ASPHN 2020-2023
Farm to Early Care and Education Implementation Grant (FIG) Final Evaluation Report

Prepared by:
Community Evaluation Solutions, Inc.
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Introduction

Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) programs are an innovative evidence-based approach that give young children increased exposure and access to local produce, opportunities to learn about nutrition and agriculture, and hands-on learning through gardening.

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity and in collaboration with National Farm to School Network (NFSN), Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN) provided a funding and technical assistance (TA) grant to strengthen state-level Farm to ECE initiatives.

In November 2020, eleven grantees, CO, DC, IA, MI, MN, MS, NC, NM, OH, VT and WA, were competitively selected from 21 applicants to receive funding and TA. Grantees received an average of $82,000/year, along with intensive TA, from November 2020 to July 2023. This report describes the cumulative outcomes of the FIG.
Eleven grantees received TA and funding to implement Farm to ECE from November 2020 to July 2023. By the end of the FIG in 2023, grantee coalitions grew 7-fold.

Work done by funded FIG grantees positively impacted an estimated 3,603 ECE sites, 7,984 ECE educators, and 210,262 children over the course of the FIG.

Grantees leveraged FIG activities, TA, and resources to apply for additional funding and secured over $4.5 million in external Farm to ECE funding to sustain their work.

Grantees prioritized equity in their FIG work with coalition members, ECEs, educators, and the children they served.

FIG activities supported positive outcomes through policy, systems, and environment (PSE) changes ensuring the long term impact of work done through the FIG.
The FIG evaluation collected data from multiple sources, including:

- Evaluation Survey and Progress Reports
- Webinar/Call Attendance Data and Meeting Minutes
- Farm to ECE Conference Evaluation Surveys
11 grantees (10 states and the District of Columbia) received funding and TA through the FIG.

26 additional states and territories participated in FIG webinars and trainings.

FIG initiatives, in funded locations, impacted 331 U.S. counties.

An average of 57% of counties in each funded location were impacted by the FIG.

* Note: Some education-only coalitions (e.g., Northern Mariana Islands) do not appear on map.
Between November 2020 – July 2023, the FIG reached an estimated . . .

- 210,262 Children
- 3,603 Early Care and Education (ECE) Sites
- 7,984 ECE Educators
- Of those ECEs, 316 were Family Childcare Providers
During the FIG

grantees partnered with

394

food producers, food hubs, and farmers

FIG grantees’ collaborations with food producers, food hubs, and farmers included:

- Coalition membership
- Farmer and food producer trainings
- Connecting ECEs with local food producers
- “Meet the Farmer” video series
Farm to ECE coalitions grew substantially during the FIG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Number of Coalition Members</th>
<th>Average per Coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2020</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2021</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2022</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2023</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>96</td>
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</table>
The FIG provided varied TA opportunities and resources to support grantees.

Grantees ranked the TA and resources that were most valuable to their FIG work.

The In-Person Farm to ECE Conference was the most valued resource.

1) In-Person Farm to ECE Conference
2) Small Group Meetings with ASPHN & NFSN
3) FIG Webinars (tie)
   Online Farm to ECE Conferences (tie)
4) Farm to ECE Springboard Opportunities
5) FIG Networking Calls
6) FIG Basecamp Resource Share Site
7) FIG Monthly Newsletters
8) FIG Topical Discussion Groups
ASPHN held an in-person Farm to ECE Conference December 5 – 8, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

Key conference objectives included building capacity to sustain effective, equitable, inclusive Farm to ECE coalitions.

There were 87 participants at the conference. Of these, 49 were FIG grantees, an average of 4 attendees per FIG grantee coalition.

* Note: The full evaluation report from the In-Person Farm to ECE Conference can be found here.
Most respondents to the conference survey agreed the 2022 Farm to ECE conference was useful.

I learned something during the Learning Session that I will use in my work.

I learned something during the Learning Session that will positively impact the long-term sustainability of my work.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree
Most participants agreed that the conference was **useful**, **strengthened** Farm to ECE **knowledge** and **skills**, and increased capacity to address **equity** in the work.

Participants who attended online Farm to ECE conferences in the past reported that **attending the in-person event increased engagement, retention, and networking**.

After the conference, attendees planned to **center equity** in their work, use **facilitation skills** to foster genuine **connection**, increase **family engagement**, and influence **Farm to ECE policies**.

Many respondents said the **field trips** were the best part of the conference and highlighted this **added value** of **hosting the event in-person**.
Small group meetings with ASPHN and NFSN program managers were held regularly with 1-2 grantees each time. Meetings were an opportunity to discuss progress, challenges, and possible resources.

200 Small Group Meetings were held with FIG Leads and Program Managers.

Over 1,000 Farm to ECE resources were shared with FIG leads during or after meetings.
FIG grantees participated in regular **Farm to ECE webinars** during FIG, November 2020 to June 2023.

38 Farm to ECE topical webinars were offered between 2020-2023.

Webinars had 48 attendees on average, representing 13 different Farm to ECE coalitions.
Many FIG grantees offered **mini grants** to ECEs or farmers, which supported Farm to ECE implementation (e.g., expanding or building capacity for gardens, local food procurement, cooking, etc.).

Interest in Farm to ECE was demonstrated by the number of mini grant applicants far exceeding available funding and TA capacity.

Funding capacity only allowed grantees to fund **27% of mini grant applicants** during the FIG.

1,481 Applications were received for mini grants.

398 Farm to ECE mini grants were awarded.
All eleven FIG grantees completed a final FIG evaluation survey in July 2023.

Coalition leads collaborated to complete the survey.

The next slides contain feedback from grantees about the FIG and its perceived impacts.
Grantees enacted the following **policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes** during the FIG:

- Advocated for the expansion of state grants to include Farm to ECE (as well as K-12)
- Helped establish full time positions for Farm to ECE focused personnel within state agencies
- Developed or strengthened territorial or statewide local food procurement infrastructure
- Implemented Farm to ECE through existing funding mechanisms (e.g., SNAP-Ed)
- Collaborated with state or territorial agencies (e.g., Dept of Education, Dept of Agriculture) to develop resources, trainings, and policies to support Farm to ECE
- Created accredited professional development modules for ECE educators

This year, with advocacy from FIG team members, [ECEs] were finally added as eligible applicants to state Farm to School grant funding for local foods (previously limited to K-12 schools), and the [state] Department of Agriculture is creating a full time Farm to Institution position that will explicitly include Farm to Early Care in their workplan.

- FIG Coalition Lead
Grantees leveraged FIG activities, TA, and resources to apply for additional funding, and received **over $4.5 million in funding** outside of the FIG. When asked about pursuing external funding, grantees mentioned:

- Collaborating with new partners (e.g., Food Corps, School Garden Networks) to apply for funding
- Leveraging USDA SNAP-Ed funds to support Farm to ECE
- FIG grantees received or benefited from funding from state agencies and other organizations, including:
  - Department of Health & Human Services
  - Department of Agriculture
  - Department of Education
  - Maternal & Child Health Block Grant
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - USDA Farm to School Grants
  - Foundations
  - Vital Village Grants
  - University Grants
  - Non-Profit Organizations
  - COVID Relief Funds

"We [received] the High Obesity Program (HOP) grant through the CDC that involves advancing Farm to ECE by continuing the work of our coalition. This is about **2.5 million dollars over 5 years**. This project will 1) **increase access to healthier food** and expansion of Produce Perks, 2) **increase access to physical activity** by developing policies and plans to everyday destinations [and] 3) **increase the number of [ECE] programs impacted by Farm to ECE**, including policies and activities to support purchasing, serving, and teaching about local foods.

- FIG Coalition Lead

We would not have been in the position we are in today to **apply for the HOP grant**, if it was not for the support of the FIG.

- FIG Coalition Lead
All FIG participants agreed that coalition effectiveness, communications, capacity, and outputs increased during the FIG.

Our coalition’s effectiveness increased. 5 Strongly Agree, 6 Strongly Disagree
Our coalition’s communications increased. 3 Disagree, 8 Strongly Agree
Our coalition’s capacity increased. 4 Disagree, 7 Strongly Agree
Our coalition’s outputs increased. 1 Disagree, 10 Strongly Agree

[Bar chart with categories and responses]

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree
FIG participants agreed that FIG increased Farm to ECE awareness, implementation, and resources over the 3 years of the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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Legend:
- **Strongly Disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Agree**
- **Strongly Agree**
ASPHN Farm to ECE Springboard Opportunities

FIG grantees had the option of participating in ASPHN Farm to ECE Springboard Opportunities with subject matter experts December 2020 to June 2023. Diverse opportunities were offered but all with the common goal of helping coalitions sustain Farm to ECE efforts after the FIG ended. Opportunities and the participating grantees were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FIG Grantees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm to ECE Visioning and Planning Focused on Equity and Collaboration</td>
<td>DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm to ECE Strategic Plan Development Focused on Equity and Collaboration</td>
<td>MN, WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm to ECE 3-5 Year Strategic Policy Plan Development</td>
<td>MI, NC, VT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm to ECE Resource Translation into Multiple Languages</td>
<td>CO, IA MN NC, OH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength-Based Communications and Grant Writing</td>
<td>All Coalitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition Coaching to Build and Expand Farm to ECE Community Engagement</td>
<td>IA, MS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing Local Food Procurement Trainings for Farm to ECE</td>
<td>CO, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping the Local Food Procurement System for Farm to ECE</td>
<td>CO, OH</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Most grantees agreed that ASPHN Farm to ECE Springboard Opportunities met or exceeded coalition expectations.

Most grantees rated the subject matter expert(s) who led Springboard Opportunities as excellent.

* Note: Most coalitions participated in multiple Springboard Opportunities.
Grantees agreed that their FIG coalition prioritized equity in their Farm to ECE work during the FIG.

Most grantees agreed that their Farm to ECE coalition is more representative of the communities they serve (e.g., race, ethnicity, geography, etc.) than it was at the beginning of the FIG.
Grantees addressed **equity** in Farm to ECE in many ways including:

- Translated entire educational websites and over 130 resources into 8 different languages
- Mini grants supported purchasing culturally appropriate foods and educational materials
- Focused on diverse and underserved communities (e.g., opportunity zones) and ECEs that serve them
- Provided education in flexible formats (e.g., live, asynchronous) to increase educator access
- Developed website and resources on traditional foods and foodways (informed by Tribal partners)

The trainings we offered ECE sites in the past three years have provided **context, tools, resources, and support**, but ultimately allowed for **self-implementation** of new food skills among ECEs. This creates a foundation for each provider to adapt to their unique environment, population, and needs, and **empowers** them to drive the [work] at their sites.

- FIG Coalition Lead
Grantees addressed **equity** within their **coalitions**, in many ways, including:

- Participated in equity-focused educational opportunities and consulted with equity experts (e.g., consultants) on coalition structures.  
  
  Our **equitable approach to coalition-building** and meeting facilitation ultimately played a critical role in **empowering ECE communities** to voice their needs and concerns to a multi-sector audience...The **intentional communication** we facilitated built [ECE educators’] **trust** and **confidence** to communicate in coalition spaces and **increased enthusiasm** for [Farm to ECE] policy and program implementation amongst partners.

- Provided multiple ways for members to interface with the coalition (e.g., meetings, conferences, TA, asynchronous work, etc.).

- Diversified coalition membership to include food producers, educators, etc.

- Provided financial support to coalition members whose employers did not pay them to attend coalition meetings.

- FIG Coalition Lead
Most participants agreed that their coalition's FIG project is sustainable.
When asked about **challenges** encountered during the FIG, grantees mentioned:

- **Reporting requirements and administrative burden**

- **Staff turnover within coalitions, partner organizations, state agencies, and ECEs**

- **Challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic**
  - Shifting health and safety guidelines at ECEs
  - Challenges with communication and building relationships
  - Personnel changes within coalitions and ECEs

We found that at times, project timelines were difficult to honor due to the wants, needs and pace of community members; however, due to the FIG leadership team and most specifically the support of [ASPHN], **we were able to move through these challenges with relative ease and understanding.**

- FIG Coalition Lead

[Our FIG work] took **more administrative time [than expected]** in year one...Over the course of FIG, ASPHN did an amazing job of listening, responding to feedback, and shifting time and administrative processes to streamline reporting, meetings and expectations to **better fit the scope of the grant and the needs of states.**

- FIG Coalition Lead
When asked to describe greatest **success** in the FIG, grantees mentioned:

- Implementing policy, systems, and environment (PSE) changes that will increase sustainability of FIG projects

- Developing strong buy-in, trust, and positive attitudes towards Farm to ECE among partners and beneficiaries

- Cultivating relationships between ECE educators and farmers/food producers

Reflecting on the past three years, **it is difficult to choose just one success from the many that we’ve had!** But the one that will hopefully produce the most significant change is our [state] Farm to ECE Policy Strategic Plan [for] 2023-2026. The opportunity to work with Policy Equity Group prompted us to **clearly state our long-term goals** and align the Network’s new workgroups with these goals, which will inform our work for years to come.

- FIG Coalition Lead
Recommendations for ASPHN

Continue to support impactful Farm to ECE work through other available mechanisms after the FIG concludes.

Share findings and outcomes from the FIG with funders and stakeholders using evaluation reports, infographics, etc.

Maintain availability of Farm to ECE educational resources (e.g., via Basecamp) that were shared during the FIG.
Conclusions

FIG coalitions grew substantially throughout the FIG. Work done by funded grantees positively impacted thousands of ECEs and educators, and over two hundred thousand children.

Grantees leveraged FIG activities, TA, and resources to apply for additional funding and secured over $4.5 million in external funding to support the sustainability of their work.

FIG funding, technical assistance, education, and resources allowed grantees to increase awareness and implementation of Farm to ECE.

Grantees focused on equity and building strong relationships with and among ECE educators, farmers, food producers, coalition members, and community members.

FIG activities created structure and increased funding through policy, systems, and environment (PSE) changes that will contribute to the sustainability of Farm to ECE work done through the FIG.
Acknowledgements

ASPHN acknowledges and thanks the rich collaborations that helped make the FIG phenomenally successful. This includes work with NFSN, CDC, and the ASPHN Farm to ECE Advisory Committee. The committee has included the following individuals Cynthia Atterbury, Sunny Baker, Diane Beth, Katie Chatsfield, Tomas Delgado, Jennifer Dellaport, Linda Jo Doctor, Carrie Dooyema, Jennifer Garner, Diane Golzynski, Reynaldo Green, Jill Carlson Groendyk, Diane Harris, Claire Heiser, Everett Jackson, Melissa Lonsberry, Gabrielle Mnkande, Emia Oppenheim, Karen Probert, Kate Reddy, Sophia Riemer Bopp, Meagan Shedd, Margaret Smith, Marsha Spence, Lacy Stephens, and Diona Williams.

Since the FIG began in November 2020, the committee devoted time, resources, creativity, expertise, and very thoughtful input to ASPHN’s work on Farm to ECE. We are grateful to them and look forward to ongoing collaboration and success.

Thank you,
Emia Oppenheim, PhD, RDN, FIG Program Manager

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