



What is Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE)?


Farm to ECE includes strategies and activities that increase **gardening opportunities**, **access to healthy, local foods**, and **food and agriculture education** in programs serving children ages 0 to 5.

Early care and education settings include **childcare centers or family childcare homes**, **pre-K classrooms**, **Early Head Start programs**, and more.

Farm to ECE is a triple win!

 Kids who participate in F2ECE eat more servings of fruits and vegetables.

 By shortening supply chains, farmers keep a bigger share of the dollar.

 Communities win when farmers reinvest in their local communities and kids take what they learn home with them.

What are the benefits of selling to ECE programs?

- Childcare programs that are committed to serving fresh, local foods on a weekly/monthly basis will be consistent customers.
- Childcare programs can vary in size and structure, which can help make the process more flexible for producers and the educators they're selling to.
- Selling to early childhood programs can be an opportunity for growth and security for your business.
- **GAP certifications are not required for sales to ECE sites!**
- Your products are not only being promoted to the children and staff of the programs, but to their families and community as well.

Why Farm to ECE?



In the US, 3 in 5 children spend time in care outside of their home, which makes early care and education programs one of the best places to help children build healthy eating and physical activity habits.

Teaching children about gardening and agriculture shows children where their food comes from and the journey it takes to get to their plate.

We are here to help you in promoting and selling your products to the ECE programs serving Alabama's children.

Reach out to alabamafarmtoece@apcteam.org to get connected to ECE programs near you!

Direct Ways to Sell to ECE Programs

Directly to an ECE site

Farmers and producers can reach out directly to an ECE program's director to promote and sell their product.

At a farmers market

Programs preparing meals onsite can visit farmers markets to purchase items on their menu.

Through a CSA/box program

ECE sites can sign up for a CSA program to receive consistent shares of a farm's harvest

Indirect Ways to Sell to ECE Programs

- Through meal providers
 - Caterers or large-scale meal service
- Through food hubs
- At local grocery stores
- Through broadline distributors

Things to Consider When Selling to ECE Programs

Purchasing volume

Family child care home programs and small centers usually plan and purchase food weekly and in smaller quantities, while centers may purchase in bulk and request larger quantities.

Schedule

Some programs only operate during the school year (August - May), and some are open year-round.

Food purchasing procedures

Programs participating in the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) have specific purchasing guidelines they must follow and may request additional documentation.

Food safety

GAP certifications and liability insurance are not a requirement to sell to ECE programs, but they may be requested by the program's staff.

Insight on Meals in Licensed ECE Programs in Alabama

Licensed childcare programs in the state of Alabama are required through the Minimum Standards provided by the State of Alabama Department of Human Resources to serve meals that adhere to the **USDA's meal pattern guidelines**.

These guidelines include **fruits and/or vegetables with every meal and snack, meat and/or meat alternates (beans, nuts, yogurt, etc), whole grains, and milk**. Program operators are purchasing these items in various ways and are encouraged to purchase locally, and many programs have policies that state where their meal components are sourced.

**Want to learn more or looking to get started?
Reach out to alabamafarmtoece@apcteam.org!**