

# Colorado Farm to ECE Surveys: Processes and Lessons Learned

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# Background

- Farm to Child surveys can be useful in a variety of scenarios:
  - Exploratory or “lay of the land”
  - Demonstrating need or interest for initiatives or to secure additional funding
  - Demonstrating momentum or successes
  - Repeated over time to assess trends or impact of programming or initiatives



# Colorado Survey Timeline

First official  
grant to  
CDPHE for  
Farm to  
ECE work in  
CO

First  
statewide  
Farm to  
ECE Survey  
(250  
responses)

Many additional grants,  
creation of resources,  
trainings, partnerships,  
pilot programs and more

5-Year  
Follow Up  
Farm to  
ECE Survey  
(464  
responses)

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023



# Survey Development Process

- Started with clear goals: what is most important to know and how will the data be utilized?
  - Collaborate with partners on what they most want to know
- Focused goals can help keep survey length manageable; survey fatigue can impact response rates and data quality
- Utilized existing surveys as a starting point
  - In 2018, utilized nationwide survey
  - In 2023, built upon previous survey

# Colorado Survey Structure

## Demographics

- Program type
- Program size
- Program open during the summer
- Program participation in CACFP
- Program for-profit or not-for-profit status
- Program location (county or zip code)



## Familiarity and Participation

- Level of familiarity with term “Farm to ECE” or “Farm to Child”
- Define 3 main Farm to ECE activities and ask about participation



## Gardening

- Garden type, size, longevity
- Who participates and how garden is used
- Likert scale for benefits of gardening
- Likert scale for challenges related to gardening



## Nutrition Education

- Key nutrition education activities
- Use of curriculums
- Likert scale for benefits of nutrition education
- Likert scale for challenges related to nutrition education



## Local Food Purchasing

- Frequency, location, type of local food purchases
- Local food budget
- Likert scale for benefits of local food purchasing
- Likert scale for challenges related to local food purchasing



## Resource Needs and Feedback

- Inventory of use of common Colorado Farm to Child resources
- Future support needs

# Survey Development Process

- Question phrasing was important
  - Context, order and how questions are asked will influence answers
    - In 2018 survey, a few respondents said that they participated in nutrition education related to local food or agriculture, but did not report overall participation in Farm to ECE activities, which indicated a need for even clearer definition at the beginning of the survey
  - Phrasing related to potentially identifying questions (such as county or zip code)
    - Prefaced question by stating how it will be used and assurance that data will not be shared
    - Included a “prefer not to answer” option for any sensitive questions
- Made other non-identifying questions required to improve data quality

# Survey Development Process

- Used 'skip' or 'display' logic to only ask questions to relevant respondents
  - If they said they did not participate in any Farm to ECE activities, were asked a set of questions about the barriers to overall participation
  - Respondents only got questions about details of each activity if they stated that they currently engaged in it (ie gardening)
  - Everyone got the benefits/challenges questions to gain a broader perspective

# Survey Review Process

- Utilized collaborative processes whenever possible, such as asking partners what they would be interested in learning from the data
- Shared survey draft with other partners or stakeholders, including educators, for review and feedback
- More formal review options could include cognitive interviews with educators



# Survey Incentive

- Provided an incentive to increase response rate:
  - Entry into a drawing for a larger \$ amount is often the most efficient use of funds
  - Incentive funds came from community partner in 2023
- Consider all possible resources and partnerships:
  - Flexible grant funds
  - Other state or local agencies (public health, agriculture, education, early childhood)
  - Community organizations in the local food/nutrition/early childhood space
  - Universities

# Survey Distribution

- Sent survey link out through multiple channels:
  - Providers participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program
  - Statewide ECE licensed provider e-mail newsletter (Office of Early Childhood)
  - Farm to Child Collaborative email listserv
  - Family Day Care home sponsors
  - Family Friend and Neighbor Care coalition leaders
- Included deadline in survey communication (~4 weeks worked well)
- Email subject line mentioned the drawing entry
- Monitored survey responses, sent a reminder email partway through to encourage additional responses

# Survey Follow-Up Opportunities

- Excellent opportunity to not only collect data on Farm to ECE efforts, but also generate new contacts and connections
- Once respondents finished anonymous survey, they were directed to a different survey to enter their contact information for the drawing
- Respondents were also asked if they would be interested in being contacted in the future regarding Farm to ECE opportunities or to share more about their own work
- A majority of respondents provided their contact info

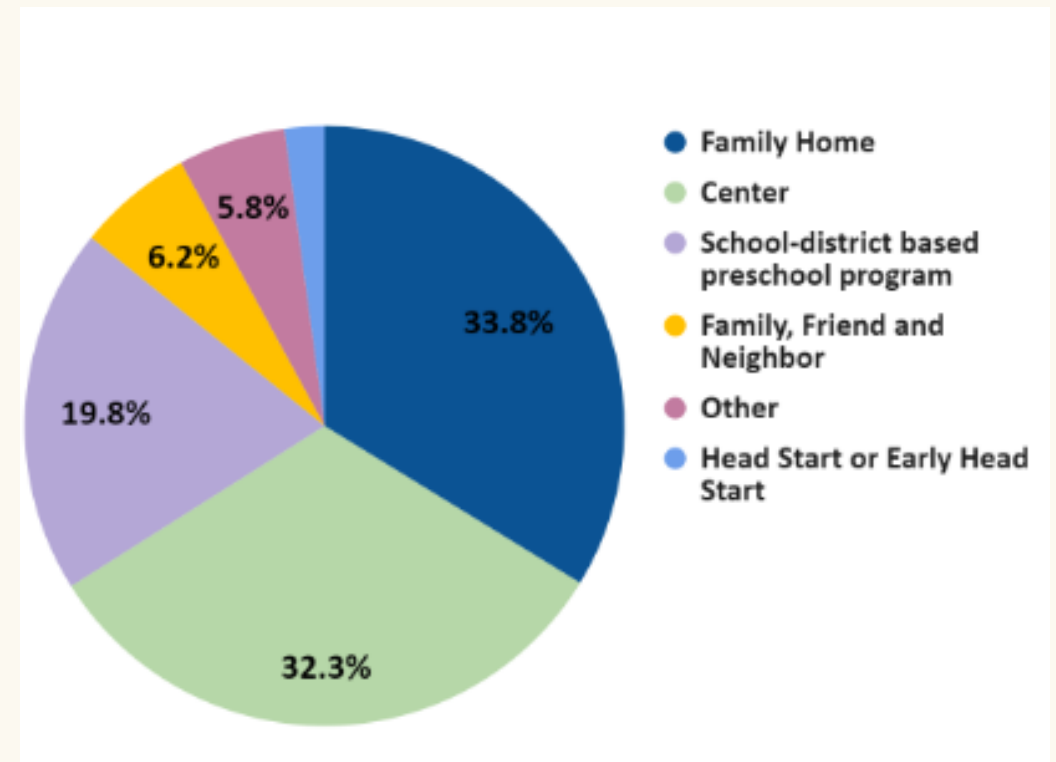
# Data Analysis

- Overall results
- Longitudinal analysis (2018 to 2023)
- Cross sectional analysis:
  - Site type
  - Site size
  - Site location (different regions of the state)



# Overall Results

- 464 completed responses
- Sites represented a variety of types
- Sites represented a range of sizes
- 57% participated in CACFP
- 36% were part of a school district
- 50% were for-profit status



# Overall Results

58%

Participated in at least one of the 3 main Farm to Child activities (gardening, nutrition education, or local food purchasing)

45%

Said that they were familiar with the term 'Farm to Child' or 'Farm to ECE'.

46%

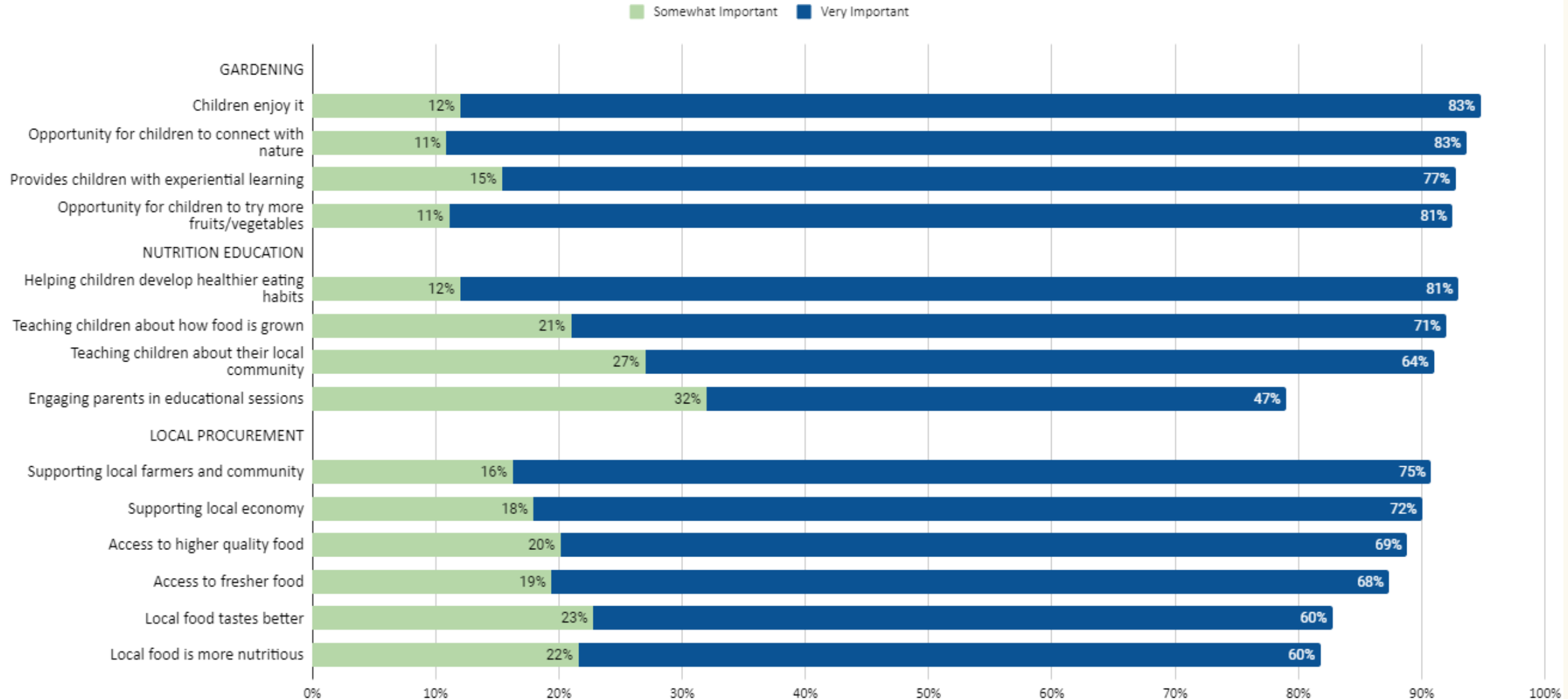
Of those who don't participate, state it's because of a lack of funding or money for activities.



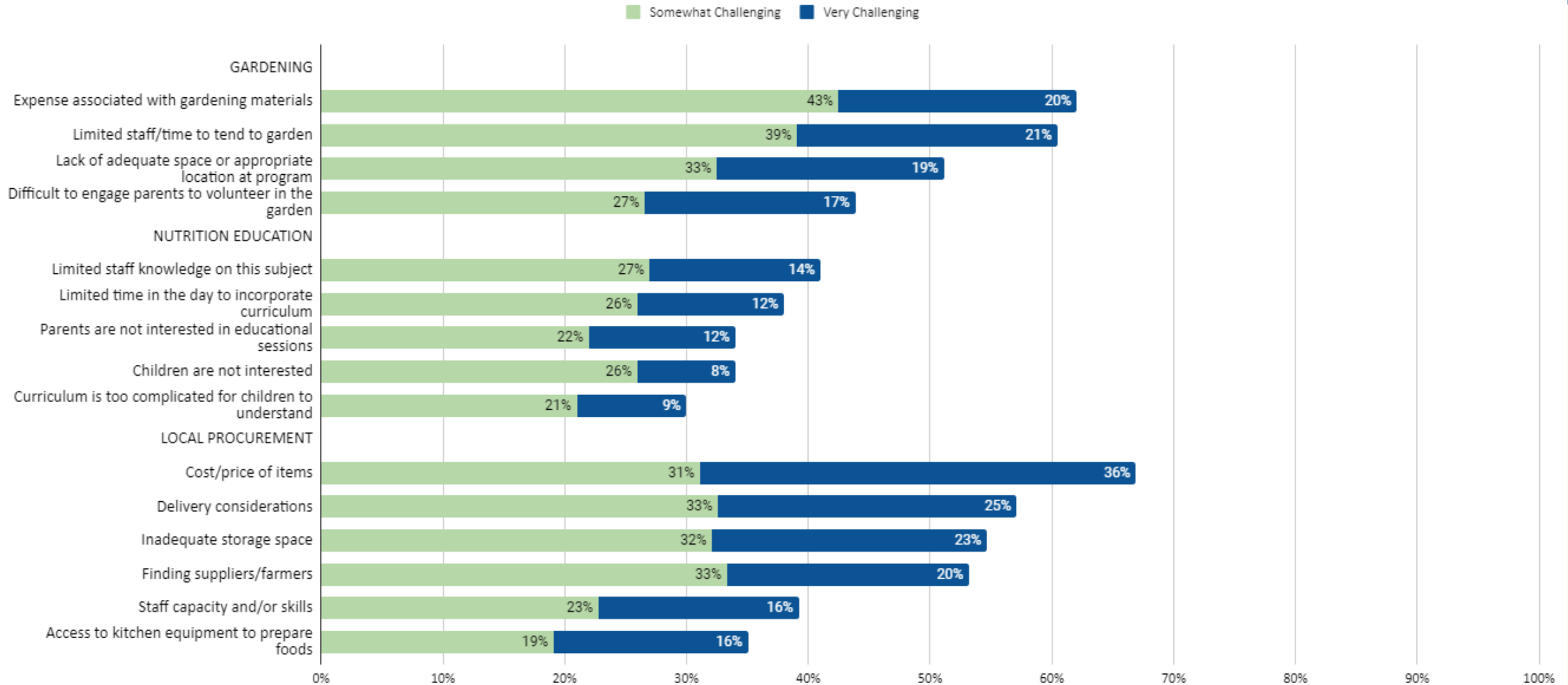
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# Overall Results: Benefits

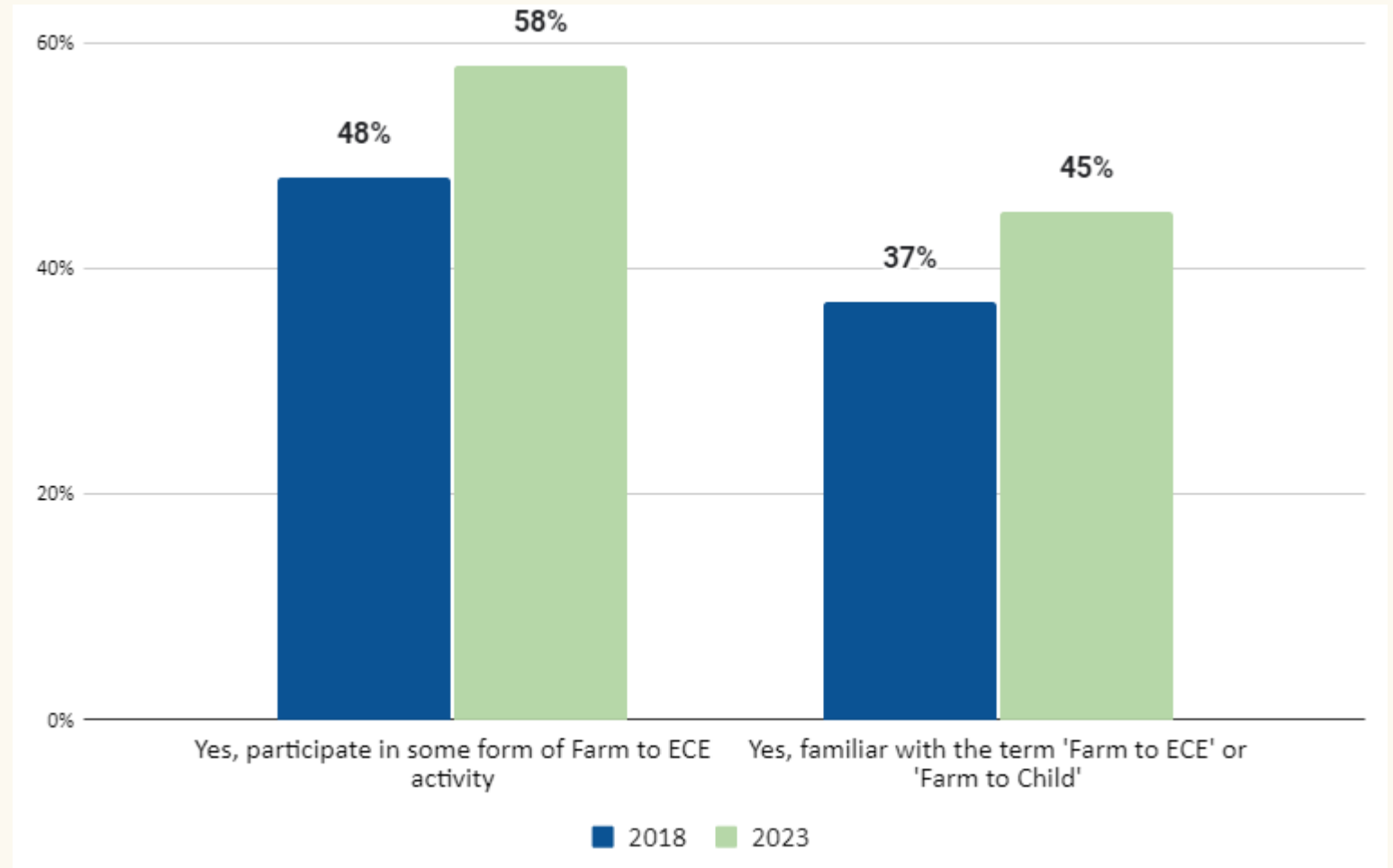


# Overall Results: Challenges



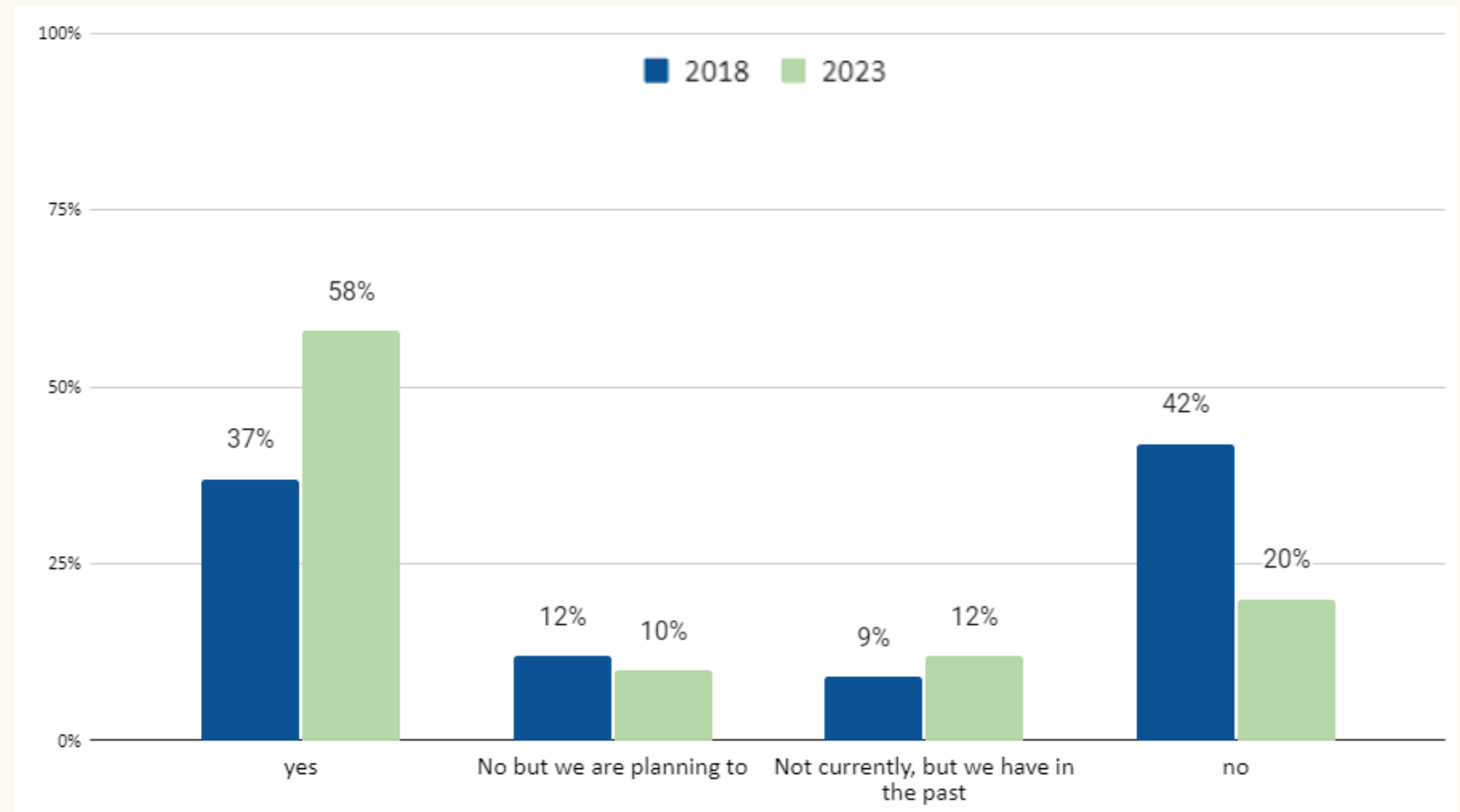
# Longitudinal Results

- Overall participation in Farm to ECE and familiarity with the term increased over the 5-year period



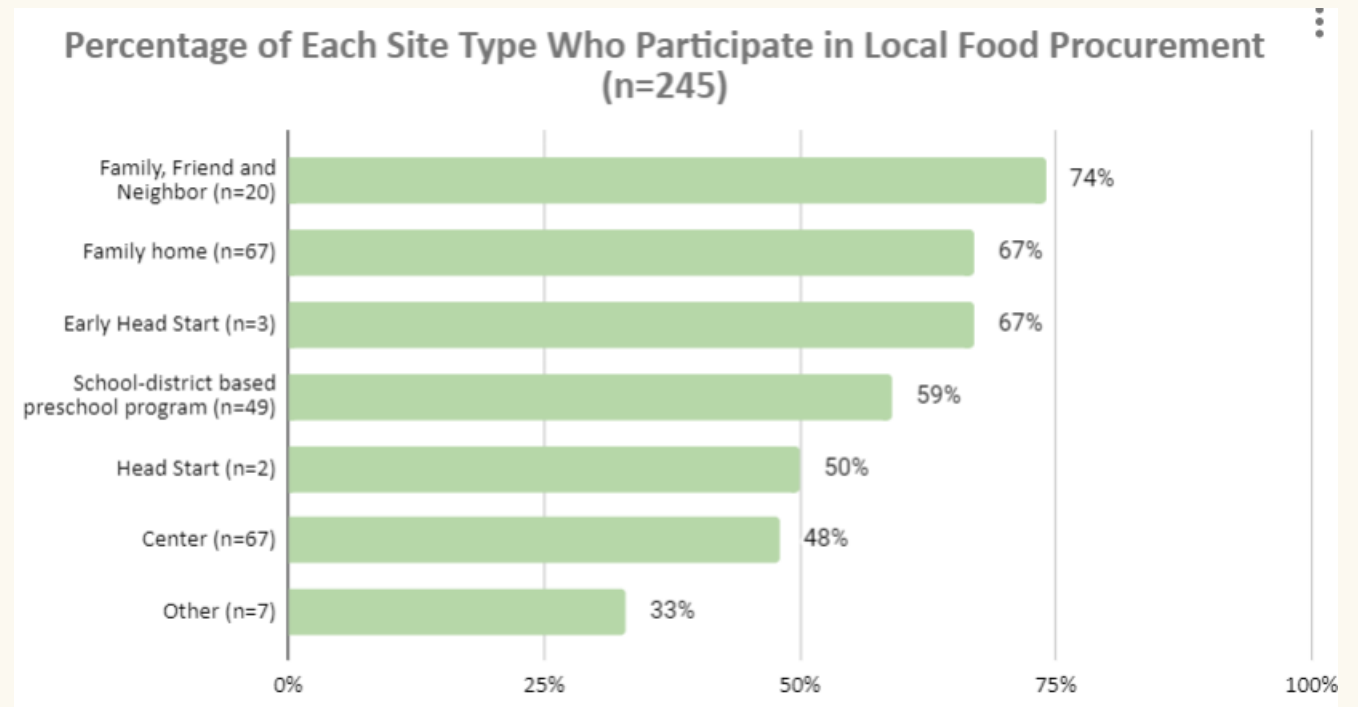
# Longitudinal Results

- Participation in local food purchasing increased significantly (37-58%) from 2018-2023!



# Cross-Sectional Results

- Able to see differences in participation in specific activities by type of site
- Family, friend and neighbor care, and Family homes purchase local food at the highest rates



# Utilizing Baseline Key Findings

- Understand general landscape of Farm to ECE in Colorado
- Demonstrate interest as well as need for grant applications and funding requests
  - 48% participated in some type of farm to ECE activity based on the definition
  - Only 37% did any kind of local food purchasing
- Resource development to focus on most needed materials and/or opportunities

# Utilizing Follow-Up Key Findings (Internal)

- Progress over time; demonstrate momentum and success
  - 45% increase in survey response rate
  - Increased participation overall
  - Increased participation in local food purchasing
- Guide future work and resources
  - Maintain existing resources that are widely used
  - Focus on promoting resources that are less recognized
  - Develop new resources based on needs

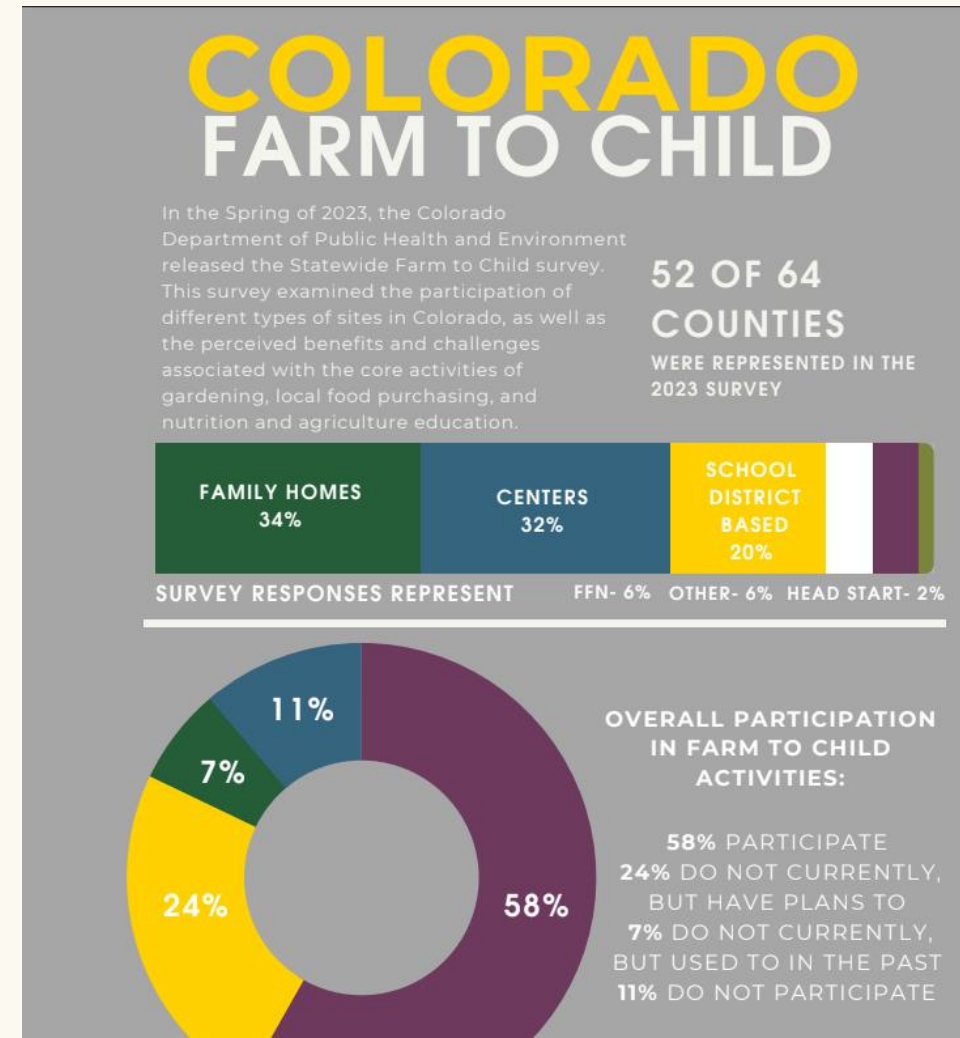
# Utilizing Key Findings (External)

- Data privacy was high consideration
  - If details could identify a specific site, suppressed data if sharing the raw data files with partners
- Levels of data summaries tailored to different audiences
- Encouraged partners to utilize data
  - Sites can showcase state-level data in combination with personal stories and experiences to demonstrate momentum and impact

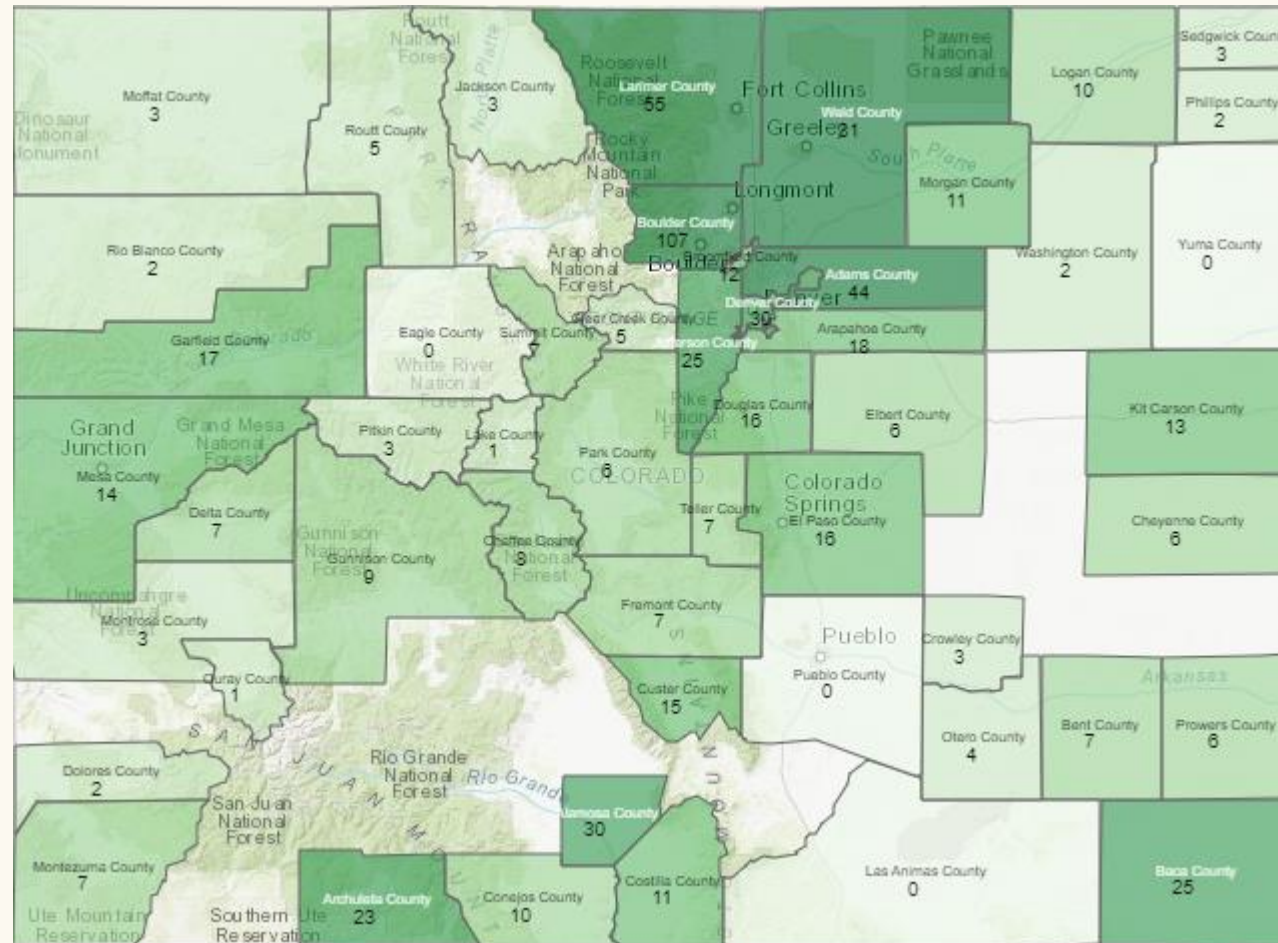
# Utilizing Key Findings (External)



Slide Deck, Recorded Webinar and Infographic



# Utilizing Key Findings (External)



Map

# Overall Challenges

- Convenience sample
- Anonymity makes it harder to directly track over time
- Lower interest in follow-up after reaching out



# Overall Successes

- Close to 500 sites responded to the complete survey in 2023
  - Increased interest
  - Not too long
- Representation from around the state (52/64 counties)
- Representation from a variety of site types, sizes
- Longitudinal metrics
- Future surveys



# Resources

- ASPHN Resources
- [Farm to ECE Survey journal article](#)
- [Colorado Farm to Child Website](#)