

Farm To ECE Winter Lessons

Early Childhood Educators can teach young children about winter farming and seasonal food with these lesson suggestions. These lessons can help teachers and the children in their care to foster a deeper understanding of agriculture, sustainability, and where their food comes from in the colder months.



Lesson 1: Farmers in Winter: What do they do?

Objective:
To teach children about the challenges farmers face during winter and how they adapt to grow food in cold weather.

Agriculture in Alabama:
Alabama’s farming communities often face the risk of frost or freeze in late fall and early spring, which can harm sensitive crops like tomatoes, peppers, and beans. Farmers may use row covers or frost blankets to protect plants from these sudden cold spells.

Activity:
Create a simple story or puppet show that follows a farmer’s day during the winter. Demonstrate activities like caring for livestock, harvesting winter crops, and preparing the land for spring. Ask children to share their ideas of what they think farmers do in the winter and let them act out these activities or make their own stories.

Extension:
Set up a small pretend “farm” area in the classroom with miniature farm equipment (plastic rakes, shovels, buckets, gloves, etc.), animals using stuffed or plastic animals, and “winter crops” with pretend vegetables such as carrots and potatoes.



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Lesson 2: Winter Vegetable Exploration

Objective:

To introduce children to winter vegetables and show how they grow in the cold weather.

Agriculture in Alabama: During the winter months, farmers markets will often sell a variety of winter vegetables, including kale, broccoli, lettuce, beets, and more! At the farmers market, you may also see items like mushrooms, honey, or bread that has been produced locally.

Activity:

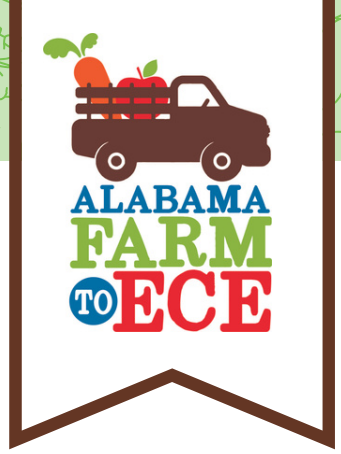
Bring in a selection of winter vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, cabbage, squash, and kale. Let children touch, smell, taste, and chop (with child-safe knives) the vegetables. Ask the children to rate their favorites or tell about their experience. Providers can teach how each vegetable grows or how the vegetables help the child's body grow and stay healthy .

Extension:

Create a winter "vegetable garden" in the classroom using craft supplies or in a sensory bin with dried beans, seeds, and small vegetables.

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Lesson 3: Seed Starting and Winter Growth

Objective:

To teach children about how some plants can grow in winter and how to start seeds indoors.

Agriculture in Alabama:

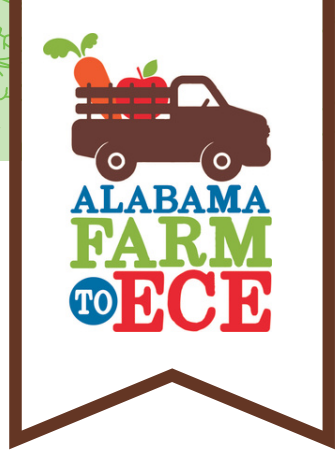
Certain crops are better suited to colder weather and can thrive during Alabama's winter months. Farmers often plant winter-hardy vegetables such as collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, kale, spinach, and broccoli. These crops can handle light frosts and continue growing through the winter.

Activity:

Demonstrate how to start seeds indoors such as lettuce, herbs, or small flowers. Children can plant their own seeds in small cups or pots to take care of in the classroom. Discuss how some plants can survive in cold weather like greens and other plants need warmer temperatures.

Extension:

Create a matching game where children can match pictures of vegetables/fruits or plastic vegetables/fruits to cold or warm temperature pictures. Or, create a growth chart for children to mark how their plants are growing over time.



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Lesson 4: Winter Soup with Local Ingredients

Objective:

To teach children about farm-to-table cooking and how to make use of winter vegetables.

Agriculture in Alabama:

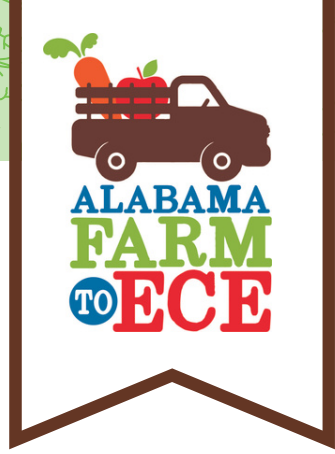
In Alabama, farmers grow a wide variety of vegetables depending on their climate and where they are located in the state. In the cooler northern part of the state, farmers grow vegetables like collard greens, turnips, and broccoli, which can handle the cold. In southern Alabama, farmers can grow sweet potatoes, watermelon, and okra most of the year because of the warmer climate.

Activity:

Involve children in making a simple vegetable soup with winter vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, leeks, and cabbage. Talk about where each vegetable comes from and how it grows. Allow children to help wash, peel, and chop the vegetables.

Extension:

Discuss other ways winter vegetables can be cooked (in stews, roasted, etc). Ask children what their favorites are and how they eat them at home. Discuss how these foods are filling and nutritious during winter months.



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Lesson 5: Winter Scavenger Hunt: Where does food come from in the Winter?

Objective:

To show children where food comes from in different seasons and how we get food even when the weather is cold.

Agriculture in Alabama:

Alabama farmers use high tunnels (unheated greenhouses) to extend their growing season during winter. These structures trap sunlight and protect plants from cold temperatures, allowing farmers to grow crops like lettuce, spinach, and herbs year-round. They also help preserve moisture and improve soil quality.

Activity:

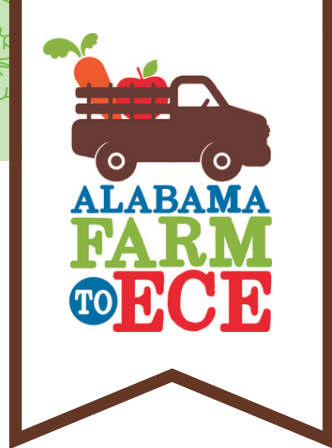
Create a scavenger hunt inside or outside the classroom with pictures of various winter crops or food sources (ex. apples, potatoes, eggs from chickens, milk from cows). Ask children to match the items from where they might come from (a farm, a greenhouse, a barn).

Extension:

Take the children to a field trip to a local farm or farmers market to see what's being harvested in the winter. Do a virtual farm tour by watching a video of a farm or farmers market in the winter if going in person is not an option.

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Lesson 6: Farm to Table: A Journey from Seed to Plate

Objective:

To teach the basic concept of farm-to-table by following the journey of food from the farm to the child's plate.

Agriculture in Alabama:

In Alabama, the journey from farm to table is a vital part of the state's agricultural tradition. Early childhood educators can teach children about where their food comes from by following the path of local crops like collard greens, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes, from the farms that grow them to the meals that end up on their plates. Use recipes from websites like sweetgrownalabama.org to model how local foods are harvested and used in tasty recipes.

Activity:

Create a simple flowchart or poster showing the journey of food from seed planting to harvest, to the farmer's market or grocery store, and then to the child's plate at home or in the classroom. Start with pictures of a farmer planting sweet potatoes; then harvesting these root vegetables; a mother purchasing sweet potatoes from a farmer at a farmers market; a child helping with washing and peeling the sweet potatoes at home; and ending with a recipe or picture of sweet potato casserole. Use pictures of real farms, food items, and children eating meals to illustrate these steps.

Extension:

Invite a local farmer or gardener (in person or virtually) to speak with the children about their farming practices and how/what they grow year-round.

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Lesson 7: Winter Farming and Sustainability

Objective:

To teach children about sustainable farming practices and how they help farmers to grow food in different seasons.

Agriculture in Alabama:

Alabama farmers use several sustainable farming practices during the winter to protect the environment and ensure healthy crops. They often plant cover crops like clover or winter rye to prevent soil erosion and add nutrients to the soil.

Activity:

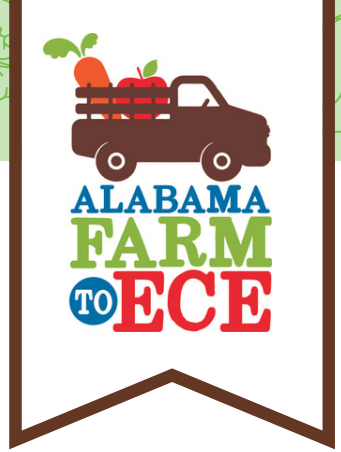
Discuss simple concepts of sustainability, such as composting, conserving water, or using renewable energy like solar power on farms. Have children participate in a composting project by collecting food scraps from snacks. Children can compost in class or program composting site or make their own compost baggies. Discuss and demonstrate how waste can be reused to help grow more food.

Extension:

To teach children about solar power, early childhood educators can help make a simple solar oven using a cardboard box. First, cut a flap in the lid and line it with shiny aluminum foil to reflect sunlight. Place clear plastic wrap over the opening to trap heat, and add black construction paper inside to absorb the sun's energy. Place small snacks, like marshmallows or chocolate chips, inside and let children "cook" them in the sun. While waiting, discuss how the sun's energy is being used to warm the box, teaching kids about solar power in a hands-on and fun way!

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Lesson 8: Animal Care in Winter

Objective:

To introduce the concept of animal care and how farm animals are cared for in the winter months.

Agriculture in Alabama:

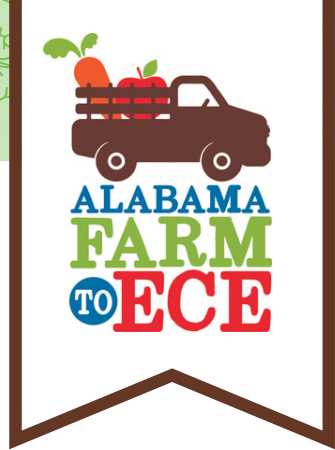
In Alabama, farm animals like cattle, chickens, goats, and pigs need extra care during the colder winter months, even though the winters are generally mild. Cattle are well-suited for the cooler weather, but farmers still make sure they have plenty of food, water, and shelter from wind or extreme cold. Chickens need to stay warm and may stop laying eggs when it's too cold, so farmers often provide extra bedding and insulated coops to keep them comfortable. Goats are hardy but need protection from rain and freezing temperatures, so farmers may provide them with shelters or heated areas. Pigs can handle cold but also need a warm, dry place to stay, especially when it's wet.

Activity:

Discuss how farm animals are kept warm and safe in the winter. Show pictures of animals like chickens, cows, and sheep with their winter coats (can discuss how they shed these when it warms up) or in their barns.

Extension:

Create a simple role-play area where children can pretend to care for their farm animals. They could pretend to gather eggs, put animals to sleep in their barns, brush cows, or feed hay to animals.



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Lesson 9: Winter Weather and Its Impact on Farms

Objective:

To teach children how weather affects farming and food production.

Agriculture in Alabama:

Farmers in Alabama often diversify their crops to help minimize risk during the winter. They might grow winter crops in rotation with summer crops or raise livestock like cattle, chickens, and goats, which can continue to provide income and food throughout the colder months.

Activity:

Discuss how snow, frost, and ice impact the growth of certain plants and how farmers plan for colder months. Use a weather chart to track the daily temperature and talk about what crops can handle cold weather and which ones can't. Children can match pictures of crops to the warm or cold weather they grow in.

Extension:

Make a simple weather station with thermometers and rain gauges to allow children to observe and record the weather in real time, discussing how weather influences farm life.

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Lesson 10: Winter Farming Art Projects

Objective:

To encourage creativity while reinforcing lessons about winter farming.

Agriculture in Alabama:

Some farmers markets in Alabama, like the Pepper Place Farmers Market in Birmingham, often feature local artists selling farm-themed artwork. Children can learn about farm animals, crops, and landscapes through paintings, pottery, and other artistic mediums.

Activity:

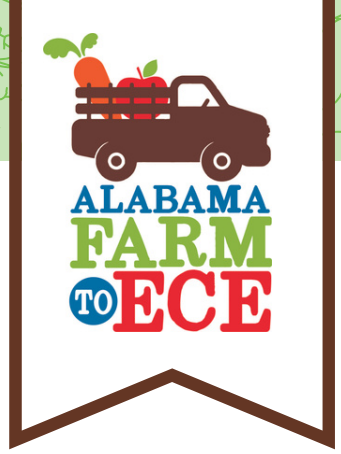
Have children create art projects inspired by winter farming. For example, children could make collages of winter vegetables, paint pictures of farms in the snow, or create farm animal masks.

Extension:

Organize a “farm art show” where children can dress up as farmers and share their creations with their classmates, other students in the program, parents etc. They can share different things they have learned about winter farming and agriculture. Or, organize a “farm animal parade” with each child wearing a farm animal mask they made.

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Lesson 11: Winter Solstice and the Importance of Sunlight



Objective:

To introduce the concept of seasons and how they affect farming, specifically the sun's role in the growing season.

Agriculture in Alabama:

The winter solstice typically occurs around December 21st or 22nd each year in Alabama, just like everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. This marks the shortest day and longest night of the year, after which the days gradually begin to lengthen again.

Activity:

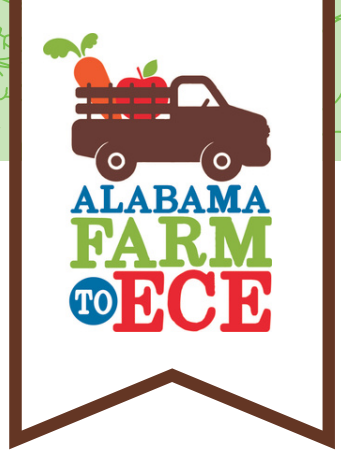
Discuss the winter solstice and why the days are shorter. Use a globe or a diagram to show how the Earth's tilt affects the length of daylight. Ask children to draw pictures of how the sun appears at different times of the year. Discuss the importance of sun for crops.

Extension:

Have children create a simple "sunlight" chart to track the length of daylight each day, marking the solstice as the shortest day of the year. This activity can be done as a class and children can take turns marking each day.

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Lesson 12: Local Winter Farmers Market Tour



Objective:

To introduce children to farmers markets as a source of local food purchasing in their community, and what items are commonly sold at farmers markets during the winter months.

Agriculture in Alabama:

Here is a list of some of the farmer's markets in Alabama that are open year round:

- Pepper Place Farmers Market (Birmingham)
- Huntsville City Farmers Market (Huntsville)
- Mobile Bay Farmers Market (Mobile)
- Montgomery Farmers Market (Montgomery)
- Tuscaloosa Farmers Market (Tuscaloosa)
- Fairhope Farmers Market (Fairhope)

Activity:

Take the children on a field trip to local winter farmers market, or invite a local farmer to visit the class. Let the children interact with the farmers, ask questions, and observe what fresh produce is available during the colder months. Take some produce back to the classroom if possible to experience texture, smell, and taste.

Extension:

Have children draw pictures of their favorite items they saw at the market, such as winter squash, root vegetables, or winter greens. Do a taste testing with some produce you picked up at the farmers market and let them rate their favorites.