GROWING CONNECTIONS: FARM TO ECE PARTICIPATION, CHALLENGES & MOTIVATIONS



CONNECTICUT Public Health

UCONN COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ZWICK CENTER FOR FOOD AND RESOURCE POLICY

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A Connecticut Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) study was conducted to assess how Connecticut ECE providers procure local food products and their interest in sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables from local producers. 874 ECE providers gave information about their existing procurement and serving practices.

FARM TO ECE ACROSS CONNECTICUT



757 ECEs conducted Farm to ECE and 457 procured Connecticut-grown fruits and vegetables



Top locations to purchase food are grocery stores/supermarkets and wholesale clubs

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Top priorities when selecting food are nutrition and then quality of food.



On average, providers spent 37.6% of their food expenditures on Connecticut-grown fruits and vegetables



The top Farm to ECE activities were gardening and lessons on local food, gardening, and farming



The top motivations for participating in Farm to ECE were providing higher-quality fruits and vegetables and teaching children where their food comes from

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INTEREST IN PURCHASING LOCAL PRODUCTS

CONNECTICUT GROWN
CTGrown.org

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture's CT Grown program highlights agricultural products grown in Connecticut.
Here's what ECE directors said about this program:

- **96%** are willing to incorporate new CT Grown menu items
- **77%** are more likely to purchase food advertised as CT Grown
- **64%** of ECEs are familiar with the CT Grown label

TOP 3 CT GROWN PRODUCTS OF ECES CURRENTLY BUYING LOCAL



93% purchase apples



75% purchase carrots



63% purchase lettuce

OTHER CT GROWN PRODUCTS ECES WANT TO BUY



73% would purchase berries



64% would purchase snap/green beans



58% would purchase sweet corn

CHALLENGES TO SERVING LOCAL FOOD

ECE directors across Connecticut expressed enthusiasm for serving local food. However, they face significant barriers, and top challenges depend on whether they are already buying local food.





Cost is a big challenge for ECE providers wanting to buy local

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SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD AND ECE CONNECTIONS

FACILITATING LOCAL PROCUREMENT

- Partner with food hubs
- Information on where to buy local food
- Guidance on seasonal availability of local produce
- Funding for local food purchases

FACILITATING FARM TO ECE:

- List of interested farms
- Supporting on-site gardening programs
- Assistance from gardening experts
- Opportunities for farm visits and experiential learning

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on study findings, the following recommendations could help grow local food procurement in Connecticut ECEs:

Develop resources to facilitate farm connections

Provide gardening resources

Facilitate CACFP participation

Provide funding for local food purchases

Aid with food service

Engage in relationship building

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