

# CT Farm to Early Care and Education Program Application Guidance and Instructions

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH), in collaboration with UConn Extension and the Farm to School Collaborative, is requesting applications for innovative Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) projects that strengthen relationships between children and nutritious, locally grown food. The Connecticut (CT) Farm to ECE Program is an educational program designed to support new and expanding projects through funding, training, and technical assistance. Participants will be selected through a competitive process. To access the application, visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/F2ECE2021>.

## INTRODUCTION

The CT Farm to ECE Program is designed to expand existing farm to ECE efforts in the state to make locally grown food more accessible and increase experiential learning opportunities for young children and their families

This includes:

- Connecting children ages 0-6, staff and teachers, parents, and community members with nutritious local foods
- Providing resources to support: a) procurement of locally grown food; b) development of on-site gardens; and c) agriculture/nutrition education for children and their families
- Increasing the opportunity for ECE programs to engage and develop relationships with Connecticut farm businesses.

## What is Farm to ECE?

Farm to early care and education (farm to ECE) offers increased access to the same three core elements of local food sourcing, school gardens and food and agriculture education to enhance the quality of the educational experience in all types of ECE settings (e.g., preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, programs in K - 12 school districts). Farm to ECE offers benefits that parallel the goals and priorities of the early care and education community including emphasis on experiential learning opportunities, parent and community engagement, and life-long health and wellness for children, families and caregivers. For the purposes of the program the definition of “local” can be determined by the individual applicant.

## Importance of Farm to ECE

Farm to ECE programs have been shown to increase children’s access to fresh fruits and vegetables while increasing their knowledge of and desire to eat healthier foods. This is particularly vital for children under 6 years old, when early patterns can determine later eating habits and preferences.

For more information and resources on Farm to ECE, visit Connecticut’s *Put Local on Your Tray* website at <https://putlocalonyourtray.uconn.edu/> or the National Farm to School Network website at <http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/early-care-and-education>.

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

All applicants must be current participants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Eligible ECE providers include preschools, Head Start/early Head Start, center-based programs, in-home family child care programs, or any program serving children prior to kindergarten that are not part of a school district. CACFP sponsor organizations are also eligible.

Applicants selected to participate will:

1. Work with DPH and its partners from June 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022 to implement their proposed projects.
2. Identify a lead contact for the project.
3. Use the Go NAPSACC online system to complete an initial Farm to ECE self-assessment, develop an action plan, track progress toward action plan items, and re-completing the Farm to ECE self-assessment at the end to measure success.
4. Work with a technical assistance consultant to support development and implementation of action plans, including participating in in-person (or remote) site visits and attending training.
5. Complete and submit a brief project and budget report to showcase progress made.
6. Contribute to evaluation and communication efforts, such as taking photos or videos to highlight successes; participating in interviews or submitting stories or quotes; and inviting CT DPH staff or partners to visit sites.
7. Receive funding (\$250 for sites with enrollment of 12 children or less or \$750 for sites with enrollment of 13 or more children) for participation and to support project implementation.

## PROGRAM TIMELINE

Applicants selected to participate in the program will work with DPH and its partners from June 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022 to implement their proposed project. Data collection, surveys, and interviews may occur after May 31, 2022 but before June 30, 2022 to inform the Farm to ECE program evaluation for our federal sponsors.

Application Timeline:

- Release date: March 2, 2021
- Info session: March 12, 2021 at 1 pm (to register: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/USDAF2ECESpring2021>)
- Application due date: April 1, 2021 at 4:00 pm
- Participant selection and notification on or before May 1, 2021

Post-selection Timeline:

- Complete DPH vendor forms on or before May 7, 2021
- Start project period after June 1, 2021
- Attend one of the virtual Go NAPSACC onboarding trainings (dates TBD after June 1, 2021)

- Enroll in Go NAPSACC online by June 30, 2021
- Complete Farm to ECE self-assessment by July 15, 2021
- Complete action plan by July 30, 2021
- Disperse funds after July 30, 2021 (upon successful completion of above items)
- Attend Farm to ECE training, as recommended by technical assistance consultant (dates TBD throughout implementation period)
- Implement action plan activities, receive virtual technical assistance, participate in virtual site visits and trainings from August 2021-April 2022 (Some ECE providers may finish implementing individual projects before April 2022)
- Complete Farm to ECE self-assessment again and final project/budget report by May 31, 2022

## APPLICATION

Interested applicants will submit their proposal by April 1, 2021 for consideration. The application is available here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/F2ECE2021>.

Applicants should carefully read all guidance and instructions, and should be prepared to provide:

- Information about the organization, including numbers served, description of populations served, and community connections
- A brief project narrative, outlining project goals and objectives, project outcomes, and proposed activities
- Recent (past 2 years) Farm to ECE activities and how this project will assist with expansion of those activities
- A proposed budget for the educational funds

Proposed activities should include procurement of locally grown food, development of on-site gardens (in-ground, raised bed, windowsill, etc.), and providing agriculture/nutrition education for children and their families. Examples of activities include, but are not limited to:

- serving locally grown food in meals and snacks
- promoting and increasing access to locally grown food for providers, staff, and/or families
- featuring locally grown food in taste tests and food preparation with children
- integrating curricula that supports exploration of food, agriculture, gardens, and nutrition
- taking field trips to farms, farmers' markets, and community gardens
- hosting a farmer or other farm visitor in the classroom
- growing edible plants in gardens, on windowsills, or with indoor grow lights
- providing resources or education for families and the community (i.e. sending bags of locally grown food home with families, or serving as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) distribution site or hub for food purchases, related information, activities/workshops, etc.)

- coordinating with community partners to offer incentives to parents for shopping at a local farmer's market

### **Educational Funds**

Selected applicants will receive funds to support program implementation upon completion of specific program activities (see Project Timeline for details). If selected for participation, sites with enrollment of 12 children or less will receive \$250 each and sites with enrollment of more than 13 children will receive \$750 each. Applicants will propose a budget for these funds as part of the application that supports the goals and objectives of their project and will help with the implementation of the proposed activities.

### **Allowable Expenses**

Funds may be spent on locally grown food, gardening supplies, and/or costs related to agriculture or nutrition education that support the applicant's project plan and activities. Supplies may include knives, cutting boards, gardening or farming supplies, etc. Food purchases are acceptable, however, no more than 20% of the total budget may be used for food purchases. The ultimate goal of funded projects should be to make locally grown food products available on menus long-term, and purchasing local products should not be a primary use of grant funds. Food purchases should be limited to educational purposes, such as: farm to ECE sample tables, taste tests, or promotional use. Purchasing foods for meals or snacks is not allowable, except when related to conducting a test run of a new local or regional product.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

Demand for participation is expected to be high and each application will be scored to measure commitment, readiness, and impact of proposed activities, with additional consideration given to ECE programs that serve vulnerable or underserved children and their families.

Other scoring criteria includes existing connections with community partners and/or Connecticut farmers, ranchers, fisherman, and food processors; plans for sustainability beyond the project period; and inclusion of innovative procurement strategies, such as:

- making locally grown food available in meals, snacks, and learning activities
- procuring locally grown food through nontraditional channels such as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share, shopping at a farmer's market, growing an edible garden, etc.
- training staff around food preparation, cooking with children, safe food handling and storage, etc.
- augmenting seasonal availability of locally grown food by freezing or otherwise storing food for later use
- coordinating purchasing efforts in multiple centers or among multiple ECE programs/sites, e.g., forming a cooperative buying group with other ECE programs or community partners

## ASSISTANCE AND CONTACT

If you have questions or are interested in applying but feel you need assistance with any aspect of the application, please contact us. You may join in on our scheduled information session on March 12, 2021 at 1:00 pm by enrolling here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/USDAF2ECESpring2021>, or contact us by email as outlined below.

Jennifer Vinci: [Jennifer.Vinci@ct.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Vinci@ct.gov)

Debora Brandon: [Debora.Brandon@ct.gov](mailto:Debora.Brandon@ct.gov)

## HOW TO SUBMIT

The application is available here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/F2ECE2021>. All applications must be submitted using Survey Monkey. If you need assistance accessing the application, please contact Jennifer Vinci or Debora Brandon at the email addresses outlined above.

Applications are due by 4:00 pm on April 1, 2021.

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