

The NC Farm to Early Care and Education Initiative Connects Local Farms and Early Childhood Education Centers Throughout North Carolina



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RALEIGH, NC: Teams in nine North Carolina counties have joined the NC Farm to Early Care and Education (NC Farm to ECE) Initiative. The statewide collaborative network is underway in Alexander, Guilford, New Hanover, Nash/Edgecombe, Orange, Randolph, Wilkes, and Wayne Counties. These teams include childcare advocates; early care and education, health, and food system nonprofits; specialists at local Smart Start offices; early care and education program directors, staff and parents; NC Cooperative Extension agents and directors; and farmers.

NC Farm to ECE is an initiative of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS), a partnership of North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Last year, CEFS was awarded a two-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to focus on creating connections between farms and early childhood education centers and family child care homes in North Carolina.

"The NC Farm to ECE Initiative works with local childcare centers and family childcare homes to help develop relationships with local farms to provide access to local and healthy food," says Caroline Stover, project manager of the initiative. "To achieve this goal, CEFS and its partner organizations are working with childcare centers to develop food procurement systems, and provide curriculum training to teach young children where their food comes from."

This pilot program will help determine what shifts are necessary in the food system and the early care and education field to support and encourage local food connections in all communities statewide, and to then implement those changes. The continuity of the work will be achieved by integrating training opportunities and resources developed and shared into well-established organizations conducting technical assistance for both childcare facilities and producers, including NC Cooperative Extension and the NC Partnership for Children.

"Farm to Early Care and Education is such a crucial opportunity to create the understanding of where food comes from at a crucial stage in children's lives," says Nancy Creamer, Director of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems. "Children spend up to ten hours a day in care outside of the home, consuming at least two meals and two snacks a day there. Young children are often tasting different foods for the first time, establishing a lifetime of eating patterns, so having the opportunity for all children to know how food grows, learn who grows their food, and get to taste fresh food is a win for all."

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) is a partnership of North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. CEFS develops and promotes just and equitable food and farming systems that conserve natural resources, strengthen communities, improve health outcomes, and provide economic opportunities in North Carolina and beyond. For more information please visit www.cefs.ncsu.edu.