



COLORADO FARM TO CHILD

A GUIDE TO

**Selling Local Food
to Child Care Providers**





Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) is an initiative to provide young children with healthy, locally produced, and culturally responsive food—much like national farm to school efforts. Farm to ECE, however, specifically focuses on children 3-5 years old in child care settings, which include non-profit or for-profit child care centers, family child care homes, Family, Friend, and Neighbor care sites (FFNs), care programs associated with K-12 school districts, and programs for children and youth with special healthcare needs.

To better coordinate resources and guide collective action around these efforts, the [Colorado Farm to Child Collaborative](#) developed a strategic document known as the [Colorado Farm to Child Roadmap](#). The Collaborative—a diverse group of producers, care providers, organizations, state agency representatives, school districts, and others all working together to bring local produce to children—outlined a list of Work Plan Priorities in the Roadmap to accelerate Colorado’s Farm to ECE progress.

This guide offers step-by-step directions to get you started selling your food to local early care and education providers. Follow the steps to understand where to begin, what regulations and requirements to be aware of, how to support Farm to ECE, and whom to contact for more information—such as the individuals listed at the end of the guide.

FARM TO WHAT?

You might hear people use lots of different phrases to express the same basic idea: Farm to Child. Farm to School. Farm to Preschool. Farm to Early Care and Education. They all describe getting fresh food from local sources into the hands—and bellies—of young people, and while each phrase may refer to a different setting, there is a shared foundation of ideas and resources that apply across the board.



A photograph of children wearing hats and gloves, working in a garden. They are kneeling on the ground, possibly planting or tending to soil. The scene is outdoors with trees and a fence in the background.

7 STEPS TO SELLING LOCAL

STEP 1

Understand your role(s) as a producer.

STEP 2

Join the Farm to Child community.

STEP 3

Learn how ECE sites & schools purchase local food.

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Celebrate your success!



STEP 1

Understand your role(s) as a producer.

Why should you be involved in Farm to Early Care and Education? As a producer, selling products to local child care providers might be the most effective way for you to nourish children, support your community, and thrive as a business. You can support Farm to Child in many additional ways, and you should start with what feels within your reach.

Producing and harvesting healthy and culturally responsive foods is critical to ensuring that the benefits of local food are enjoyed by as many children as possible. Fresh fruits and vegetables are a nutritious part of a child's diet, and offering food options that reflect the diverse cultures of Colorado will help make Farm to Child efforts more equitable. Check out this [list of food preference suggestions](#) by Food Bank of the Rockies to better understand what it means to offer culturally responsive foods.

Read more about the Farm to ECE and other Farm to Child efforts on the CO Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) Farm to Child [webpage](#), or contact Colorado's State Farm to Child Coordinator, Brittany Martens, to discover how to get more involved in Farm to Child work in Colorado.

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(CDPHE)

CONSIDER OTHER ROLES

The [National Farm to School Network](#), a leading non-profit in the Farm to Child space, is built around three core elements:

LOCAL FOOD
PURCHASING

GARDENS

AGRICULTURAL
EDUCATION

This guide focuses on local food purchasing, but producers can advance the other two elements as well. Try the following:

- **Partner** with local organizations & child care settings to support their needs.
- **Advocate** for policies that enable and fund Farm to Child efforts.
- **Host** farm field trips to demonstrate agricultural practices to children, families and child care providers.
- **Learn** about Farm to Child regulations, best practices, and opportunities.
- **Donate** your excess produce to child care providers.



STEP 2

Join the Farm to Child community.

You are not alone in navigating Farm to ECE opportunities. There are many different types of care providers, non-profit organizations, private businesses, and public agencies already involved in the broader Farm to Child community, and they have plenty of resources and advice to offer others interested in joining. Many state agencies help to coordinate Farm to ECE resources and improve related state programs alongside their federal partners. Throughout this guide, you'll see the following acronyms:

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)
- Colorado Department of Education (CDE)
- Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Once you've completed Step 1 and understand more about what it means to participate in Farm to ECE, take advantage of available resources and connections by doing the following:

CHECKLIST for Joining the Farm to Child Community:

- Register as a local producer** through the CDE's [Farm to Child Producer Survey](#) to connect with potential buyers, access unique resources from the state, and share your contact information for school districts searching for local food. Visit CDE's [Farm to School webpage](#) to learn more.
- Connect with the Colorado Farm to Child Collaborative** through [this short survey](#) to meet knowledgeable partners and learn about new opportunities.
- Become a National Farm to School Network member** by signing up for their [monthly newsletter](#) and receiving news, information on best practices, and other opportunities.
- Provide feedback** on the development of a centralized, online Local Food Purchasing Platform for Colorado and, once the platform is up and running, utilize it to sell your products.
- Participate in data gathering and assessment efforts**, such as by participating in surveys and attending Farm to Child events, to allow organizations and agencies to track the growth of Farm to ECE networks.
- Keep a contact list of state departmental staff** involved with Farm to Child efforts and other members of the community you meet along the way—because you never know when you'll have an exciting idea to share or when you'll need help solving a tough problem.

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STEP 3

Learn how ECE sites & schools purchase local food.

Selling your products to child care providers may be different from your usual way of doing business, so here is some basic information about the ways these sites and facilities purchase food. Steps 4, 5, and 6 will give you some more ideas about how to utilize this information and whom you can contact to make those ideas happen.

Purchasing Methods: You can market and sell your products to child care providers in all sorts of ways because these providers can purchase food products in all sorts of ways, such as:



At farmers' markets featuring locally based producers and merchants.



Directly from a producer through a contract or agreement negotiated specifically for that child care provider.



At grocery stores or supermarkets offering locally sourced produce, eggs, meat, and dairy products.



Directly from a K-12 school or school district, which may have agreements to provide food to local child care providers.



Through community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs that provide a share of a producer's harvest—for pick-up or delivery.



Through a food hub or food distributor, which aggregate and distribute food from a combination of smaller producers to satisfy larger orders.



Safe Produce: Young children can't always eat the same types of food as older children in school settings or as adults. Certain foods present choking hazards or might require a bit too much dexterity for toddlers to handle, so ECE providers may be more likely to request types of produce that can be easily and quickly prepared for young eaters, such as apples, berries, and cucumbers.

For a longer list of ECE-preferred produce options, check out page 6 of [Farm to Child Care: A Detailed Guide for Farmers and Food Producers](#), published by the Wisconsin-based non-profit organization Rooted.



ECE vs. K-12: Even if you have experience selling to K-12 schools, you should anticipate different needs and limitations when selling directly to ECE sites. Noteworthy differences include:

- **Purchasing volume:** ECE programs tend to have smaller class sizes and more variable schedules, so they will likely purchase smaller quantities of food than schools.
- **Purchasing logistics:** ECE programs, especially Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care sites (FFNs) operating out of private homes, will likely have less storage space and prepping equipment than schools to accommodate bulk purchases.
- **Schedule:** ECE programs tend to continue through the summer months when K-12 school is not in session.
- **Programming and activities:** ECE curricula often prioritize experiential learning and hands-on activities, such as gardening and cooking, which may mean that child care providers are more likely than school administrators to ask about child-friendly recipe ideas or tips for starting a small garden with the children.
- **Meal funding:** ECE and K-12 programs are eligible to receive reimbursements for meal purchases through federal or state nutrition programs. Child care providers may use different funding programs than schools, which means when ordering or purchasing produce, ECEs will likely need to meet slightly different nutrition and documentation requirements than schools.
- **Formal bidding:** ECE programs will not likely issue formal requests for food contracts, whereas school districts may be required to issue a request for proposals (RFP) to compare quoted prices and offers from multiple producers. Watch [this webinar](#) by LiveWell Colorado to learn more about the bidding process.

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Nutrition Programs: Many child care providers participate in the USDA’s [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) (CACFP), which offers direct reimbursements for food and meal purchases that meet certain nutrition and documentation requirements. As a producer, it is important for you to be aware of the information that must be listed on the receipts you provide to your buyers. To meet CACFP requirements and be submitted by child care providers as documentation for reimbursement, receipts must list: (1) Purchase date, (2) Vendor name, (3) Description of each item, (4) Price of each item, (5) Total purchase amount (and tax), and (6) Payment method. In Colorado, CACFP is administered by CDPHE, but child care providers often receive help from specialized non-profit organizations to navigate this reimbursement process.

Funding Opportunities: CDPHE maintains a list of [Farm to Child Grant Opportunities](#) which offer funding to support the needs of Farm to Child participants—producers and child care providers alike.



STEP 4

Know regulations & adopt best practices.

Child care providers—and the schools or organizations they may be partnering with—will often only purchase food from producers that meet certain requirements. Even if the criteria listed below are not explicitly required by your buyer, they are still considered best practices and are encouraged within the agricultural industry. Adopting as many of these best practices as possible will also be helpful in preparing to eventually sell Farm to Child—beyond only ECE settings—if that is something you hope to do. Assess where your business stands on these best practices:

CACFP Receipts: As described in Step 3, the receipts you provide to your buyers will need to include all of the elements required by CACFP. Be sure to include the necessary information on the receipts you provide to your buyers. Reference this [receipt template](#) created by CDPHE.

Required food safety standards: There are many food safety certifications and standards for you to be aware of, but depending on your farm's circumstances, only some of them are required by law. For example, you may need to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. The FSMA rule outlines standards for the growing, harvesting, packing, and holding of produce for human consumption. Check if you're exempt from the requirements of the rule by using CDA's [Produce Safety Rule and Registration Exemption Tool](#). If you *are* covered under this rule, you should register online for the CDA's [Colorado Produce Safety Program](#), which conducts inspections at no cost to you or your farm. Visit the [Colorado Produce Safety Collaborative](#) for more helpful information. Additionally, if you produce meat or poultry, you are likely required to maintain a hazard management plan through the [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point](#) (HACCP) final rule.

Voluntary food safety standards: Even if the state or federal governments do not require you to meet certain standards, a potential buyer might have their own food safety requirements for food purchases. In particular, ECE sites and schools want to be sure that produce is handled safely, so they may look for certifications from two U.S. Department of Agriculture programs: the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Audit Program and the Good Handling Practices (GHP) Audit Program. You can find more information on the USDA's [GAP webpage](#), and you may discover that your farm already follows the criteria of these certifications anyway. You can also apply for partial reimbursement of the audit costs through CDA's [Cost-Share Program](#).

Check out pages 46-47 of the "[Agricultural Producers' Toolkit](#)" as well as the Spark Policy Institute's "[Producers: So you want to sell to schools?](#)" for a more detailed list of safety guidelines for producers. Connect with your local [Extension Office](#) for more guidance on food safety considerations.

Insurance coverage: Many buyers require their producers to have a certain level of liability insurance. If such a requirement is a barrier to you, consider selling your products to a food hub. Food hubs often have their own insurance, which will likely be enough to meet the requirements child care providers and schools have in place.



STEP 5

Identify potential buyers & platforms.

You don't have to wait for child care providers and school programs to reach out to you; you can get in touch with them first. You can also sell your food through the other indirect methods described in Step 3, which will still allow your products to reach children in your community. To find direct buyers or indirect methods, try the following:

CHECKLIST for Identifying Potential Buyers:

- Connect with Colorado's Farm to Child Collaborative** to meet other care providers involved in Farm to Child.
- Register as a CSA provider** through the CDA's [CSA webpage](#) and with the USDA's [CSA Directory](#).
- Find a local Family Resource Center (FRC)** through the [Family Resource Center Association](#) to connect you to local ECE providers and provide options for cold storage and food preparation.
- Find a local Early Child Council** in your area through the [Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance](#).
- Find local farmers markets** by using the Colorado Farmers Market Association's [map database](#).
- Find local food hubs** by using the USDA's [Food Hub Directory](#).
- Find nearby school districts partnering with child care providers** by contacting CDE Farm to School Coordinator Justin Carter.
- Attend webinars and trainings**, including those through Nourish Colorado's [Local Procurement Colorado](#) (LoProCO) initiative, to learn about Farm to Child opportunities and meet potential buyers.
- Talk to friends, neighbors, and members of your community** to identify trusted community non-profits which might point you in the right direction or which might partner with child care providers themselves.
- Register your business with Colorado Proud's [public directory](#)** to learn more about how to label, market, and sell your local products and to access the Colorado Proud logo for packaging and marketing.

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STEP 6

Schedule & conduct meetings with buyers.

Once you've identified sites in need of local food, reach out and schedule a meeting to discuss your products. Small child care sites may not have a dedicated staff person that handles food purchasing, so you'll have to reach out and ask who to meet with the most appropriate point of contact. If contacting a school district, the most appropriate contact may be the Child Nutrition Director—but ask the main administrative office if you're not sure. You could also schedule a meeting with staff at a local food hub, family resource center, or the other entities mentioned in previous steps. In any case, coming prepared to your meeting with the following information will ensure the conversation goes smoothly:

CHECKLIST for Preparing for Buyer Meetings:

Bring these with you to the meeting:

- A completed W-9 form
- Food safety certifications (if you have any)
- Proof of insurance (if you have any)
- Photos of your products
- Samples of your products (if they're in season)
- A short write-up about your farm
- Wholesale price list

Understand what else you can offer:

- Tours or Field trips to your farm
- Lessons for the children
- Recipe ideas

Come prepared to discuss:

- Delivery logistics (time of day, frequency, location)
- Ordering process (contact information, lead time, order minimums)
- Order minimum requirements
- Payment methods and receipts
- Packaging and processing needs
- Food preparation needs
- Communication protocol (points of contact, preferred methods and times of communication)
- COVID-19 safety measures

STEP 7

Celebrate your success!

Congratulations on nourishing young children and supporting your local economy by selling Farm to ECE! Tell us about the successes you've had by filling out this [Success Story Survey](#), and continue to reference this guide and explore the other roles you can play as a producer in Farm to Child efforts.



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