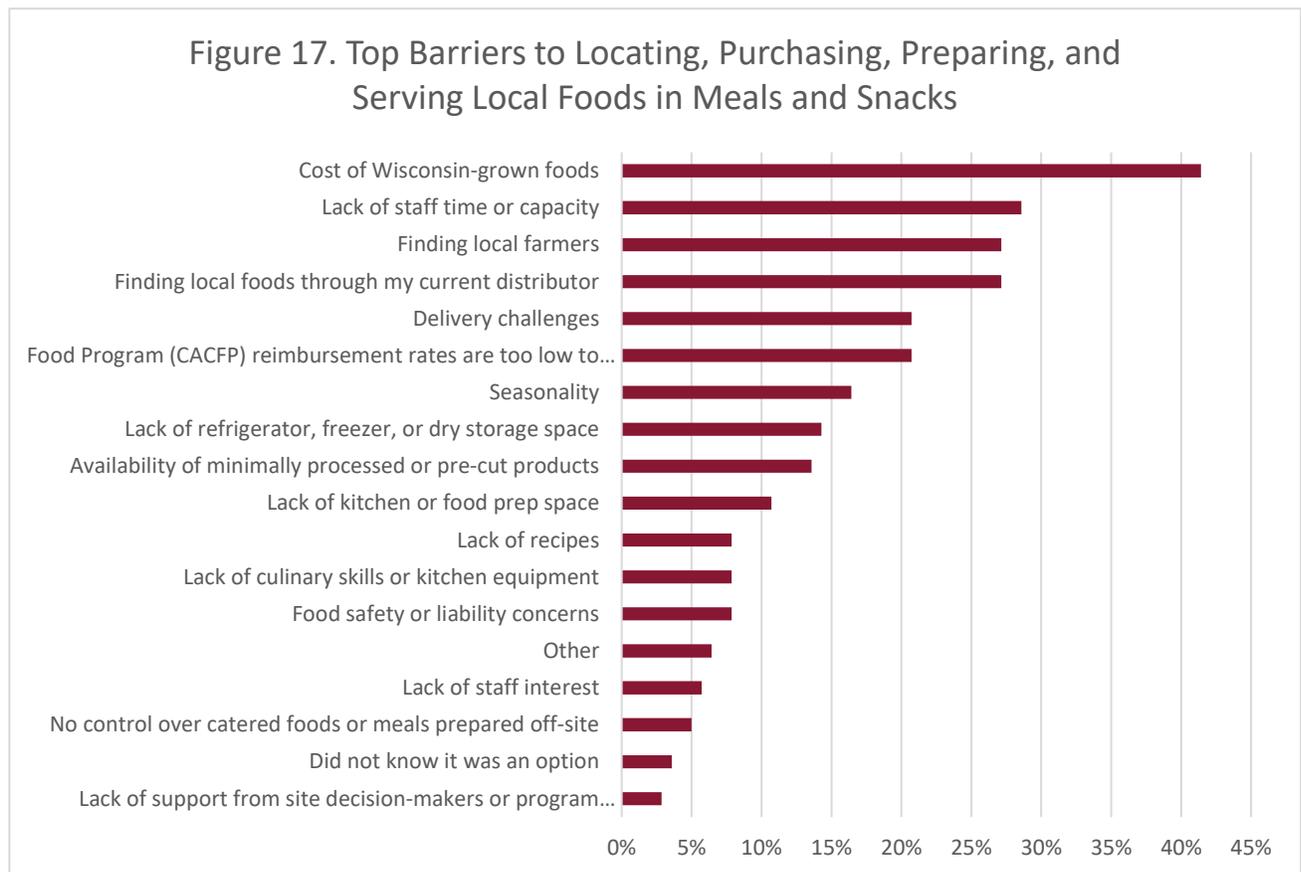


Farm to ECE providers were asked what specific locally-grown food items they purchase for use at sites. Providers were only asked about types of foods and were not surveyed about frequency or spending levels. Survey responses indicate providers purchase a wide variety of locally-grown and processed food items for both meals and snacks at their sites. Fruits (61%) and vegetables (61%) were the top items, followed by fluid milk (39%), other dairy products (37%), and eggs (36%) ranking on top. Other Wisconsin-grown food items include using foods grown in the garden.

Figure 16. Wisconsin-Grown Foods Used in ECE Meals or Snacks

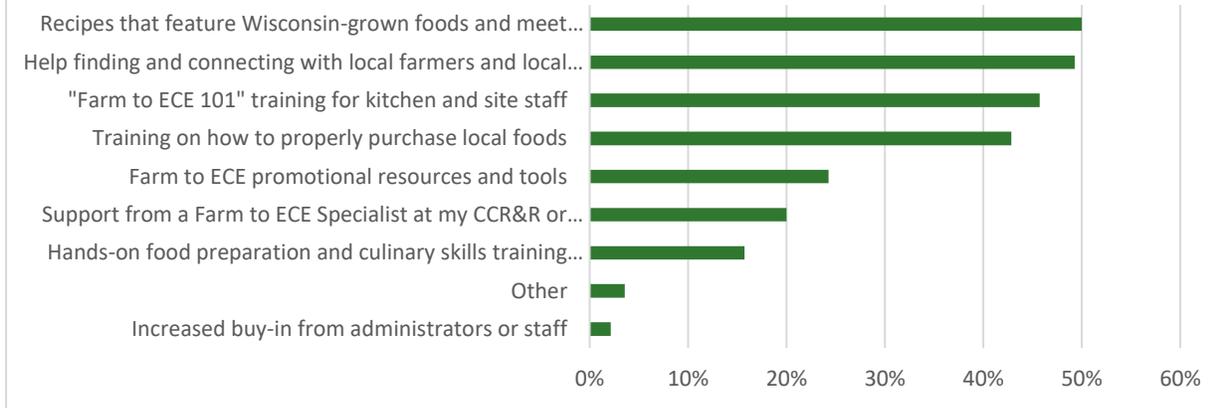


Farm to ECE providers were asked about the barriers they experience when finding, preparing, and using Wisconsin-grown foods, and resources that would most help them increase the use of local foods in the ECE setting. When asked to select their **top five** most significant barriers to accessing local foods, 41% of respondents indicated the cost of Wisconsin-grown foods as a significant barrier. 29% of respondents indicated lack of staff time or capacity as a top barrier to using local foods at ECE sites. Sourcing local foods, including finding local farmers (27%) and finding local foods through a current distributor (27%) were also significant challenges. Twenty respondents (6%) indicated other challenges including spoiled food, unsure of rules around purchasing local foods to serve to children, and unable to shop for local foods during open hours.



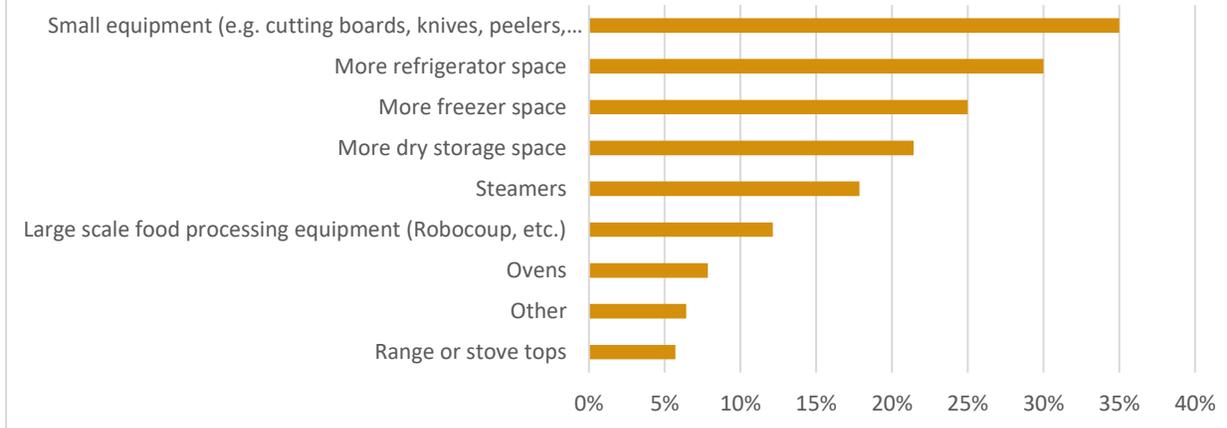
Survey respondents were asked about trainings, resources, and tools most helpful to expand or start using Wisconsin-grown foods at their programs, which can be seen in Figure 18. The top three requested resources are recipes featuring Wisconsin-grown foods that meet the CACFP nutrition guidelines (50%), assistance to find and connect with local farmers and local foods (49%), and farm to ECE training for kitchen and site staff (46%).

Figure 18. Trainings, Resources, and Support Needed to Increase the Use of Healthy Wisconsin-Grown Foods at ECE Sites



Providers also responded to a question about the kitchen facilities and culinary equipment upgrades most helpful to increase the use of local foods at ECE sites. Providers indicated more small equipment (35%), more refrigerator space (30%), more freezer space (25%), and more storage space (21%) would be the most helpful kitchen upgrades to increase the use of Wisconsin-grown food. Other kitchen and food preparation upgrades include child-friendly tools and increased funds for purchasing additional equipment.

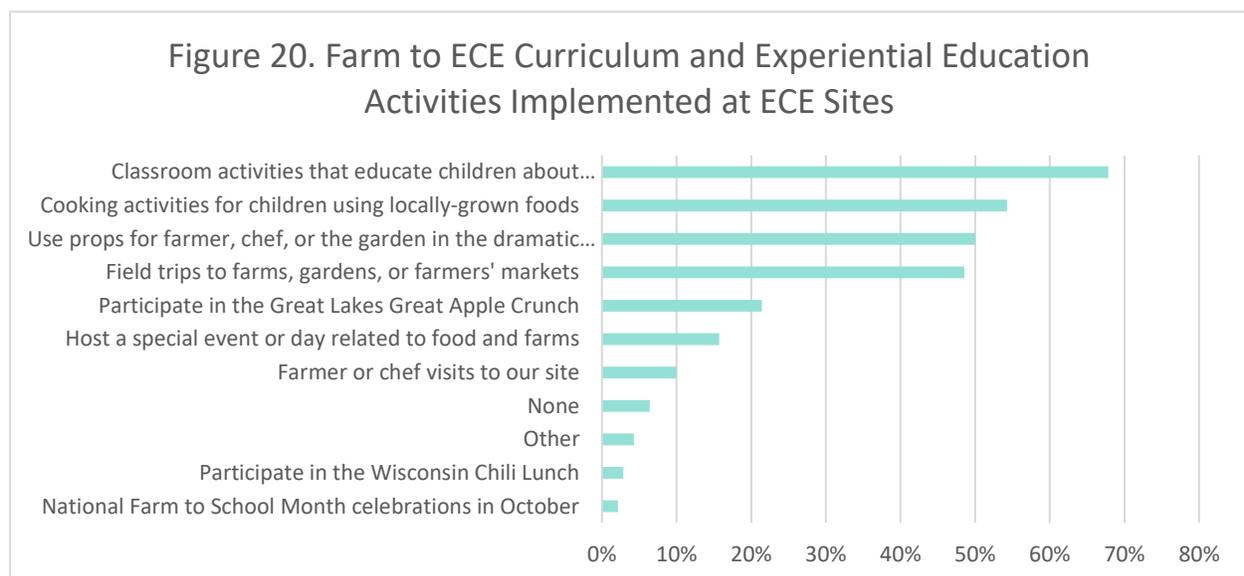
Figure 19. Kitchen Facilities and Equipment Needed to Increase the Use of Healthy Wisconsin-Grown Foods at ECE Sites



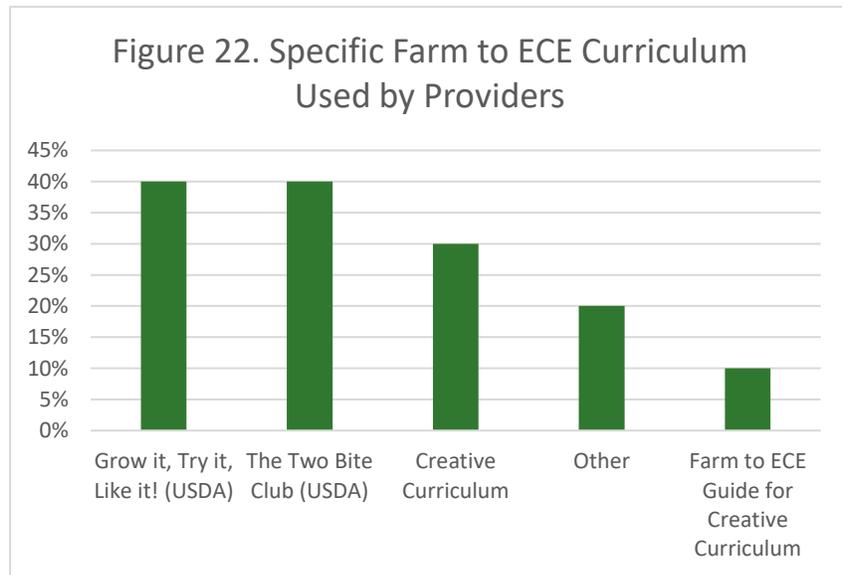
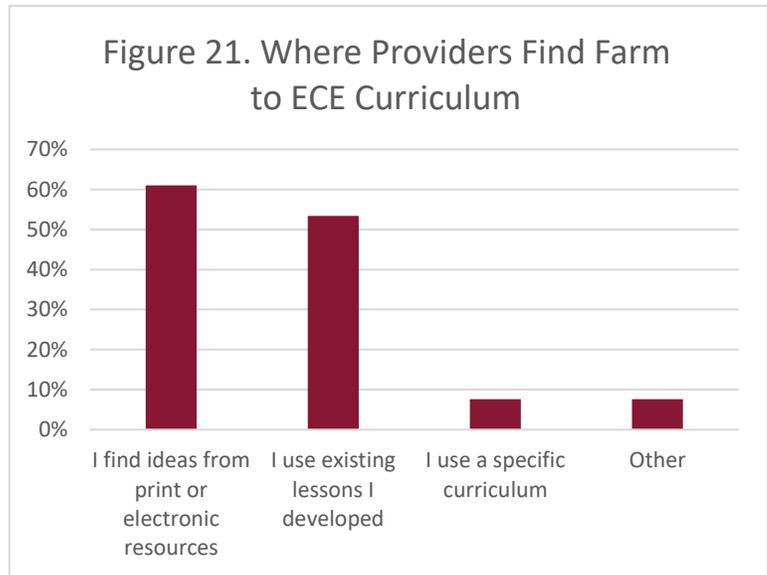
## Incorporating Farm to ECE in Curriculum and Experiential Education

Farm to ECE offers abundant opportunities for hands-on learning in food, nutrition, and agriculture, and can be included in almost every part of a child's day. This includes teaching children about where food comes from and how it is grown through books, dramatic play, or song. It may also include field trips to farms, farmers' markets, or gardens outside of the early care site setting. The addition of cooking, gardening, or food-related items to a sensory table provides additional opportunities for learning. Farm to ECE offers children practice using gross motor skills through activities like pushing a wheelbarrow in the garden, or fine motor skills by using a magnifying glass to observe a seed sprout. Be it through use of a formal curriculum guide, lesson plans found on Pinterest, or impromptu seasonal experiments, there are a variety of ways to integrate farm to ECE into the learning day.

Respondents reported a wide range of farm to ECE activities including educating children about Wisconsin-grown foods, how food grows, and where it comes from (68%); cooking activities for children using locally-grown foods (54%); using props for farmers, chefs, or the garden in the dramatic play area (50%); and field trips to farms, gardens, or farmers' markets (49%). Additional activities listed by providers include: parent events with food samples of fresh, healthy foods; dietetic students teaching during spring semester at a technical college; setting up an apple orchard for a mid-September activity area; and kids making a farmers' market stand for parents.



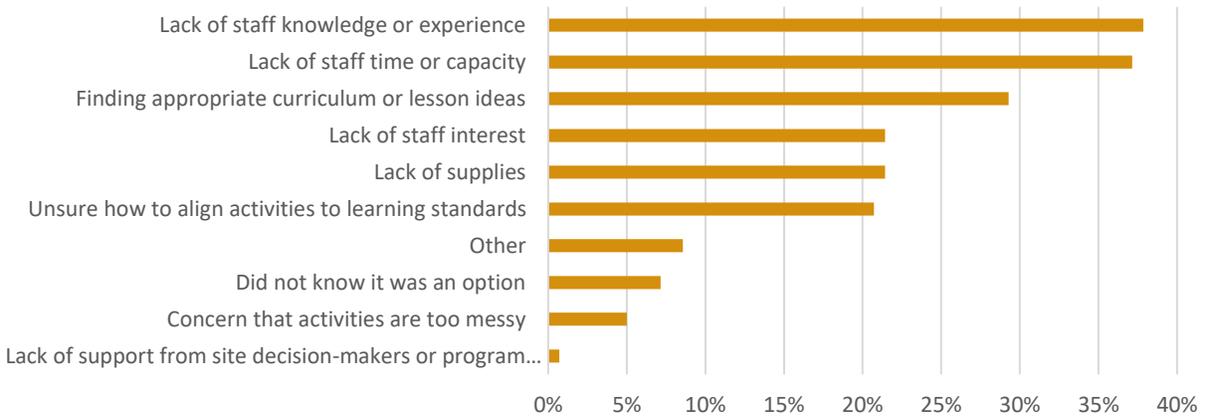
Providers were surveyed on how they find or choose farm to ECE lesson plans, activity ideas, and curriculum for their classrooms and sites. Responses indicate providers rely on a wide variety of informal and formal sources. Over half (61%) of farm to ECE providers reported finding activity and lesson ideas from print or electronic resources like Pinterest, blogs, or websites. 53% of respondents indicate developing their own lesson plans when implementing farm to ECE activities. Only 8% of farm to ECE providers report the use of a specific, formal curriculum.



Providers also reported using other curriculum and techniques including: MyPlate, USDA, lessons from books, Montessori Curriculum, and improvising curriculum based off on-site garden successes and child interest. Respondents were able to choose multiple planning options.

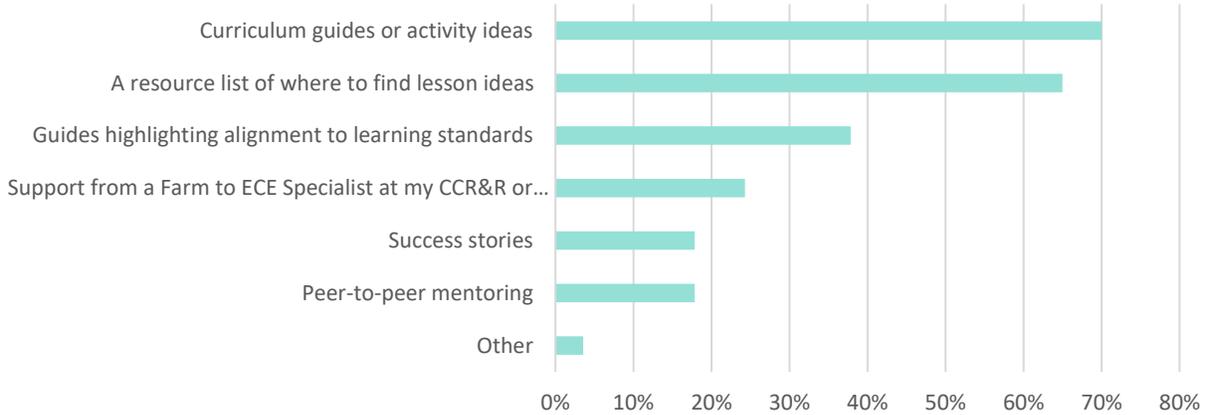
Providers were asked about the barriers and challenges experienced when incorporating farm to ECE activities into experiential education or curriculum. Lack of staff knowledge or experience was the highest ranked challenge (38%) followed by a lack of staff time or capacity (37%) were the top answers, followed by finding appropriate curriculum or lesson ideas (29%). Participants also indicated lack of supplies (21%) and staff interest (21%), and lack of knowledge about aligning activities to learning standards (18%) were barriers to implementing farm to ECE activities. Other barriers and challenges include: insufficient funding, lack of support from administrators and decision-makers, and lack of space at ECE sites.

Figure 23. Barriers and Challenges to Implementing Farm to ECE Curriculum or Experiential Education



Survey respondents were asked about trainings, resources, and support that could help providers include more farm to ECE activities in their curriculum and experiential education activities. The top responses were curriculum guides or activity ideas (70%), a resource list outlining where to find lesson ideas (65%), and guides demonstrating alignment between farm to ECE activities and learning standards (38%).

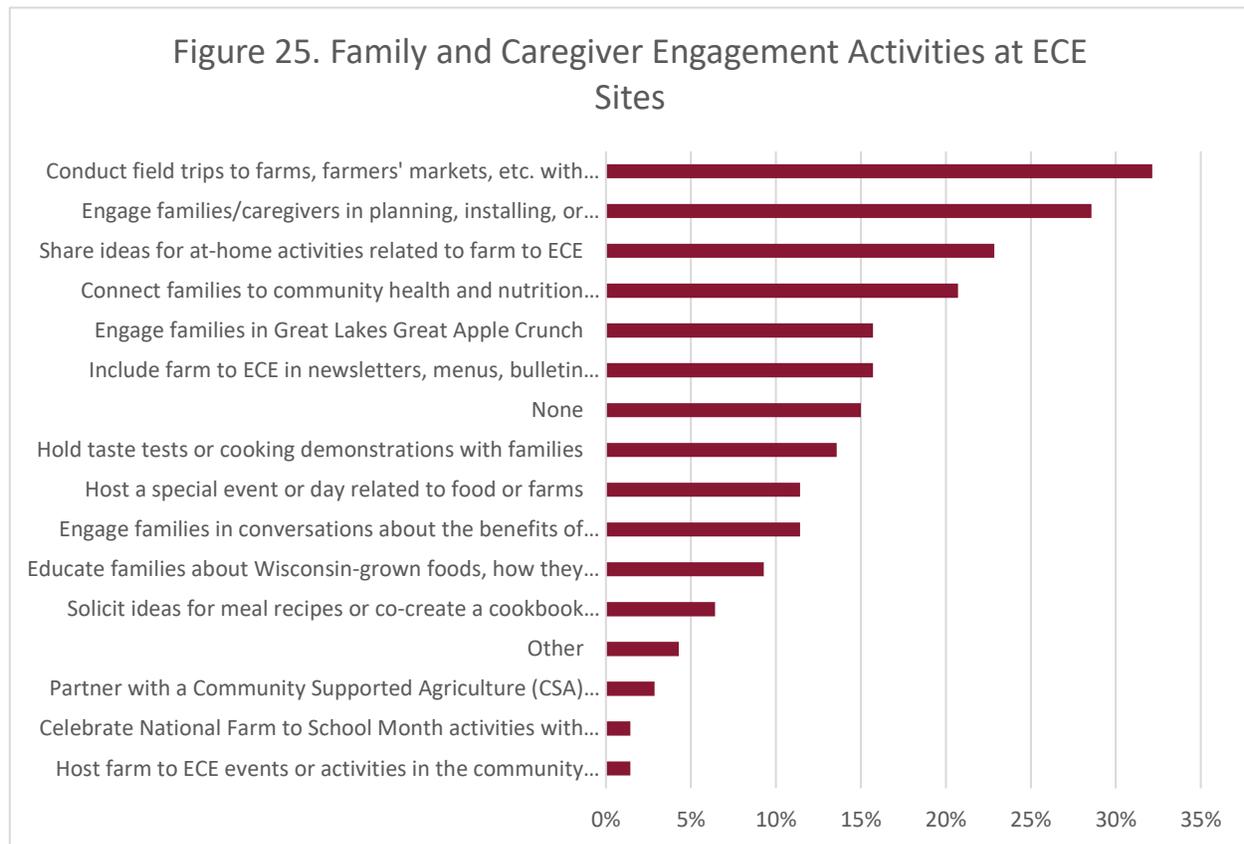
Figure 24. Training Resources Needed to Support Farm to ECE Curriculum and Experiential Education



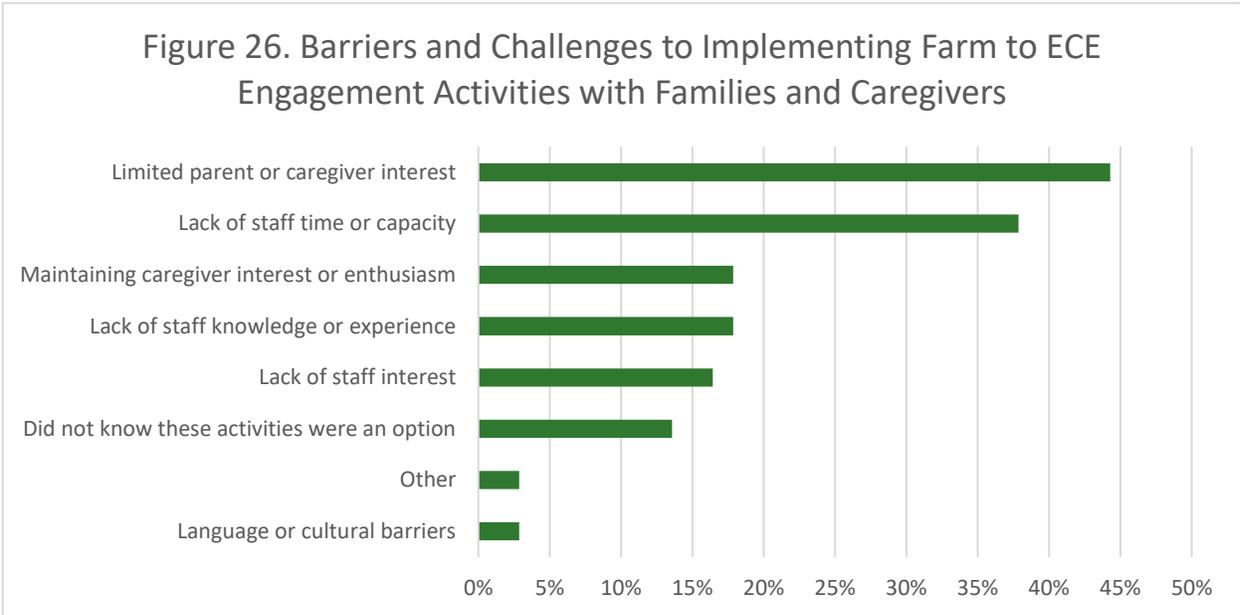
## Engaging Family and Caregivers in Farm to ECE Activities

Family engagement is central to early care and education quality. When families and caregivers are involved in education, children benefit, the program benefits, and families benefit. Early childhood sites can foster strong partnerships with family and caregivers through farm to ECE activities. Through farm to ECE's emphasis on health, community connections, local food, hands-on learning, and inclusion it has the potential to: promote social and racial equity; inspire parent-child activities; and help sites collaborate with families to determine their needs, interests, strengths, and goals.

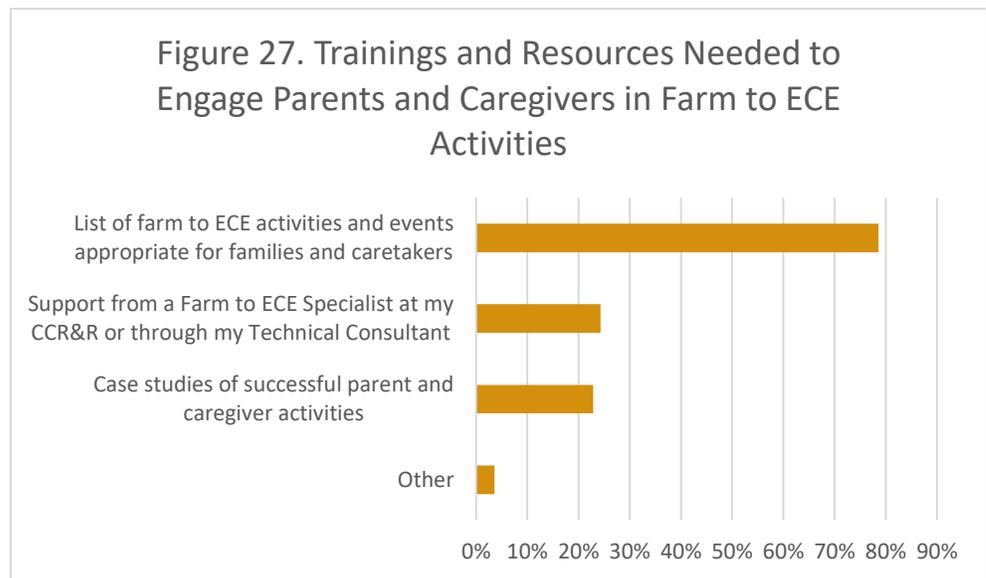
Despite the importance and value of incorporating families and caregivers in farm to ECE activities, survey responses indicate providers participate the least in this area of farm to ECE, with 15% of farm to ECE practitioners indicating no parent engagement activities at all. Sites that do engage with families report the top activities as field trips to farms and farmers' markets (32%); engaging families in planning, installing, and maintaining an edible garden (29%); sharing ideas for at-home activities related to farm to ECE (23%); and connecting families to community health and nutrition resources (21%). Other engagement opportunities include: sending children home with produce from on-site gardens and providing materials for at-home gardening.



A perceived lack of time and interest by parents and caregivers (44%) and lack of staff time or capacity (38%) are the primary barriers to engaging parents and caregivers in farm to ECE activities. Additional challenges include maintaining caregiver interest or enthusiasm (18%) and lack of staff knowledge or experience (18%). A small percentage of respondents (3%) indicate language or cultural barriers in engaging families. Other challenges include funding to carry out projects, parent work schedules, and reducing parent burden.



The trainings, resources, and supports suggested to help providers increase parent engagement in farm to ECE activities reflect the limited current activity in this area. The primary resource selected by practitioners is a list of farm to

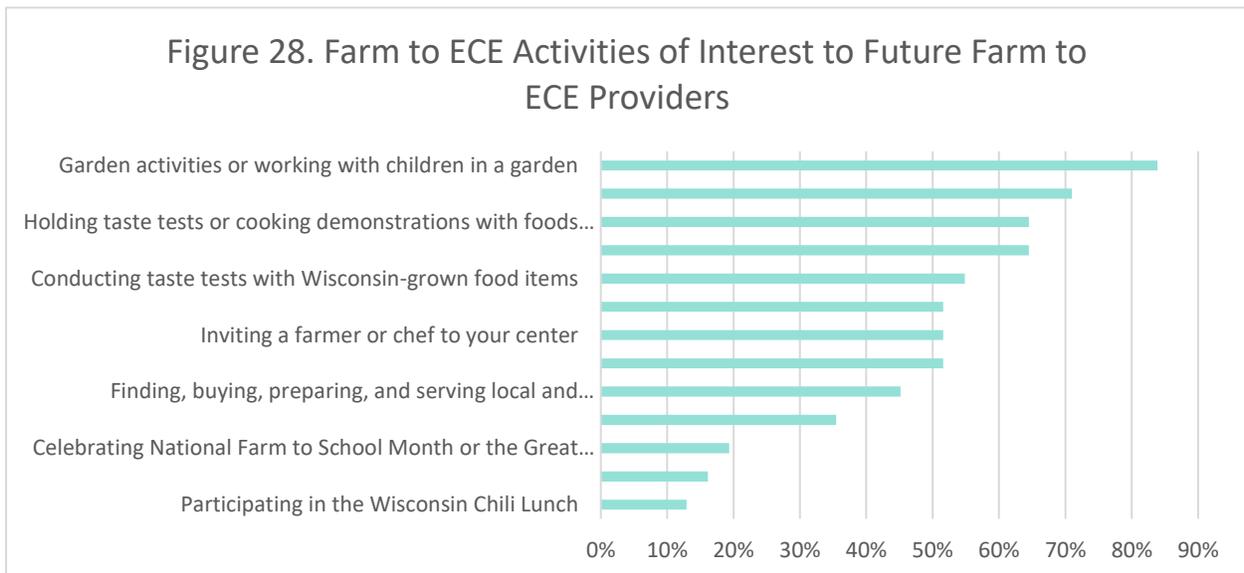


ECE activities and events appropriate for families and caretakers (79%), followed by support from a farm to ECE Specialist at a local CCR&R or through a technical consultant (24%), and case studies of successful activities with parents and caregivers (23%). Other suggested

training and resources include: on-site training and resources that parents can take to do farm to ECE activities at home.

## Providers Interested in Future Farm to ECE Activities

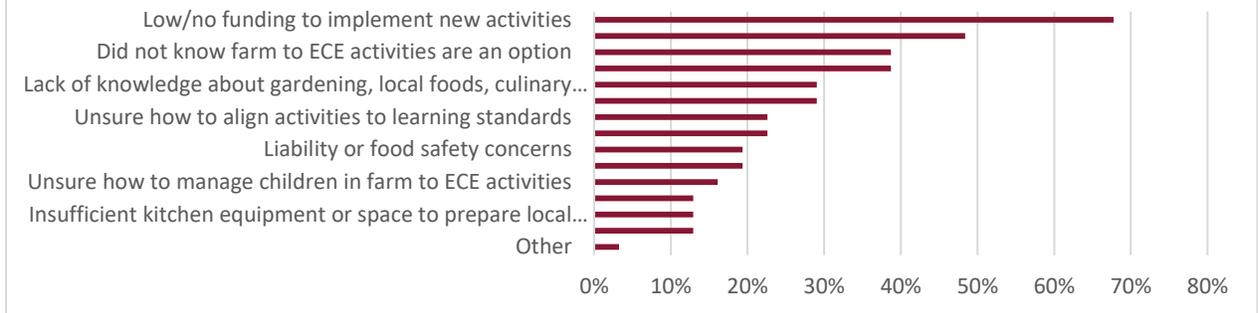
As stated in the introduction, 31 survey respondents (16%) indicated they currently do not engage in farm to ECE activities but want to in the future. This group of interested respondents was asked a series of questions about activities they are most interested in, barriers faced in implementation, and needed resources to move forward with farm to ECE. The responses are outlined below.



The activities interested respondents are most likely to pursue are spread across all four activity areas of farm to ECE, with an emphasis on gardens, local foods, and experiential education. The top four activities selected are gardening with children (84%), educating children about locally grown foods (71%), holding taste tests and cooking demonstrations with food from an on-site garden (65%), and conducting field trips (65%). Over half of respondents indicated they would like to conduct taste tests on Wisconsin-grown food items (55%), include farm to ECE activities in curriculum (52%), invite a farmer or chef to the ECE site (52%), and provide farm to ECE information through a newsletter, social media, or bulletin board (52%).

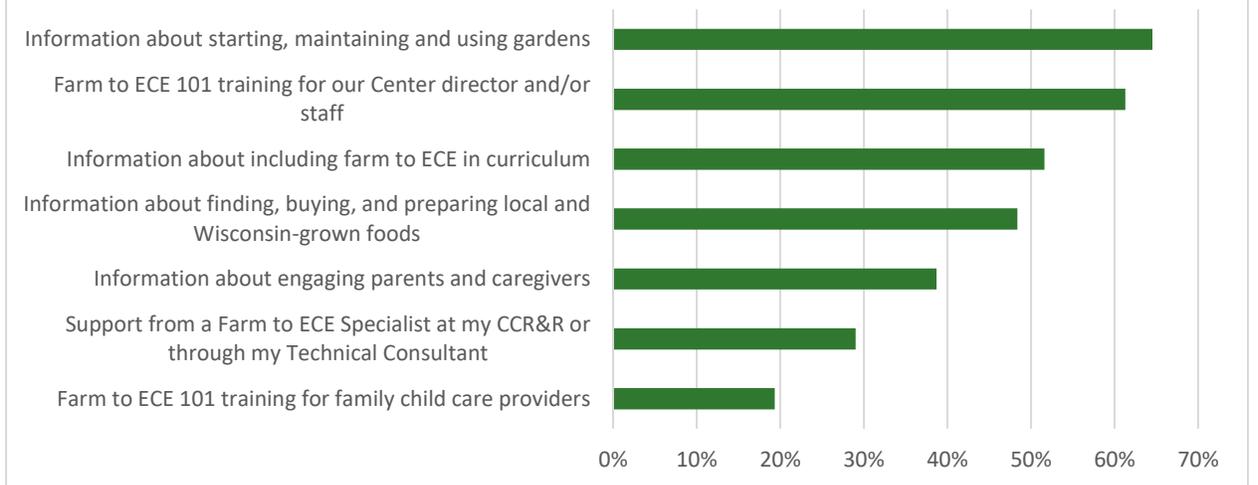
Survey respondents interested in farm to ECE activities report perceived challenges and barriers across the spectrum, with the primary responses related to capacity. Low/no funding for new activities (68%) was the top perceived barrier to implementing farm to ECE activities. Lack of staff time or capacity (48%), lack of awareness of farm to ECE activities (39%) and limited space for gardens or activities (39%) were also reported as perceived barriers.

Figure 29. Barriers and Challenges to Beginning Farm to ECE Activities



Providers interested in farm to ECE activities were asked about the training and support topics that would most help them implement farm to ECE activities in the future. Information about starting, maintaining, and using garden was the top answer (65%), followed by farm to ECE 101 training for staff at group centers (61%) and information about incorporating farm to ECE into curriculum (52%). Nearly half of respondents (48%) indicated information about procuring local food would be a helpful resource and 39% wanted information about engaging parents in farm to ECE activities.

Figure 30. Training Resources Requested by Providers Interested in Farm to ECE



## Survey Responses from Sites That No Longer Participate in Farm to ECE Activities

Six survey respondents (3%) indicated they used to engage in farm to ECE activities, but currently do not. This group reports the major barriers to implementing farm to ECE as low/no funding for implementing new activities (5 responses), limited space (3 responses), and lack of staff time (2 responses). Other barriers included low CACFP reimbursement rates for local food (2 responses), lack of knowledge on how to procure Wisconsin-grown foods (2 responses), and lack of knowledge about gardening and culinary skills (1 response).

Four of the six providers who previously engaged in farm to ECE activities report that information about starting, maintaining, and using gardens would be helpful for reimplementing farm to ECE activities in the future. Other helpful resources include: farm to ECE 101 training for staff (4 responses), information about engaging parent (2 responses), information about procuring local food (1 response), information on farm to ECE curriculum (1 response), and support from a farm to ECE specialist (1 response).

## Providers with No Interest in Farm to ECE Activities

Only six of the 188 ECE providers responding to this survey (3%) indicated they do not conduct any farm to ECE activities, and do not plan to conduct them in the future. Perceived barriers to implementing farm to ECE activities include: Lack of space for gardens (4 responses), insufficient funding (3 responses), lack of knowledge on how to procure Wisconsin-grown foods (2 responses), lack of staff time or capacity (2 responses), low CACFP reimbursement rates for local food (2 responses), no knowledge of the option of farm to ECE activities (1 response), lack of knowledge about gardening (1 response), unsure of how to manage children in farm to ECE activities (1 response), insufficient kitchen equipment (1 response), and limited parent interest (1 response).

This group of respondents indicate the following resources would be helpful in implementing farm to ECE activities: information about starting, maintaining, and using gardens (3 responses); farm to ECE training (2 responses); information about procuring local food (1 response); and information on engaging parents (1 response). Two respondents indicated none of the recommended resources would be helpful in implementing farm to ECE activities.

## Discussion

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were far fewer responses to this year's survey even when extending the survey close date. There were 188 responses from 44 counties in 2020 compared to 324 responses from 57 counties in 2017. In addition, respondents included sparse, if any, responses to open ended questions. Because of this, quotes and other free

response answers weren't included in this report. An opportunity for a future Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey could be to focus more on the qualitative data especially to capture impacts of COVID-19.

Farm to ECE providers see the benefits of farm to ECE programming at their centers. Figure 6 shows all the benefits perceived by providers, like improving children's knowledge of where food comes from, improving children's learning and development, increasing access to fresh, health food, and improving overall health (all of which had over 75% of providers in agreement). Farm to ECE providers also participate in a number of different activities, like planting gardens, using fresh food for meals/snacks, and incorporating farm ideas into the curriculum. We can see that the farm to ECE activities in Wisconsin are robust and children are benefiting from these efforts. However, much of the current survey data gives us a better understanding of the opportunities to improve access to and adoption of farm to ECE activities in the state to make it even more successful.

The most pressing issue that is perceived by providers is lack of time, funding, and capacity to conduct farm to ECE activities. This is consistent with the results from 2017 and may indicate that ECE providers are limited in their ability to incorporate *any* new activities or practices. Not only do non-farm to ECE providers experience barriers and challenges to starting activities, active farm to ECE providers experience similar barriers and challenges to expanding their activities. Limited outdoor space, lack of staff time, no funding to start a garden or purchase healthy food, and just being unsure how to start or expand farm to ECE activities are all significant barriers that childcare providers identified in this survey. The idea of starting farm to ECE activities can sound daunting to many childcare providers. Something as simple as using one local food item in a meal or planting a single tomato plant inside or outside is considered a farm to ECE activity. The focus of future farm to ECE development should be on promoting the simpler ways to become involved in farm to ECE activities, and then work to expand into bigger projects like a full garden or going on field trips. This may be a more feasible way to increase farm to ECE participation.

The vast majority of children represented by these survey responses that participate in farm to ECE activities are white (90%). Only 64% of survey respondents serve Black children and only 57% serve Hispanic children. This is an area that needs improvement. With 90% of Wisconsin's Black population residing in only six counties, farm to ECE participation should be improved in these counties (Milwaukee, Dane, Racine, Kenosha, Rock, and Waukesha). Connecting childcare facilities with farmers, technical consultants, special resources or grant funding, and activities like gardening could help jumpstart farm to ECE programming in these areas.

One activity that increased in participation from the 2017 survey was the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch. 21% of providers reported incorporating the Great Apple Crunch in their curriculum (up from 11% in 2017) and 21% of providers reported using the Great Apple

Crunch as an opportunity to use local food in snacks/meals (up from 10% in 2017). This indicates that providers are receptive to mass campaigns like the Great Apple Crunch and are excited to participate in these types of events. These events are easy to participate in remotely and are a good way for promoting farm to ECE activities to a large number of childcare providers.

This Wisconsin Farm to ECE Survey provides us with information on how to move forward with farm to ECE in Wisconsin. Although Wisconsin Farm to ECE already has a solid foundation in the state, there are several areas that could be improved upon. Efforts to expanding and improving farm to ECE should be focused on increasing awareness of simple farm to ECE activities, utilizing mass campaigns to increase participation, and expanding farm to ECE to areas with communities of color. Once these initiatives are implemented, the next Wisconsin Farm to ECE survey can be used to measure the success of such initiatives.