# LEVERAGING FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TO ACHIEVE SNAP-ED GOALS

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest United States (US) food assistance program. It has an accompanying education initiative called the SNAP Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Services grant program (SNAP-Ed), both administered by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). SNAP-Ed serves to equip SNAP-eligible individuals with tools and information to make choices that align with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. In addition, SNAP-Ed works to strengthen policies, systems, and environments (PSE) so that healthy choices are easy and accessible choices for SNAP-eligible individuals.

USDA distributes SNAP-Ed funding to each state's Department of Human Services (DHS). The DHS, in turn, can disburse the funds to implementing agencies within their respective states. Implementing agencies can be state or county agencies and/or tribal or local organizations.

This brief offers background information about SNAP-Ed and Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE), how Farm to ECE programs can support SNAP-Ed to achieve its goals with examples from three states, and steps to take to include Farm to ECE in SNAP-Ed programming for your state.

Like SNAP-Ed, Farm to ECE initiatives empower participants, ECE staff and young children, to make and access healthy food choices. Farm to ECE has 3 pillars - educating children about nutrition and agriculture, hands-on learning through gardening, and serving local foods. Farm to ECE outcomes can help states achieve SNAP-Ed goals and PSE objectives. Farm to ECE activities offer repeated exposure to and education about healthy foods, leading to healthy food preferences and eating patterns. Gardening and food-related activities are popular among ECE families, creating opportunities for meaningful family engagement in Farm to ECE. Farm to ECE programs purchasing local foods create market opportunities for local food producers.

*"Coupling Farm to ECE and SNAP-Ed makes practical sense because they both prioritize improving healthy food access. In addition, Farm to ECE helps shape young palates. Since SNAP-Ed promotes making the healthy choice the easy choice, Farm to ECE ensures this by making sure children are open to that healthy choice."*

*Erin Olson, Iowa Community Health Consultant, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services*

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HTTPS://ASPHN.ORG/FARM-TO-ECE-GRANTEES-PROGRAMS/

# FUNDING

All states receive funding to deliver SNAP-Ed programming. States have flexibility in how, where, and when they deliver SNAP-Ed; but USDA requires states to use evidence-based nutrition education and obesity prevention interventions, many of which are listed in the SNAP-Ed Toolkit. States outline goals and project areas within a 3-year plan and then local implementing agencies can develop work plans based on those goals and project areas. States must coordinate SNAP-Ed activities with other state and local nutrition programs that are happening in the SNAP-eligible populations.

Farm to ECE does not have a recurring and common funding source across the US. When states are able to secure Farm to ECE funding across multiple years, positive impactful PSE can be achieved that improve ECE environments and children's eating habits (Figure I). SNAP-Ed could fund Farm to ECE in many states and progress both programs simultaneously.

Farm to ECE is an innovative evidence-based (Figure I) approach to improve young children's eating habits. Farm to ECE provides children exposure and access to local produce, education on food and agriculture, and hands-on learning through gardening. Farm to ECE achieves SNAP-Ed Goals.

Figure 1: Examples of Evidence Base for Farm to ECE Based on SNAP-Ed Goal Areas

| Ultimate Goal | Evidence |
|---|---|
| *Willingness to Try New Fruits and/or Vegetables* | Izumi, B., et al. (2015)<br>Sharma, S., et al. (2014) |
| *Eating More Fruits and/or Vegetables* | Cosco, N., et al. (2022)<br>Taniguchi, T., et al. (2022)<br>Savoie-Roskos, M., et al (2017)<br>Meinen, A., et al. (2012) |
| *Healthier ECE Meal Quality* | Gibson, C., et al. (2014) |
| *Healthier Foods Eaten At Home by Children and Families* | Williams, P., et al. (2014) |

# BENEFITS FARM TO ECE OFFERS SNAP-ED

| BENEFITS | EXPLANATION | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|
| Unifies State Nutrition Activities | Farm to ECE is a cross-sector initiative, connecting partners in agriculture, education, and health | • Common use of curricula like Harvest of the Month among programs such as WIC and Farm to ECE<br>• Having CACFP Consultants train ECE educators on Farm to ECE |
| PSE Opportunities (Linked PSE ideas) | Farm to ECE's three pillars: purchasing local food, education, and gardening, all offer impactful PSE opportunities. | • Building ECE gardens with community access changes multiple environments<br>• Adding Farm to ECE policies to ECE Handbooks lead to long term changes for participating children |
| Achieving SNAP-Ed Metrics (Figure 2) | Farm to ECE can help states advance population health as measured by SNAP-Ed success indicators in the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework | • Increasing local food buying is a "Medium Term Change" (MT1)<br>• Offering more local produce in ECE meals is a "Short Term Readiness Indicator" (ST1) |

# METRICS

Figure 2: From the SNAP-Ed Toolkit, this figure provides examples of overlap between Farm to ECE and the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. The outcome indicators below are where Farm to ECE can demonstrate progress and success using SNAP-Ed measures.

| | **Readiness and Capacity - Short Term (ST)** | **Changes - Medium Term (MT)** |
|---|---|---|
| Individual | ST1, ST2<br>Children willing to try and request fruits and vegetables.<br>Increased child liking of fruits and vegetables.<br>Higher lunch nutrient content.<br>Parents increase fruit and vegetable buying. | MT1, MT2,<br>Increased child consumption of fruits and vegetables.<br>Increased family shopping at farm stands or markets.<br>Increased local food purchases.<br>Increased home gardening. |
| Environmental Settings | | MT5<br>Healthier meals served.<br>Curriculum revisions.<br>Edible gardens installed and maintained. |
| Sectors of Influence | MT8<br>Increase in ECE sites participating in Farm to ECE. | |

Within the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, there are many SNAP-Ed success indicators that Farm to ECE can help achieve. Use the free Farm to ECE Self-Assessment, or another SNAP-Ed Toolkit-approved tool, the Go NAP SACC Farm to ECE module, to gauge Farm to ECE progress and be reported as a part of SNAP-Ed performance.

*"Farm to ECE objectives and programming align with SNAP-Ed guidance. It is easy to make the case for SNAP-Ed to support Farm to ECE. In NM SNAP-Ed funds cover 50% of positions that work to improve preschool health environments. We write work plans carefully so we don't overlap with other federally funded initiatives but instead build on all the good work."*

*- New Mexico SNAP-Ed Implementing Agency Lead*

# STATE EXAMPLES: FARM TO ECE AND SNAP-ED

Several states braid Farm to ECE success into SNAP-Ed by funding Farm to ECE training, full-time or part-time Farm to ECE coordinator(s), and material costs associated with expanding Farm to ECE in their state. New Mexico, Iowa, and Hawaii are examples of SNAP-Ed teams generating rich PSE shifts from Farm to ECE wins.

## NEW MEXICO (NM)

SNAP-Ed funds 50% of the work at the Department of Health to improve, enhance, and strengthen Farm to ECE programming.

Funding supports Farm to ECE staff, contractors, creating resources, an award program, and trainings.

Farm to ECE means more ECEs are now eligible to receive state-appropriated funds for local food buying!

Led to NM Golden Chile Awards!

## IOWA (IA)

SNAP-Ed funds 20% of the lead consultant's time working on ECE systems at the Department of Health and Human Services.

IA is improving ECE's PSE with Farm to ECE and using the Go NAP SACC assessment tool to gather data from ECE sites to share with SNAP-Ed. SNAP-Ed may fund IA's Go NAP SACC subscription in the future.

Led to PSEs Impacts in ECEs!

## HAWAI'I (HI)

SNAP-Ed funds a portion of the HI Farm to ECE coordinator position.

HI's Coordinator focuses on increasing healthy food access by implementing Farm to ECE; and building connections among partners, including food producers, and ECE staff.

Led to a Growing Farm to ECE Network!

# STEPS TO GET STARTED:

1. Connect with the state SNAP-Ed Coordinator or leads at implementing agencies.
2. Request the most recent 3-year State SNAP-Ed plan.
3. Find areas of overlap with Farm to ECE and SNAP-ED 3-year goals, strategies, and activities.
4. Connect with Farm to School colleagues, who may be able to help connect to SNAP-Ed leads.
5. Draft a proposal for SNAP-Ed with information on Farm to ECE evidence base, PSE strategies, and metrics mentioned in this brief.
6. Share the SNAP-Ed Toolkit directory of Farm to ECE resources along with the proposal.
7. Work with SNAP-Ed colleagues to identify mutual and new partners, short- and long-term outcome measures, and a requested budget to accomplish the proposal.
8. Implement, monitor, and adapt Farm to ECE work through SNAP-Ed.
9. Share out the success stories!

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