

# Results of the First Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey



## What Is Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education?

Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) works to build and sustain healthy, empowered communities through meaningful connections and relationships across and within ECE, food system, and supporting partners. Farm to Early Care and Education offers increased access to local foods, gardening, hands-on learning, and family engagement opportunities to children, families and providers in the early care setting. These activities support the health and educational experience of children aged 0-5 in all types of ECE settings including preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, and 4K programs in K-12 school districts. Farm to ECE promotes quality education through four main types of activities, including:

- Cultivating and tending to gardens,
- Buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals and snacks,
- Facilitating hands-on learning and play in nutrition, food, and agriculture, and
- Engaging families in health and wellness.

The Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Work Group aims to ensure ECE providers and families with young children have access to local foods and to resources to help every child develop lifelong healthy eating habits and that Wisconsin producers have a viable market for their product through collaboration with early childhood and farm to school practitioners. Learn more about Wisconsin Farm to ECE at <http://dpi.wi.gov/community-nutrition/cacfp/farm-2-ece>.

# Introduction to the Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey

In October 2017, the first Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey was conducted in the state. Developed by Community GroundWorks and supported by the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group, the goals of this survey were to:

- Establish baseline data for farm to ECE participation in the state
- Learn about existing farm to ECE activities taking place at sites across the state
- Assess challenges and successes in starting and implementing farm to ECE activities
- Determine trainings, resources, and networking tools to help providers start or grow farm to ECE activities, with a goal of making farm to ECE accessible to all children in Wisconsin.

This project was funded by the WK Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.

## Survey Methods

The inaugural Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey was based on the framework of the *2015 National Survey of Early Care and Education Providers: Local Procurement, Gardening, and Food and Farm Education* (National Farm to School Network, 2015), and was structured to collect specific information in the four focus areas of Wisconsin Farm to ECE: gardens; finding, buying, and preparing local foods; curriculum and experiential education; and family and caregiver engagement. Additional questions were added to the finding, buying, and preparing local foods section of the Wisconsin survey to determine the specific purchasing practices, sources, and needs of Wisconsin early care sites.

The survey was disseminated via email through various channels in Wisconsin, including the ten offices of Wisconsin's Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, the Wisconsin Farm to School and Farm to ECE Newsletter, the YoungStar listserv, and the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group. The survey was open during the month of October 2017, and cross promoted with National Farm to School Month. To incentivize participation, respondents who completed the survey were eligible to receive \$50 in Organic Valley product vouchers.

## Summary of Survey Findings

### Survey Responses & Demographic Information

This Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Provider Survey summary includes results from 324 qualified respondents. Data from duplicate and partial responses was removed, as were responses from entities that did not meet the criteria of an early care and education site.

Responses were received from across the state, with representation from 57 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Providers reported similar levels of services to suburban (44%), rural (42%), and urban (41%) populations, with only 3% of providers indicating service to tribal populations.

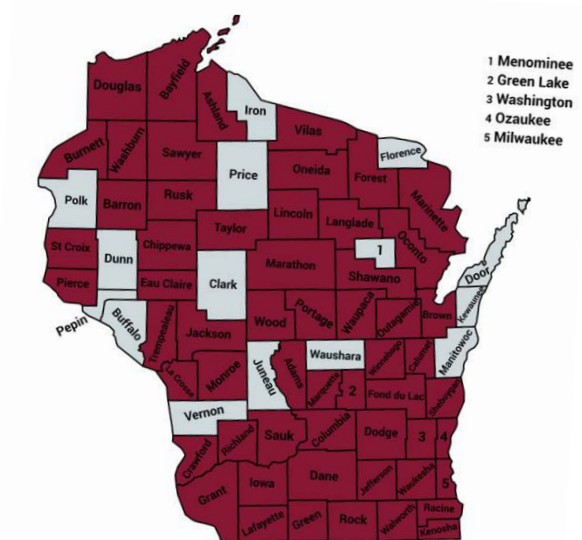
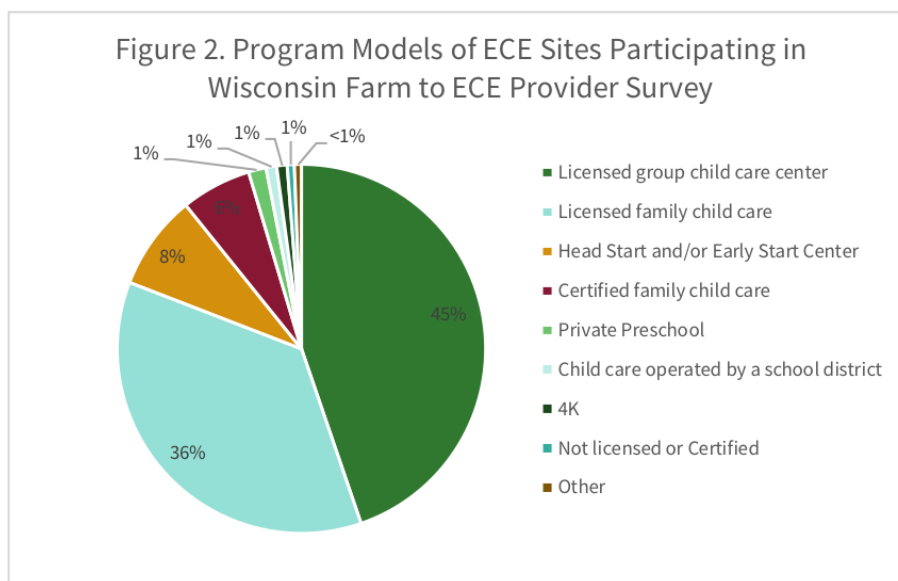
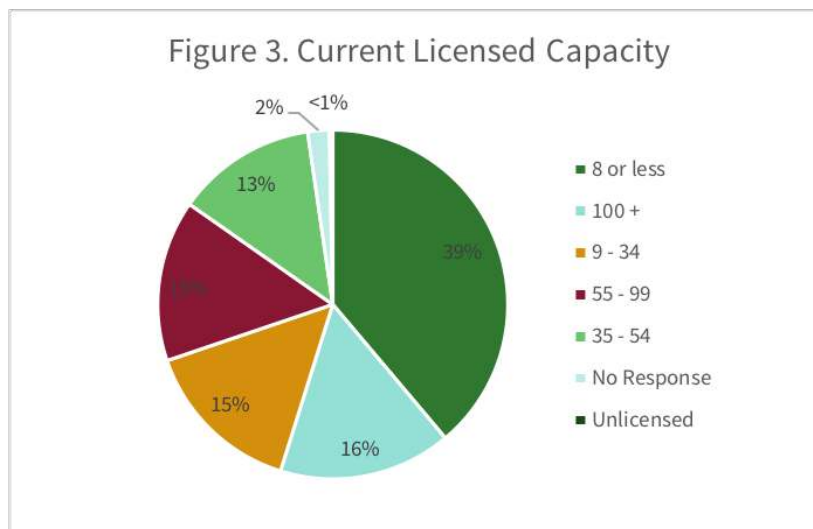


Figure 1. Map of Participation by County

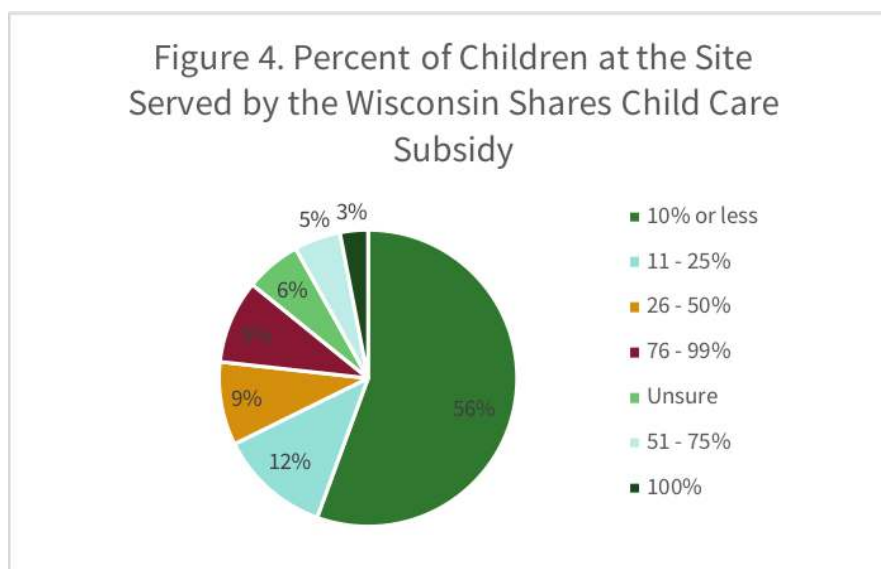
Survey responses were received from a wide range of sites and centers representing different program models. Licensed group child care centers (44%) and licensed family child care centers (36%) represent the largest groups of respondents. Head Start and/or Early Start Centers (8%), Certified family child care (6%), private preschools (2%), 4K sites (<1%), and child care operated by a school district (<1%) were also represented in the survey results. Less than 1% of respondents self-reported their sites as in the process of licensure or certification, or not licensed or certified.



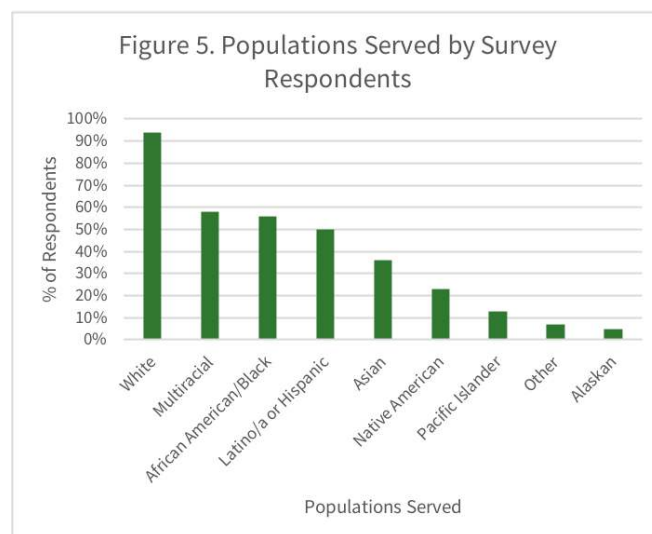
Licensed capacity and average daily attendance data were collected as a proxy for site size and capacity. Based on enrollment data provided by survey respondents, an average total of 12,179 Wisconsin children are served each day by the ECE sites represented in this survey. A summary of licensed capacity numbers is seen in Figure 3 below.



Use of the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program by families enrolled in care was used as a proxy to determine provider service to low-income and underserved populations throughout the state. Providers were asked what percentage of children they serve use Wisconsin Shares to access services at their center. Forty providers (12%) reported between 76-100% of children at their sites use Wisconsin Shares. On the other end of the spectrum, just over half of respondents indicated that 10% or fewer of the children at their sites use Wisconsin Shares. Six percent of respondents (19 sites) did not know the number of children accessing services through Wisconsin Shares.



Wisconsin Farm to ECE aims to promote racial and social equity and ensure all Wisconsin's children have access to high quality education and nutritious foods. Survey respondents were asked the populations served by their programs. Some providers indicated they do not collect this information from families. Multiple providers included comments indicating they are open and inclusive of serving all races, but currently only have white children enrolled at this time.



The survey included questions about participation in federal nutrition programs, quality rating improvement systems, and program accreditation. Over half of respondents (67%) indicate participation in the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), commonly referred to as the “Food Program” by Wisconsin providers. The majority of respondents (81%) report participating in YoungStar, Wisconsin’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, or another QRIS program, and 31% of respondents indicate accreditation through a national, local (City of Madison), or other program.

## Participation in Farm to ECE Activities

*What is Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education?*

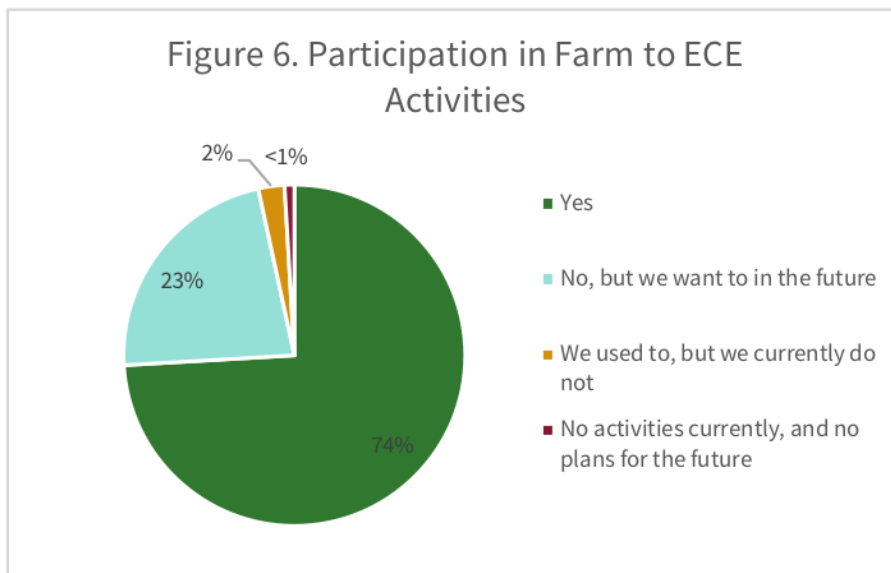
*Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education (WI Farm to ECE) increases access to local foods and enhances the quality of education in all ECE settings through a variety of activities including:*

- *Building on-site gardens,*
- *Buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals and snacks,*
- *Facilitating hands-on learning and play in food, nutrition, and agriculture, and*
- *Engaging families in health and wellness.*

One of the main functions of the survey was to determine how many ECE sites in Wisconsin currently engage in farm to ECE activities, or are interested in doing so. Survey respondents were provided with the above definition of Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education and asked if they participate in farm to ECE activities. The majority of survey respondents (240 / 74%) indicated they do engage in some form of farm to ECE. Seventy-three respondents (23%) indicate they do not currently conduct farm to ECE activities, but want to in the future.

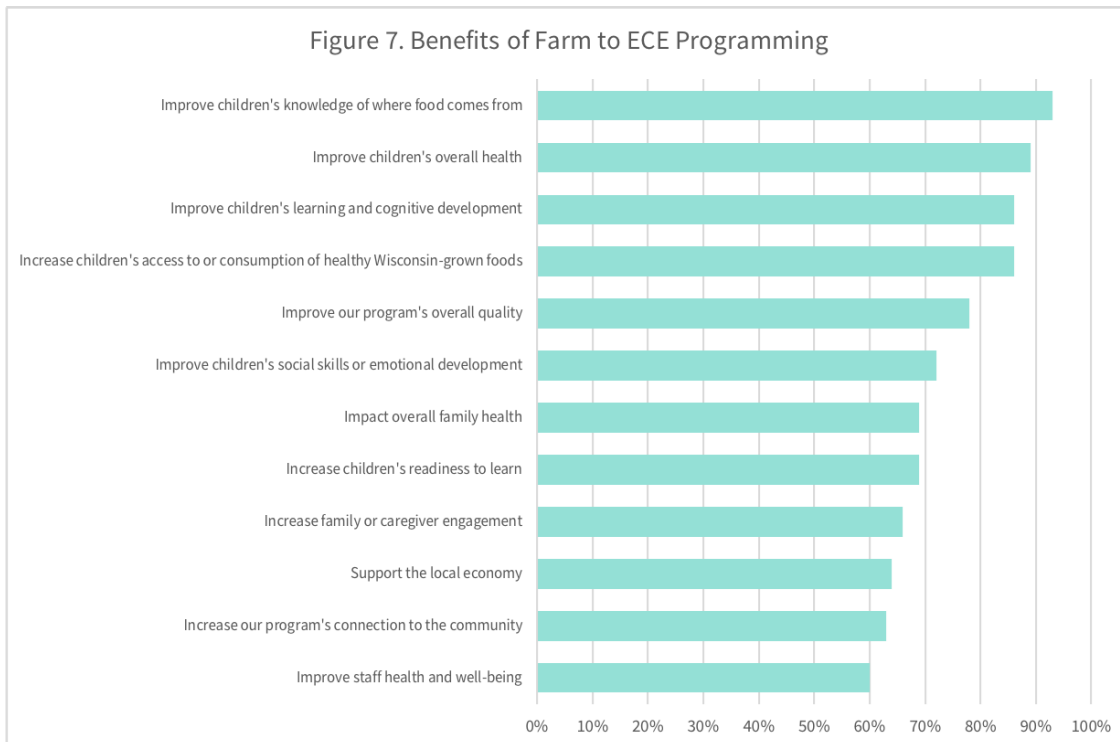
Very small percentages of respondents indicated they used to conduct farm to ECE activities, but no longer do or currently conduct no activities and do not plan to in the future.

There is an important note about the 23% of respondents who indicated they do not currently engage in farm to ECE activities, but want to in the future. Responses to open-ended survey responses by this cohort indicate some in this group already engage in some sort of farm to ECE activity (established gardens, local food education, taste tests, etc.), but do not yet formally recognize these activities as ‘farm to ECE’.

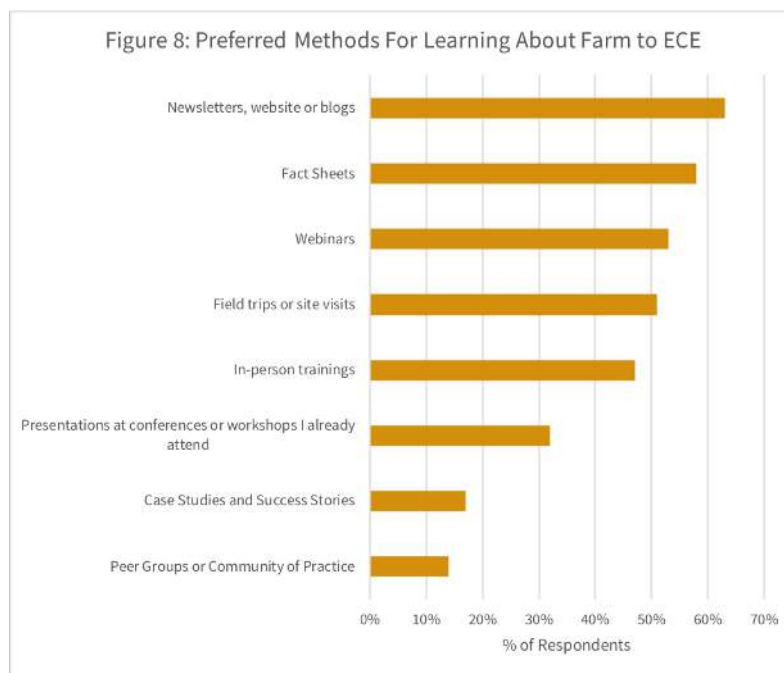


All survey participants, regardless of farm to ECE participation, were asked to identify the benefits of farm to ECE activities. The four top benefits selected relate specifically to child outcomes of farm to ECE, and include: improving child knowledge of where food comes from (93%); improving children’s overall health (89%); increasing children’s access to or consumption of healthy, Wisconsin-grown foods (86%); and improvement of children’s learning and cognitive development (86%). Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicate the ability of farm to ECE activities to improve the overall quality of their ECE site or center. All benefits can be seen below in Figure 7. Other benefits of farm to ECE provided by respondents include:

- Improving awareness of the agriculture industry
- Demonstrating farm to ECE activities to future educators
- Exposing children to a bigger world outside of their experience
- Increasing child self-confidence and ability to grow their own food
- Exposing children and parents to fresh local foods for the first time.



All survey respondents were asked their preferred method for learning more about farm to ECE activities. This question was included to help the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group and partners understand which training vehicles can be most effective for reaching current and future farm to ECE practitioners in the state. The top three responses represent print and electronic resources that can be disseminated in person or electronically, and are accessible to providers at any time, including: newsletters, websites or blogs (63%); fact sheets (58%); and webinars (when archived) (53%).



These responses confirm that ECE providers have limited time for professional development during the work day, and seek resources that can be accessed on a convenient schedule. Additional feedback for making trainings accessible to ECE providers include:

- Provide training location within a 1-hour drive of providers
- Archive webinars online to make them accessible at any time
- National provider groups and online peer-to-peer groups are useful for sharing stories, ideas, pictures, and recipes among providers.

The remainder of the report is divided into responses from participants engaged in farm to ECE, interested in future farm to ECE efforts, those who have conducted farm to ECE in the past but currently do not, and those with no interest in farm to ECE.

## Results from ECE Providers Engaging in Farm to ECE Activities

*“We have 7 raised garden beds in our play yards. We had community members donate, build, and assist with them. Staff and children plant and tend garden plots. We are not 100% successful with our crops, however we have 100% of fun working together and eating what does grow!”* - Licensed Group Child Care Center

240 of the 324 survey respondents (74%) indicated they engage in farm to ECE activities, and are labeled ‘farm to ECE practitioners’. These farm to ECE practitioners represent ECE sites in 51 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties, and serve a minimum 9,593 children based on reported average daily attendance.

More than half (64%) of farm to ECE practitioners in the survey have engaged in farm to ECE activities for more than three years.

Figure 10. Years Participating in Farm to ECE Activities

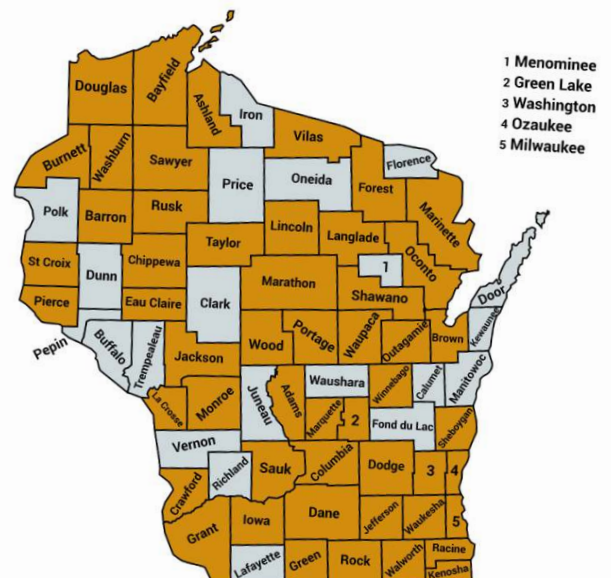
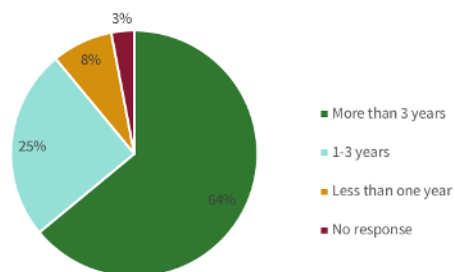


Figure 9: Farm to ECE Participation by County

Between the duration and broad geography of farm to ECE participation, this indicates a strong foundation of farm to ECE in Wisconsin.

Farm to ECE practitioners were asked a series of detailed questions about their farm to ECE activities, barriers, and needed resources.

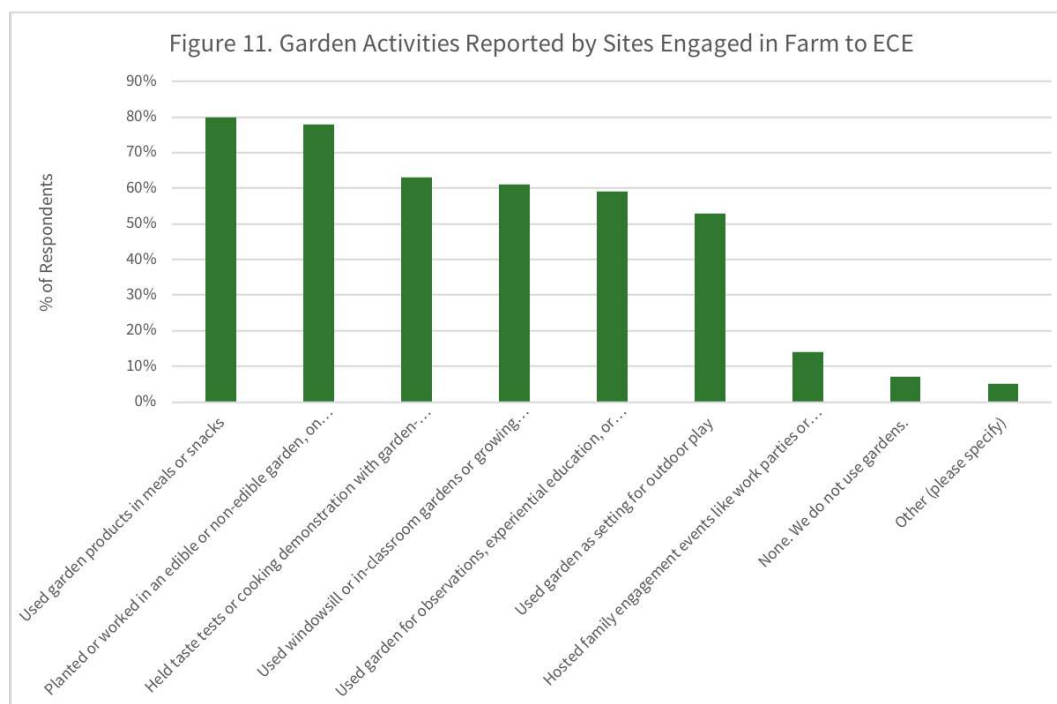
The responses are outlined below, and are divided among the four different farm to ECE activity areas: gardens; finding, buying, and serving local foods; curriculum and experiential education; and family and caregiver engagement.

## Use of Gardens in the ECE Setting

*“We have been maintaining several gardens at our preschool over the years. They include a vegetable, flower, pizza, herb, sensory rock-wall and fairy gardens. The children and staff enjoy them all and we are always interested in new ideas to share with our children out in nature.”* -Private Preschool

Gardens are a favorite farm to ECE activity as they offer a setting for hands-on nutrition education, experiential education, access to fresh produce, and opportunities for family engagement. Whether on a window sill in the classroom or in a raised bed outside, gardens help shape the nutrition environment of early care and education sites around Wisconsin. Even better, fruits and veggies from the garden are great for use in meals and snacks too.

Farm to ECE practitioners were asked four questions specific to gardens in the ECE setting. The purpose of these questions was to assess the specific garden activities used by practitioners, the challenges and barriers faced in using gardens, and needed resources to help implement more gardens in the future.

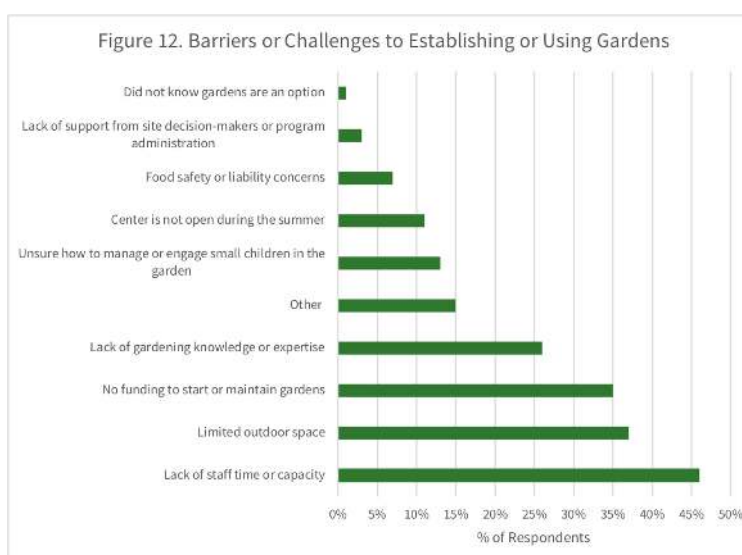


As indicated by the chart above, farm to ECE practitioners engaged in a wide variety of

garden-related activities. Farm to ECE gardens include edible plants like vegetables, herbs, and perennial fruits, as well as and non-edible plants. The most implemented activities are using garden-grown products in meals or snacks (80%), implementing edible or non-edible gardens (78%), and using garden-grown foods for taste tests or cooking demonstrations (63%). Other uses for gardens reported in the survey include: sharing garden food with families and the community, sending ‘pizza garden’ starts home with families, and engaging community partners in fundraising and establishment of gardens.

Responses to the garden-specific question, and provided by farm to ECE practitioners throughout the survey, indicate that farm to ECE activities do not always fall cleanly within one category or ‘bucket’. For example, practitioners list reading books about gardening, belonging to a CSA, attending a farmers’ market, and including garden props in dramatic play as ‘gardening activities’.

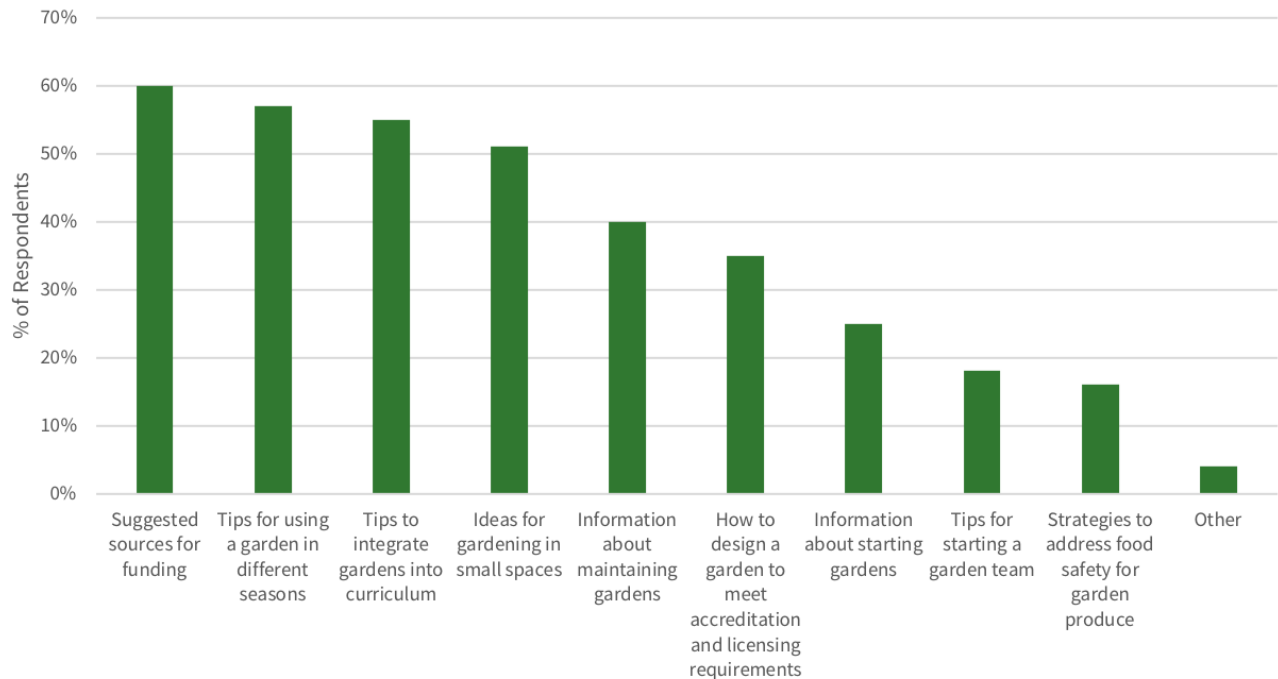
Farm to ECE practitioners were asked about the barriers and challenges they experienced when establishing or using gardens in the ECE setting. The primary barrier reported was a lack of staff time or capacity for starting or implementing gardens (46%). Limited outdoor space (37%) and limited funding for starting or maintaining gardens (35%) were also commonly reported barriers to using gardens.



Other reported barriers include: lack of staff interest and knowledge; challenges with pests and wildlife in the garden; challenges in maintaining the garden; weather and seasonality; engaging infants in the garden; soil quality; using garden produce; and engaging children in the garden.

Farm to ECE practitioners indicated a wide variety of resources, trainings, and support to help implement garden activities in the future. Resources that address funding (60%), gardening in different seasons (57%), integrating gardens into curriculum (55%), and gardening in small spaces (51%) were most highly ranked. Other resources suggested by respondents included: how to use the garden harvest and tips for indoor gardening.

Figure 13: Training Resources Needed For Farm to ECE Gardens



Farm to ECE practitioners were offered the opportunity to share additional information about garden activities, challenges, and remaining garden inquiries through an open-ended survey question. There were 61 responses to this open-ended question. The following themes emerged, and are listed in order of frequency:

**Skills and Training:** *“Our biggest challenge is we had a gardener as a teacher. She left, and the rest of the staff have no idea what we are doing. We have two gardens, but they have not yielded many crops. What we have grown the children loved!!”*

**Funding:** *“I was awarded a wonderful grant in 2016 and was able to have 10 raised 2 x 4 garden beds made specifically for my daycare. They are just wonderful. The children really take a lot of pride in the produce and a few beneficial flowers that they help grow and tend...I make sure I have kid-sized garden gloves and tools...but there is so much more I wish I could do, and funds are always needed for other things too. I hope there will be more future opportunities to help daycares to expand our kids’ gardens.”*

**Pests:** *“The children seem more eager to try new foods that they grow themselves! We love it but have noticed that it increases the amount of rabbits and critters that enter inside or near the children’s play areas. I also think that as a family owned and operated group center, we could benefit from grants and funding tips so we can make our garden areas bigger and better!”*

**Time:** *“I would say the biggest barrier is the ability to maintain the garden. Everyone is so stretched for time that I am not sure we could sustain a garden.”*

**Family Engagement:** *“The biggest challenge we face is getting families to take home and eat the foods we grow at our center.”*

42 of the open-ended responses were comments in favor of gardens, sharing garden anecdotes, listing helpful resources, or providing additional information.

Examples include:

- *We host a little farmers market for families to take our grown items and explore them as a family to help bring the process full circle.*
- *We have had gardens for a few years and this past year we actually included the seniors in the building we are located in. We are in a senior living complex. We had a "garden club" with them.*
- *We have been maintaining several gardens at our preschool over the years. They include a vegetable, flower, pizza, herb, sensory rock-wall and fairy gardens. The children and staff enjoy them all and we are always interested in new ideas to share with our children out in nature.*
- *We have always served organic vegetables from membership in an area CSA program. We also plant a garden and use all home grown vegetables from area farmers, including beef and pork. This is not new to us, it has been our practice for 15+ years.*
- *We do food experience in my class, so we try to do a fruit or vegetable a week so the kids try all the different fruits and vegetable. In summer time we plant with the kids inside the class or outside.*
- *Be sure to reserve a separate space for toddlers to continue digging and planting in newly planted garden space. Give toddlers large seeds for planting such as corn, beans, sunflower seeds, even seashells or pebbles in a practice area.*
- *The kids love it they will eat stuff right out of the garden and love to pick things all by themselves*
- *This year we made coleslaw with the kids, ate spaghetti squash, and did grape stomping! We are so excited to continue this adventure!*

## Use of Locally-Grown Foods in the ECE Setting

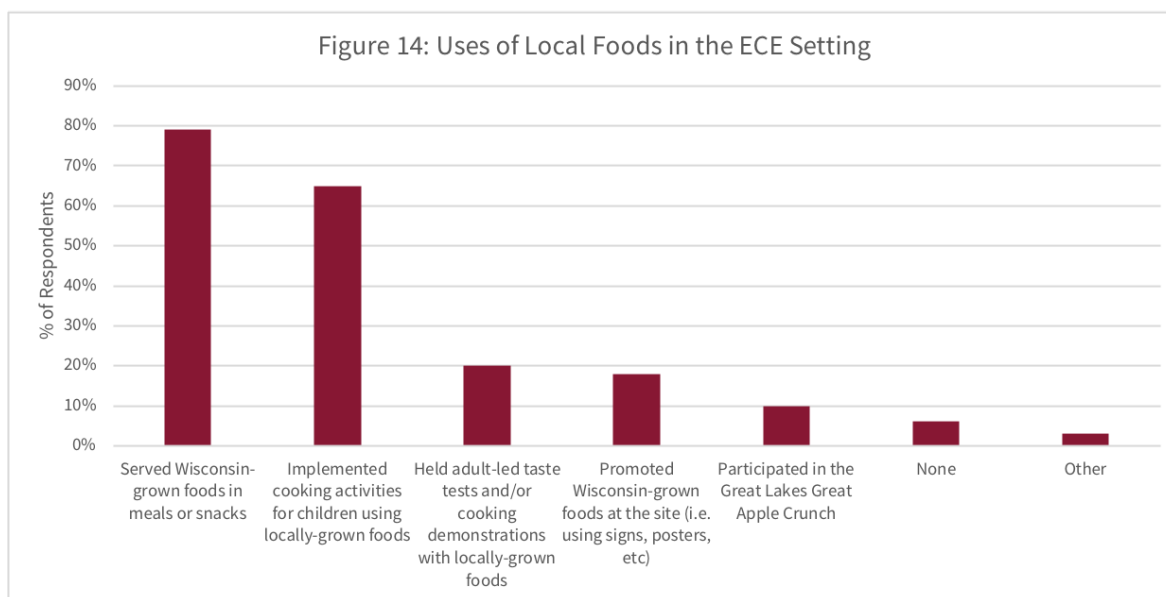
*“We have always served organic vegetables from membership in an area CSA program. We also plant a garden and use all home grown vegetables from area farmers, including beef and pork. This is not new to us, it has been our practice for 15+ years.”* -Licensed Group Child Care Center

Buying, preparing, and serving local foods in meals, snacks, and taste tests is a core farm to ECE activity. Early care sites have the opportunity to fill meals and snacks with a wide variety of Wisconsin-grown fruits, vegetables, dairy products, proteins, and whole grains to benefit child health and support Wisconsin’s farmers. Local foods can be purchased in a wide variety

of ways, like from local farmers, farm stands, farmers' markets, grocery stores, through distributors, or a weekly produce box through a Community Supported Agriculture share. Even if meals and snacks are not an option, sites can engage children in seasonal food taste tests, a great way for children to try new foods.

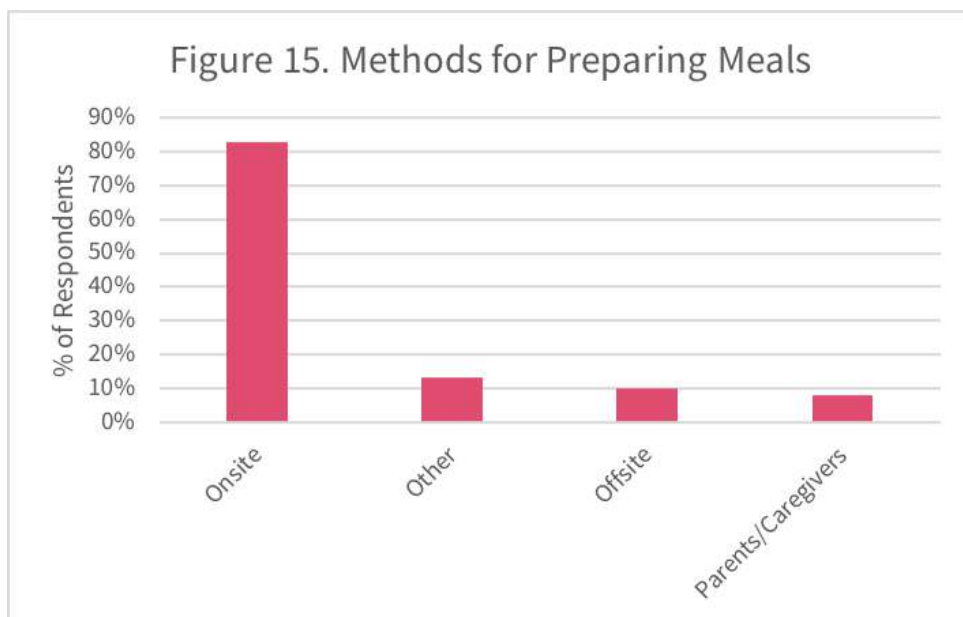
The 240 Farm to ECE practitioners who are engaged in farm to ECE activities were asked about practices for finding, buying, preparing, and serving Wisconsin-grown foods at ECE sites. In this survey, the terms Wisconsin-grown food and local food refer to all foods grown and processed in Wisconsin. For ECE sites on a state border, local foods may also include foods grown nearby in neighboring states. This survey inquired deeply about the methods for purchasing and preparing all foods and dairy products at ECE sites, including local foods, to better understand these food service environments and provide support for incorporating local foods.

Of those engaged in farm to ECE, serving Wisconsin-grown foods in meals or snacks (79%) and implementing cooking activities using local foods (65%) were the primary method farm to ECE practitioners engaged with local foods. Taste tests, cooking demonstrations, local food promotion, and the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch were additional practices for utilizing Wisconsin-grown foods. Additional responses included by providers included: Harvest of the Month, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and cooking classes with parents and caregivers.



Farm to ECE practitioners were asked a series of questions about food purchasing and preparation practices. Food purchasing and preparation varies among ECE sites, and depends on the program, facilities, partnerships and policies of each center.

Preparation of meals and snacks primarily takes place onsite at the ECE center, with 10% of respondents reporting food preparation takes place “offsite”. In some cases, meals and snacks are prepared at multiple locations, and 8% of respondents report that parents or caregivers are responsible for providing meals or snacks<sup>1</sup>. Less than 1% of sites report no meals or snacks are provided.



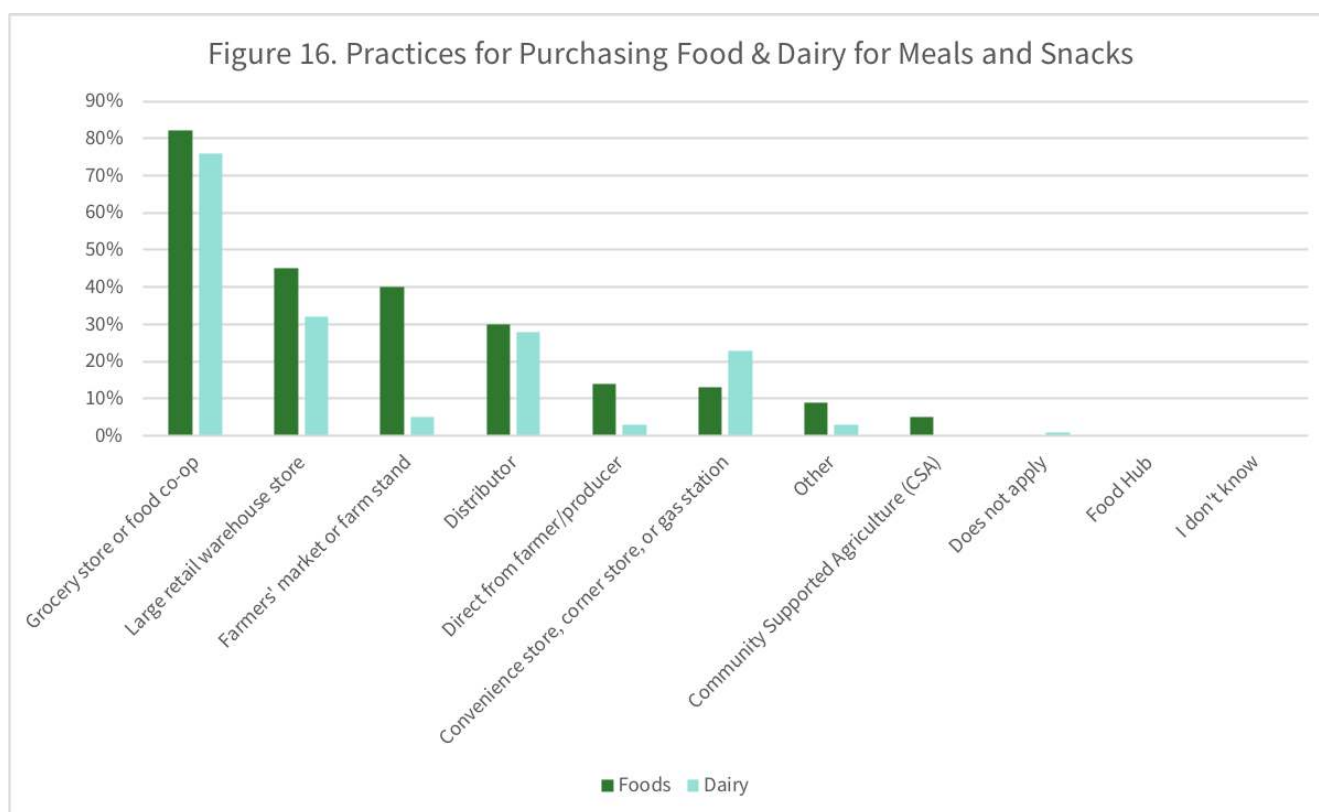
For meals prepared onsite (n=196), 92% were prepared using “scratch or fresh cooking” practices and 28% were prepared using “heat-and-serve” practices featuring “mostly pre-packaged and/or pre-cooked” foods. 8% of respondents indicated “other” practices which including a mix of fresh cooking and pre-prepared foods, or some meals or snacks are brought from home. Responses indicate that food preparation methods depend on the food item (i.e.: “*Some items like bread/ biscuits are baked*”), meal, snack, or season (i.e.: “*Mostly fresh, depending on the season*”).

Meals prepared offsite (n=24) include a variety of culinary arrangements. 38% of offsite meals were prepared by a food service kitchen within a site’s larger organization including by college food service at a central campus kitchen or by a hospital kitchen facility for an ECE site housed within a hospital. 17% of respondents indicated offsite meals were purchased from a caterer, and 13% indicated meals were prepared by a local school district. 46% of respondents indicated the “other” option for offsite meal preparation including: meals and/or snacks provided by: families, UW Extension, or listed the name of a private business or food catering service. It’s important to note this is a relatively small sample size.

Farm to ECE practitioners were asked about their practices for purchasing both food and dairy items for meals and snacks at their ECE sites. The question did not ask participants to

<sup>1</sup> Note: The survey tool only provided responses of “onsite”, “offsite”, “other”, and “I don’t know” for the questions about location of food preparation. Responses for “Parent/Caregiver” food preparation were tallied from open-ended responses added when respondents selected “other”. These responses include two categories: “Caregiver provides lunch, snack, or both” and “Caregiver provides lunch, but snacks and/or breakfast are provided on site”.

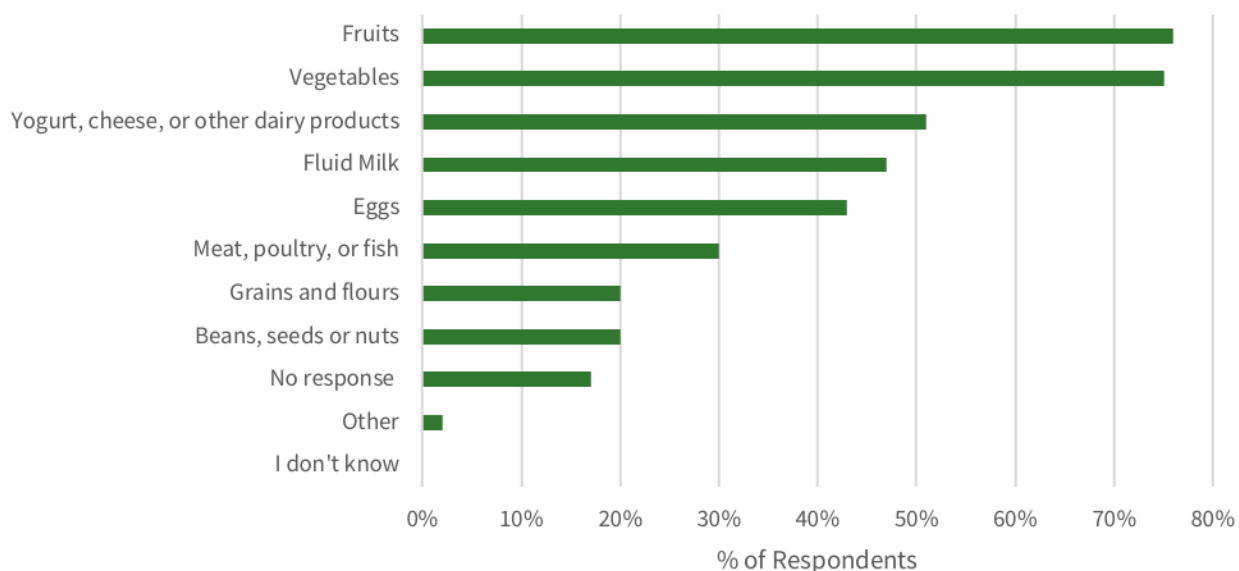
differentiate between purchases of local food items and non-local food items. Instead, this question sought to better understand the method of all food purchases. Grocery store or food co-op are the predominant purchase locations for foods (82%) and dairy items (76%) for meals and snacks, followed by large retail warehouse stores (45% food, 32% dairy). Indicators of local food purchasing include 40% of respondents purchasing food at a farmers' market or farm stand, 14% of respondents purchasing food direct from a farmer or producer, and 5% of respondents accessing foods through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Also of note, 23% of respondents reported purchasing fluid milk and dairy items at a convenience store, corner store, or gas station, while only 13% report purchasing food items at such locations. This may indicate a preference for convenient access to perishable dairy products, and an opportunity to increase purchases and consumption of Wisconsin-produced fluid milk. Lastly, respondents reported using distributors for 30% of food purchases and 28% of dairy product purchases. This demonstrates a significant difference between ECE and K-12 purchasing, in which K-12 schools/districts conduct the majority of purchases through broadline distributors and/or produce distributors.



For respondents selecting “Other”, purchasing practices include: (responses marked with a star\* were also reported for dairy purchases): gardens, purchasing conducted by institutional food service operation at larger umbrella organization\* (i.e.: hospital or university), parents/caregivers\*, food pantry or emergency food providers, catering providers\*, farmer donations, and Amazon.

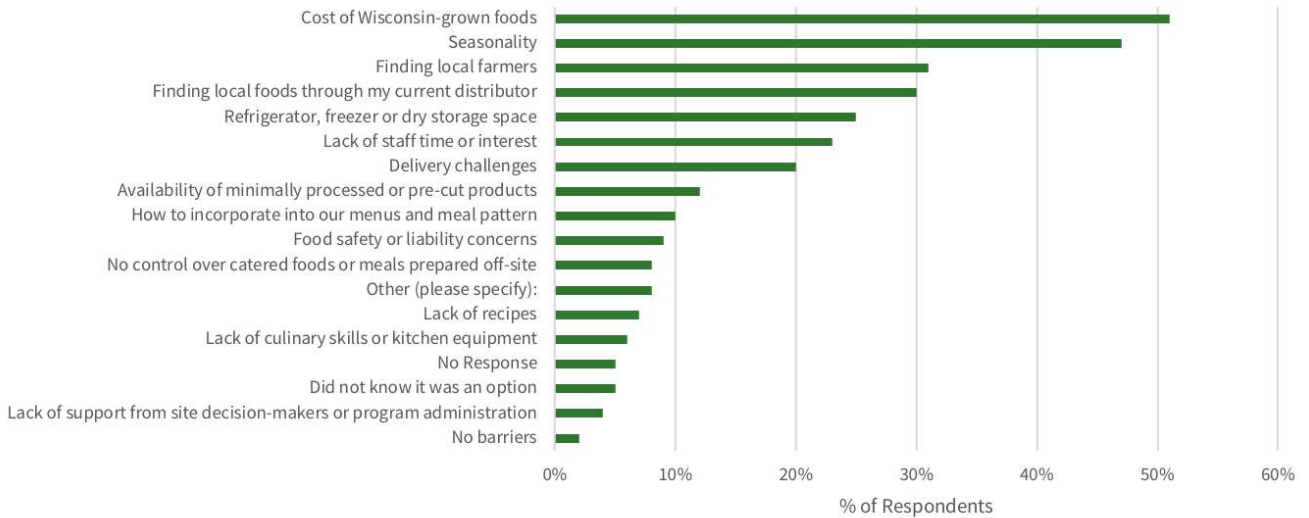
Farm to ECE practitioners were asked what specific locally-grown food items they purchase for use at sites. Providers were only asked about types of foods, and were not surveyed about frequency or spending levels. Survey responses indicate providers purchase a wide variety of locally-grown and processed food items for both meals or snacks at their sites. Fruits (76%) and vegetables (75%) were the top items, with additional usage of dairy products (51%), fluid milk (47%) and eggs (43%) ranking on top. Items listed as “other” include: canned foods (pickles, salsas, jams), raw-honey, maple syrup, or sorghum syrup.

Figure 17. Wisconsin-Grown Foods Used in ECE Meals or Snacks



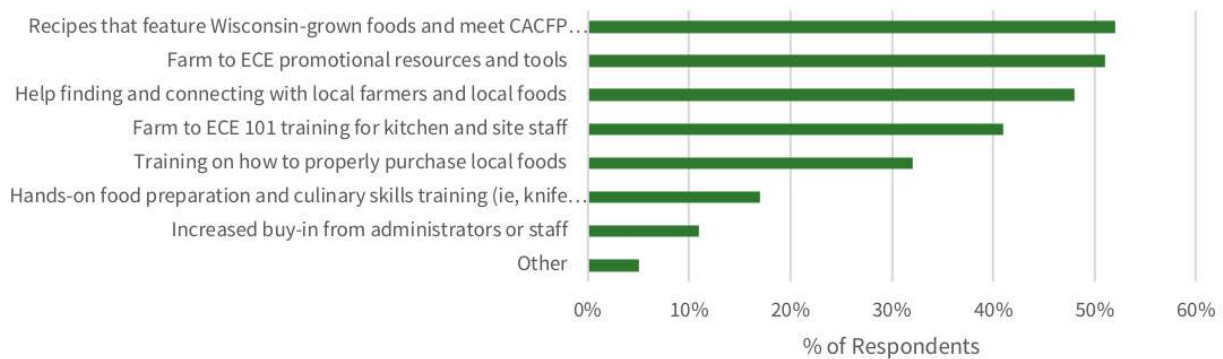
Farm to ECE practitioners were asked about the barriers they experience when finding, preparing, and using Wisconsin-grown foods, and resources that would most help them increase the use of local foods in the ECE setting. When asked to select their **top five** most significant barriers to accessing local foods, half (51%) of respondents indicated the cost of Wisconsin-grown foods as the biggest barrier. Almost half (47%) of respondents selected seasonality as a top barrier to using local foods at ECE sites. Sourcing local foods, including finding local farmers (31%) and finding local foods through a current distributor (30%) also posed significant challenges. Twenty respondents indicated “Other” challenges. These “other” barriers added by respondents included an inability to purchase outside of current contracts with vendors or caterers, and a lack of local foods offered at the places they currently shop. Specific challenges around staff time and capacity included: insufficient time to shop at different stores/locations to purchase locally-grown items, local food items not available within a reasonable distance from the ECE site, and limited time for meal preparation, especially in half-day programs.

Figure 18: Top Barriers to Locating, Purchasing, Preparing and Serving Local Foods in Meals and Snacks



Survey respondents were asked about trainings, resources, and tools most helpful in expanding or starting the use of Wisconsin-grown foods at their programs, which can be seen in Figure 19. The top three requested resources are recipes featuring Wisconsin-grown foods that meet the CACFP nutrition guidelines; farm to ECE promotional resources and tools; and assistance to find and connect with local farmers and local foods.

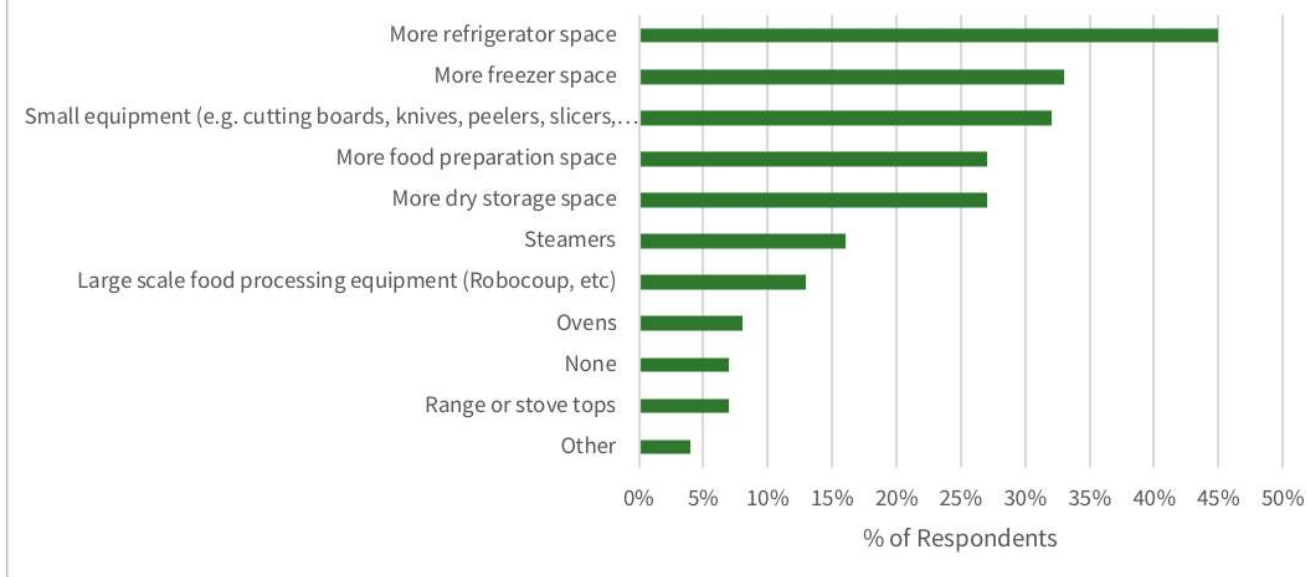
Figure 19: Trainings, Resources, and Support Needed to Increase the Use of Healthy Wisconsin-Grown Foods at ECE Sites



Providers also responded to a question about the kitchen facilities and culinary equipment upgrades most helpful to increase the use of local foods at ECE sites. Increases in kitchen space, including refrigerator, freezer, dry storage, and food preparation are in high demand, as is small equipment like cutting boards, knives, peelers, slicers, and food processors. Other kitchen and food preparation resources suggested include: staff and vehicles to transport food to multiple sites, equipment to keep cooked items warm in transit, outdoor wash sinks

for garden produce, child-sized kitchen equipment to engage children, more staff to support kitchen work, and increased opportunities to purchase from different vendors.

Figure 20: Kitchen Facilities and Equipment Needed to Increase the Use of Healthy Wisconsin-Grown Foods at ECE Sites



Providers were asked to share additional information about their activities, challenges or remaining questions about finding, buying, preparing, and serving Wisconsin-grown foods. There were 37 responses, with alignment around:

- **Cost** *“Unfortunately there is not enough money in child care to afford the necessary things, like staff wages, and then have money left over to spend on issue like healthier options. Some things are low on the ‘need’ list.”*
- **Contracts and Purchasing Relationships** *“The biggest challenge is that we do not prepare all our meals on site, so we do not have much say in what we get. We have been trying to incorporate more fresh fruits and veggies for our breakfast and snack, but unsure if locally grown as we purchase them from a vendor.”*
- **Time and capacity** *“I grocery shop at Woodman's. I often order my groceries online and pick them up. It's a big enough job (and expensive enough) as it is. I don't plan to shop around or drive to the farmers' market on the other side of town to find special foods. If I'm there, I'll buy it.”*
- **Limited access** *“We are extremely limited in options to purchase in our small town as we have only one grocery store.”*

**The remaining responses included success stories, advice, and additional challenges reported by ECE sites including:**

- *It is difficult to find fresh Wisconsin-grown foods in the winter.*

- *I like organic but sometimes it spoils quickly before I can use it. A handout about Wisconsin produce and how to preserve it for future use, while still meeting licensing guidelines, would be helpful.*
- *I buy our meat from local farmers and have it processed at our local butcher shop. I would love to do a CSA, but no local farm had a pick up point near us.*
- *Would like to receive information about local farmers' markets and local farmers who will offer low cost food options to family child care.*
- *I have a very tiny kitchen and from-scratch food prep is always a bit of a challenge.*
- *I'd love more information on how to get children involved safely with food prep.*
- *We get food from community garden, farmers' market, and grocery stores.*
- *I enjoy going to the farmers market.*
- *We lack nearby farms and purchasing options in rural northern Wisconsin.*
- *Mostly, we use WI grown that is grown in our own garden. Shopping takes so much time already, I don't add to it by doing farmers markets.*

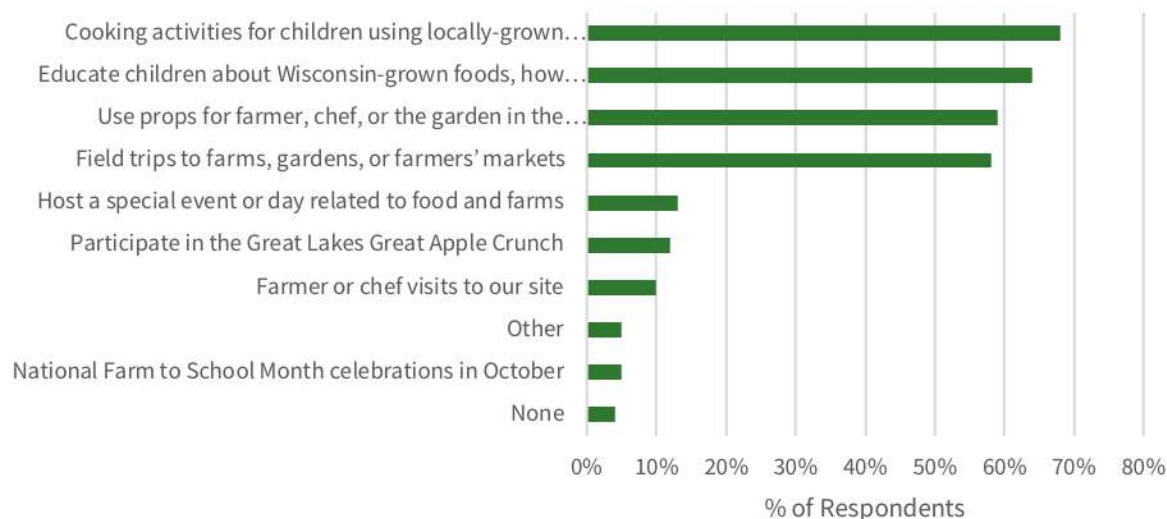
## Incorporating Farm to ECE to Curriculum and Experiential Education

***“Children can help in almost every aspect of ECE activities and love to participate and learn about new foods if you start doing these activities from infancy.”*** - Licensed Family Child Care

Farm to ECE offers abundant opportunities for hands-on learning in food, nutrition, and agriculture, and can be included in almost every part of a child's day. This includes teaching children about where food comes from and how it is grown through books, dramatic play, or song. It may also include field trips to farms, farmers' markets, or gardens outside of the early care site setting. The addition of cooking, gardening, or food-related items to a sensory table provides additional opportunities for learning. Farm to ECE offers children practice using gross motor skills through activities like pushing a wheelbarrow in the garden, or fine motor skills by using a magnifying glass to observe a seed sprout. Be it through use of a formal curriculum guide, lesson plans found on Pinterest, or impromptu seasonal experiments, there are a variety of ways to integrate farm to ECE into the learning day.

Respondents reported a wide range of farm to ECE activities including cooking activities for children using locally-grown foods (68%); educating children about Wisconsin-grown foods, how food grows, and where it comes from (64%); using props for farmers, chefs, or the garden in the dramatic play area (59%); and field trips to farms, gardens, or farmers' markets (58%). Additional activities listed by providers include: parent events with food samples of fresh, healthy choice foods; dietetic students teaching during spring semester at a technical college; setting up an apple orchard for mid-September activity area; and kids making a farmers' market stand for parents.

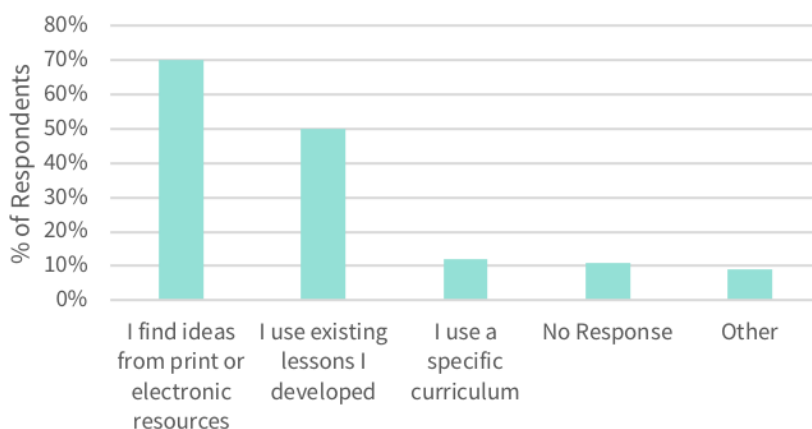
Figure 21: Farm to ECE Curriculum and Experiential Education Activities Implemented at ECE Sites



Preliminary, qualitative research in Wisconsin indicates providers seek out and use farm to ECE activities and lesson plans from a wide variety of informal and formal sources ranging from Pinterest pins, to USDA's Choose MyPlate, to YoungStar resources.<sup>2</sup> To better understand the resources and curricula providers use to prepare lessons and activities, the survey queried respondents about their practices. Respondents were able to choose multiple planning options.

Seventy percent of farm to ECE practitioners reported finding activity and lesson ideas from print or electronic resources like Pinterest, blogs, or websites. Half of respondents indicate developing their own lesson plans when implementing farm to ECE activities. Only 12% of farm to ECE practitioners report the use of a specific, formal curriculum. A list of

Figure 22: Resources Used to Plan Farm to ECE Activities



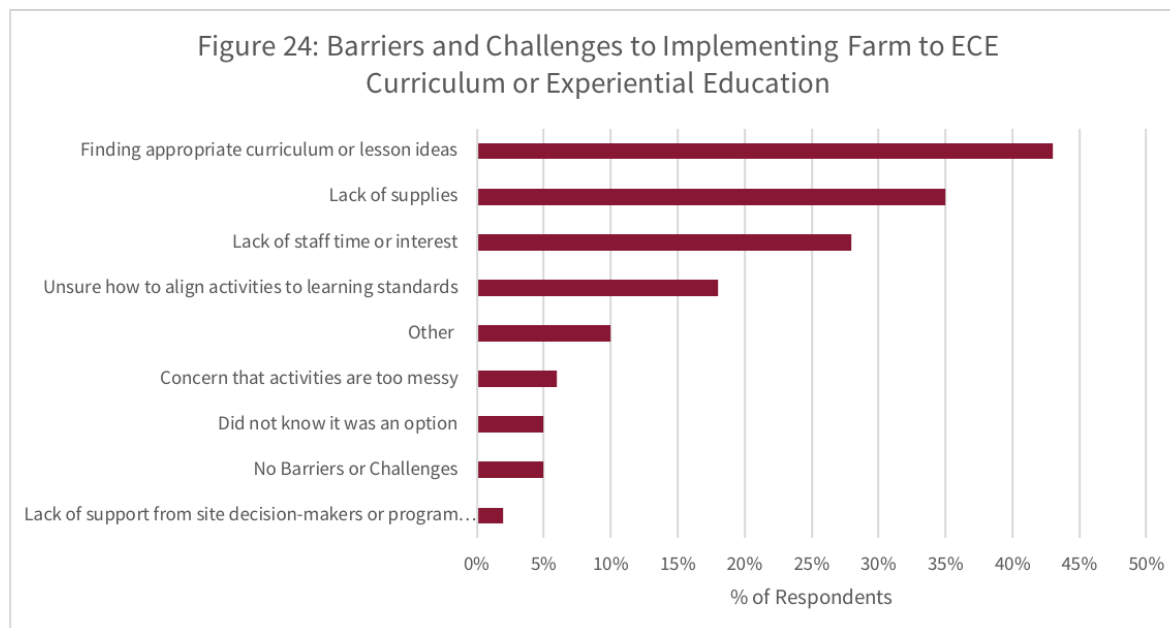
<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin Farm to ECE Interview Findings, Community GroundWorks, 2017.

reported curriculum relating to farm to ECE is in Figure 23 below<sup>3</sup>. Other resources used by practitioners include: CACFP, MyPlate, USDA, University of Wisconsin Extension, the library, and materials from workshops. Eleven percent of respondents (26) did not respond to the question.

Figure 23: Curricula Used by Farm to ECE Practitioners

Title of Curriculum	
Creative Curriculum	Garden Works Enrichment (Bright Horizons)
USDA Grow it, Try it, Like it!	Preschool Palace
Mother Goose Time Early Learning Curriculum	Gee Whiz Education
Funshine Express	Reggio Emilia Inspired Approach
KinderCare Education	The Portage Project
The Two Bite Club (USDA)	HighScope Curriculum
Appleton Area School District Birth-Five Curriculum	Nutritional Program (YoungStar)
Early Choices (Illinois)	DPI Supplied Curriculum

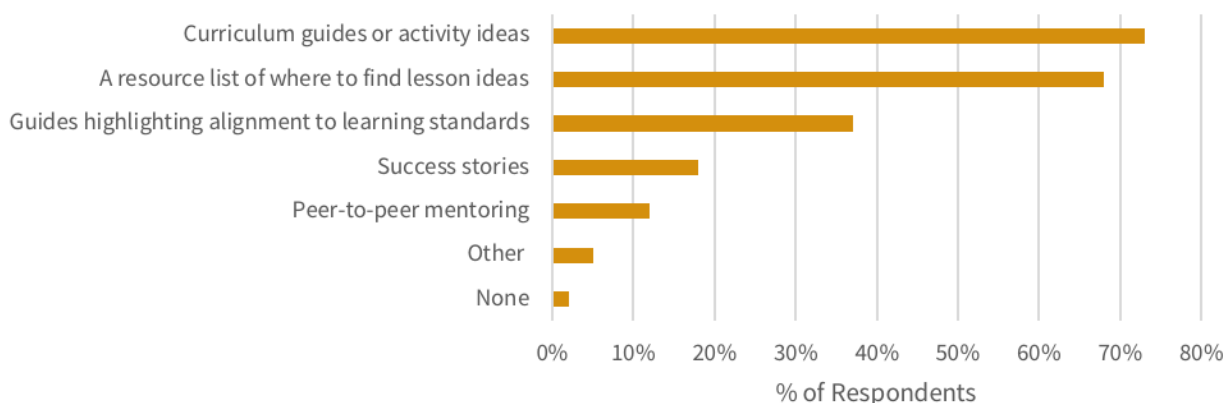
Practitioners were asked about the barriers and challenges experienced when incorporating farm to ECE activities into experiential education or curriculum. Finding appropriate curriculum or lesson ideas was the highest ranked challenge (43%), followed by a lack of supplies (35%), and lack of staff time or interest (28%). Participants also indicated lack of knowledge about aligning activities to learning standards (18%) and concerns that activities are too messy (6%) as barriers. 10% of respondents offered their own barriers and challenges including: cost of implementation/lack of funding, limited staff interest, engaging children of different ages, insufficient space, and limited ability to arrange field trips.



<sup>3</sup> Figure 23 includes only curricula materials inclusive of farm to ECE. Additional curricula listed by respondents and not specific to farm to ECE are not included in this table.

Survey respondents were asked about trainings, resources, and support that could help providers include more farm to ECE activities in their curriculum and experiential education activities. The top responses include curriculum guides or activity ideas (73%), a resource list outlining where to find lesson ideas (68%), and guides demonstrating alignment between farm to ECE activities and learning standards (37%). 5% of respondents suggested “other” helpful support like ideas for engaging children when there is limited cooking space; funding resources and grants; curriculum specific to infants and toddlers; tips for enacting activities on a budget, and online social media ‘groups’ for sharing ideas and encouragement.

Figure 25: Training Resources Needed to Support Farm to ECE Curriculum and Experiential Education



Respondents were provided space to share additional information about their activities, challenges, or remaining questions about incorporating farm to ECE activities into curriculum and experiential activities. There were 17 responses to this open-ended question. Four responses talked about curriculum materials, supply lists, and grant funding. The remaining responses include lessons learned, and implementation suggestions with an emphasis on garden activities. Examples include:

- *During the summer our school age group walked to the Farmer's Market, bought veggies and made smoothies and tried them.*
- *Child-led play and learning is the key. Activities and suggestions as the garden grows would be good.*
- *We include one food experience a week.*
- *Everybody thinks their topic is important. When you have 10 important topics and 3-4 hours of teachable time during the day, it is hard to fit in all the "important" stuff. Then add in the financial component. When staff are getting paid an average of \$9.50/hour, we really need to prioritize what gets put into the classroom. We are fortunate to have a very inventive administrator, but it is still a struggle.*

- *Children can help in almost every aspect of ECE activities and love to participate and learn about new foods if you start doing these activities from infancy.*
- *More resources with current guidelines for young children would be helpful.*

## Engaging Family and Caregivers in Farm to ECE Activities

***“We have special food days using specifically grown foods, and a ‘Friendship Feast’ where everyone brings and shares.” -Licensed Family Child Care***

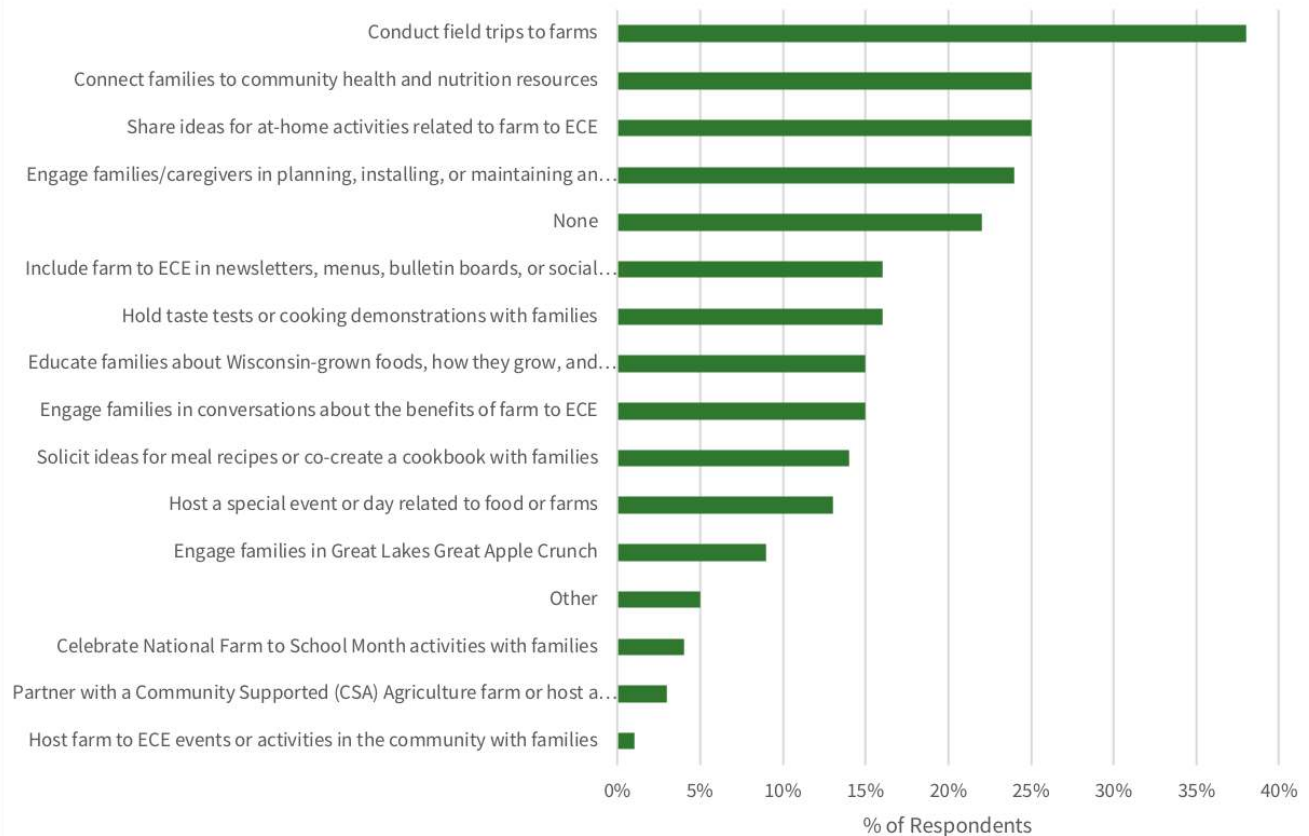
Family engagement is central to early care and education quality. When families are involved in education, children benefit, the program benefits, and families benefit. Early childhood sites can foster strong partnerships with family and caregivers through farm to ECE activities. Through farm to ECE's emphasis on health, community connections, local food, hands-on learning, and diversity, it can also: promote social and racial equity; inspire parent-child activities; and help sites collaborate with families to determine their needs, interests, strengths, and goals.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the importance and value of this farm to ECE activity area, survey responses indicate providers participate the least in this area, with 22% of farm to ECE practitioners indicating no parent engagement activities. However, ECE sites do engage in a broad array of family and parent engagement activities, just at lower percentages than activities from the other three activity areas. The top activities include field trips to farms with families and caregivers (38%); sharing ideas for at-home activities related to farm to ECE (25%); connecting families to community health and nutrition resources (25%); and engaging caregivers in edible gardens (24%). The remaining activities are outlined in Figure 26. Of the “other” responses provided by providers, examples include sending home flowers, produce, recipes, and garden boxes for families; publishing a cookbook; inviting parents to join meals; and hosting a “friendship feast” where everyone brings and shares.

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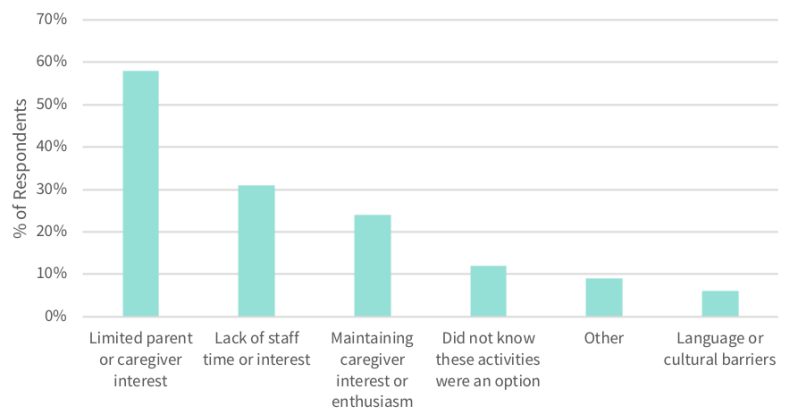
<sup>4</sup> “Engage Families with Farm to ECE”, Community GroundWorks, 2017.

Figure 26: Family and Caregiver Engagement Activities at ECE Sites

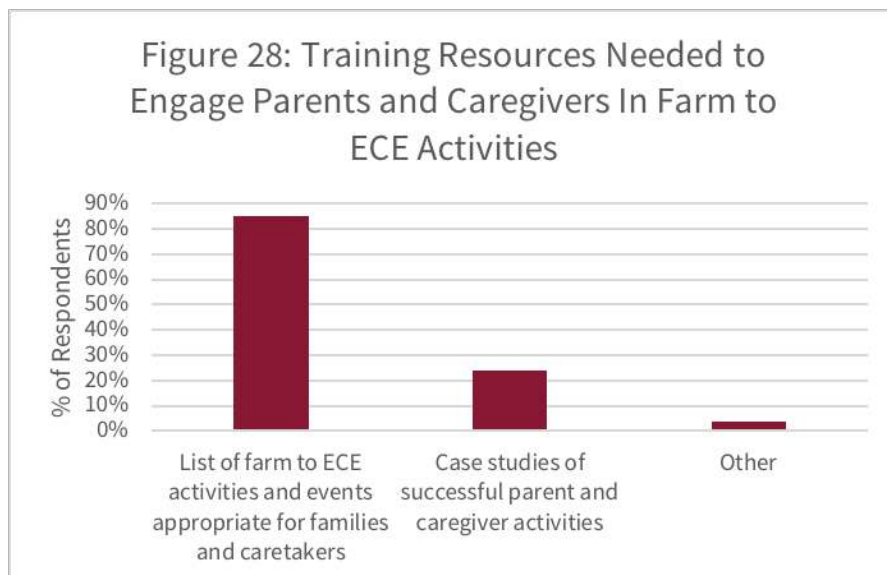


Lack of time and interest by both parents or caregivers (58%) and ECE site staff (31%) are the primary barriers experienced to engaging parents and caregivers in farm to ECE activities. Additional challenges include maintaining caregiver interest or enthusiasm (24%) and not knowing that farm to ECE engagement activities with families and caregivers was an option (12%). A small percentage of respondents (6%) indicate language or cultural barriers in engaging families. Other challenges listed by providers include funding to carry out projects, parent work schedules, and lack of capacity of site staff to prioritize these activities.

Figure 27: Barriers and Challenges to Implementing Farm to ECE Engagement Activities with Families and Caregivers



The trainings, resources, and supports suggested to help providers increase parent engagement in farm to ECE activities reflect the limited current activity in this area. The primary resource selected by practitioners is a list of farm to ECE activities and events appropriate for families and caretakers (85%), followed by case studies of successful activities with parents and caregivers (24%). 4 percent of respondents selected ‘other’ and added resources including: flyers and promotional materials to engage families; tips to share with parents and caregivers about how to economically purchase Wisconsin-grown foods; and funding to support family engagement.



Respondents were offered an open-ended opportunity to provide additional information about farm to ECE family and caretaker engagement activities, challenges, or remaining questions. There were 19 responses to this open-ended questions.

- Eight responses relate to lack of capacity, knowledge, funds and time to engage in family and caregiver activities in this area. *“One of my challenges with engaging the parents in our activities is my time and their time. They are at work when we are doing most of our activities and the weekends are so busy for both them and me!”*
- Six responses center around anecdotes, successes, and challenges of family and caretaker activities in gardens and/or sending home garden produce *“We share our produce with families through our kids leading a farmers' market (no money is exchanged). We have an annual family picnic, as well.”*
- The remaining responses address nutrition, health, and other activities at sites and/or shared with families.

## Additional Open-Ended Survey Responses

Survey respondents indicating they do engage in farm to ECE activities were provided a final

opportunity to share any remaining comments, questions, or additional thoughts about implementing farm to ECE activities at their sites. There were 24 responses spanning a variety of themes.

- **Local Foods** (3): *“Would love information that could help us use more WI products within our program’s existing nutrition guidelines.”*
- **General Enthusiasm and Request for Resources** (4): *“I’m excited to keep introducing new ideas and activities to staff & families. So whatever tools, resources you can send my way would be great!”*
- **Identifying the lack of capacity, resources, funds, knowledge and/or time** (7): *“Great programs, but childcare budgets are already stretched very thin.”*
- **Sharing an anecdote or success story** (2): *“We have implemented a nutritional/health activity at least each week, instead of having one week where the theme is ‘Healthy Eating’. We have designated a section in our newsletter each month to healthy eating and recipes”*
- **Garden related questions or requests** (7): *“We are expanding our program to double its current size. We will be adding tasting gardens to each of the 3 playgrounds (Infant/Toddler/Preschool). I would like to get ideas on age appropriate plantings for each age group, since these gardens will be accessible to the children.”*
- **Promotional Materials** (2): *“A great asset would be branding in ways of posters, stickers or some type of signage that show our involvement, so parents can see that we are not merely putting a bean seed in a styrofoam cup, we are teaching important stuff. Or maybe some seed or plant funds? Just saying, that stuff gets expensive! LOL”*
- **Parent Engagement** (4): *“Mainly more information that include benefits to educate parents that include easy and affordable recipe ideas.”*
- **Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch & National Farm to School Month** (2): *“I have not heard about the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch. I would also like more information on the National Farm to School Month. The above activities sound fun and I haven’t thought of doing them!”*

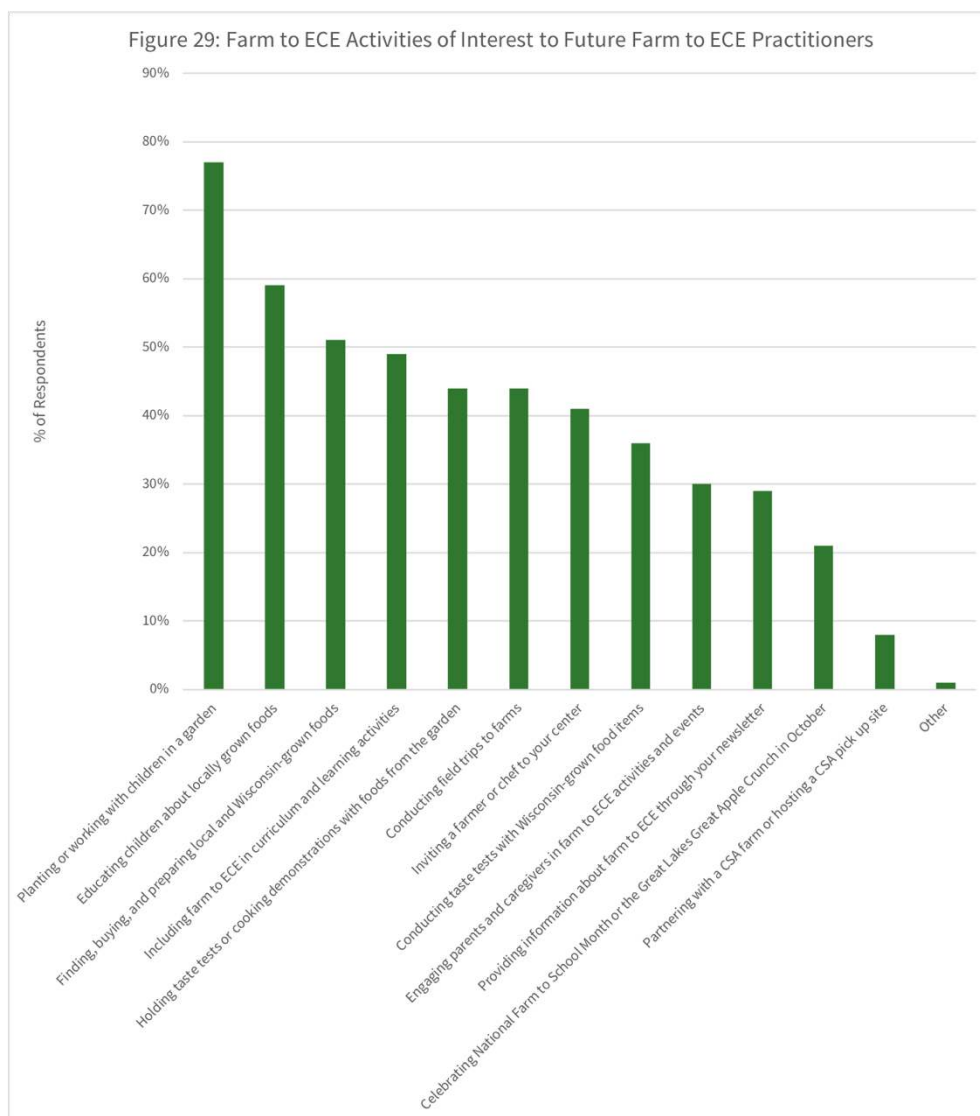
## Providers Interested in Future Farm to ECE Activities

*“I think it is a great idea and opportunity for healthier food options and more choices for our parents and their families.” -Licensed Group Child Care Center*

As stated in the introduction, 73 survey respondents (23%) indicated they currently do not engage in farm to ECE activities, but want to in the future. This group of interested respondents was asked a series of questions about activities they are most interested in, barriers faced in implementation, and needed resources to move forward with farm to ECE. The responses are outlined below. As noted earlier, many of the responses by this group

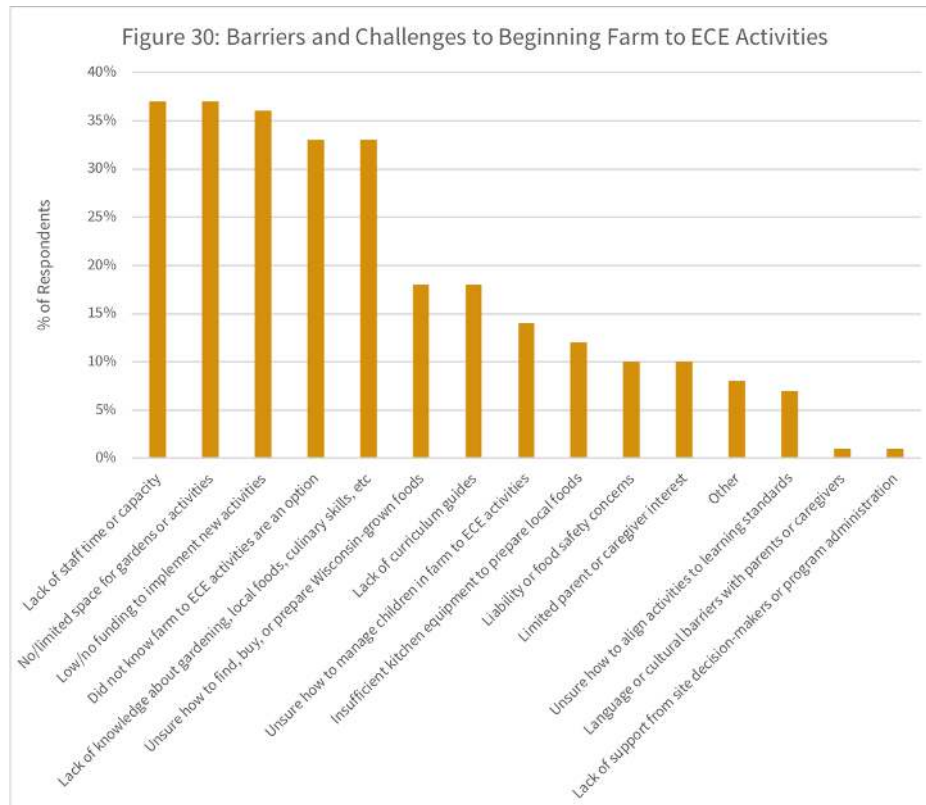
suggest that these providers are already engaging in farm to ECE, without labeling it as such.

The activities interested respondents are most likely to pursue are spread across all four activity areas of farm to ECE activities, with an emphasis on gardens, local foods, and curriculum. The top three activities selected are gardening with children (77%), educating children about locally grown foods (59%), and including locally-grown foods in meals and snacks (51%). A series of experiential education activities are ranked next: including farm to ECE in curriculum and learning activities (49%), taste tests or cooking demonstrations (44%), field trips (44%), and inviting a guest chef or farmer to the ECE site (41%).

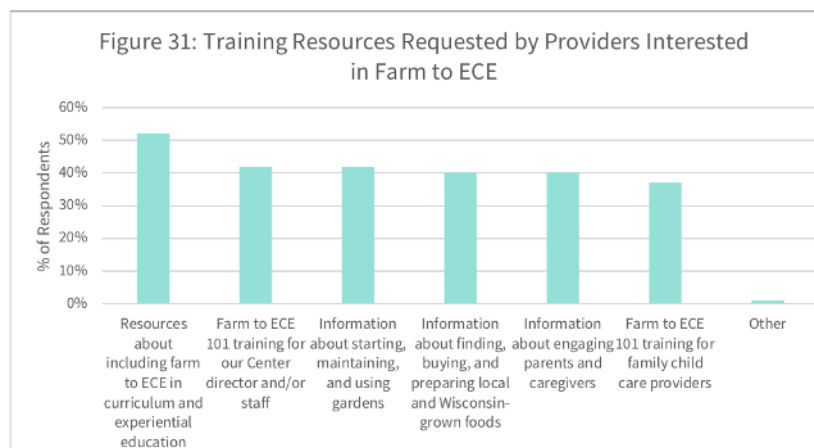


foods (59%), and including locally-grown foods in meals and snacks (51%). A series of experiential education activities are ranked next: including farm to ECE in curriculum and learning activities (49%), taste tests or cooking demonstrations (44%), field trips (44%), and inviting a guest chef or farmer to the ECE site (41%).

Survey respondents interested in farm to ECE activities report challenges and barriers across the spectrum, with the primary responses related to capacity. Over one-third of respondents indicate a lack of staff time or capacity; limited space for gardens or activities; and insufficient funding to implement new activities as a challenge to implementation. Lack of awareness of farm to ECE activities (33%) and lack of knowledge about local foods, gardening, or culinary skills (33%) are also barriers. Other barriers offered by providers include lack of relationships with local farmers, unsure if activities are relevant to children or families, and sites that do not operate during the summer. The remainder of challenges are outlined in Figure 30 below.



Providers interested in farm to ECE activities were asked about the training and support topics that would most help them implement farm to ECE activities in the future. Over half of respondents in this group (52%) requested information about including farm to ECE in curriculum and experiential educations. Interest in resources about gardening (42%), serving local foods (40%), and engaging parents and caregivers (40%) were equally requested. Respondents indicated Farm to ECE 101 Trainings for Center directors and/or staff and family child care providers would help them to include farm to ECE activities in the future. An additional training suggestion included culinary skills and food preparation, especially for sites without full kitchens.



Survey respondents interested in engaging in farm to ECE activities were provided the opportunity to share any remaining comments, questions, or thoughts about farm to ECE. There were twelve responses to this open-ended question.

- Four of the responses indicate participants already engaged in farm to ECE activities and are eager to do more. *“We currently do some activities that introduce the children to local grown foods but if we had a curriculum it would be easier to include activities more regularly.”*

The remaining responses voice enthusiasm for farm to ECE concepts: *“This sounds like a really great program for our youth to participate in.”*

## Survey Responses from Sites That No Longer Participate in Farm to ECE Activities

*“I want to re-introduce the garden to the children. We did grow potatoes this summer and will feast on them soon...as baked french fries!!! One of the children asked where French fries comes from!”* -Licensed Group Child Care Center

Eight survey respondents indicated they used to engage in farm to ECE activities, but currently do not. This group reports the major barriers to implementing farm to ECE as lack of staff time or capacity (6 responses) and insufficient funding to implement new activities (5 responses). Lack of garden space (3 responses) and insufficient kitchen equipment for local foods (2 responses) were also reported. There was one response each for lack of knowledge about farm to ECE as an option, lack of support from program administrators, lack of curriculum guides, limited parent/caregiver interest, and one write-in response that the staff were not interested in continuing the garden.

Half of the ECE providers who previously engaged in farm to ECE activities report that a farm to ECE 101 training, along with information about including farm to ECE in curriculum, would be helpful for implementing these activities again in the future. Resources about using Wisconsin-grown foods, gardens, and engaging parents was selected by 25% or less of respondents in this category.

## Providers with No Interest in Farm to ECE Activities

Only three of the 324 ECE providers responding to this survey (<1%) indicated they do not conduct any farm to ECE activities, and do not plan to conduct them in the future. Of this very small survey population, two of the three respondents indicated they were not aware of farm to ECE activities or were unsure how to manage children in these activities. Lack of staff time

or capacity, space for gardens, knowledge about gardens, and funding were also reported as barriers to implementing farm to ECE. This set of survey respondents reported trainings for ECE providers at all types of sites (group centers and family child care providers) would be helpful for implementing farm to ECE in the future, as would resources for including farm to ECE activities in curriculum.

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## Discussion

The primary goals of the inaugural Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education survey were to 1) establish a state-level baseline of farm to ECE implementation and 2) assess the tools and resources most needed to expand and strengthen the reach of these activities. Survey participation rates and results show a strong and enthusiastic foundation for farm to ECE in Wisconsin.

### Survey Reach & Participation

Both the survey participation rate and results indicate a strong foundation of farm to early care activities in the state of Wisconsin. There is no existing reporting of farm to ECE participation in the state, and a function of this survey was to establish a baseline. The closest existing data is from *Results from the 2015 National Survey of Early Care and Education Providers* (NFSN, 2016) indicating at least 113 Wisconsin survey responses, and a survey-wide 54.4% of respondents engaged in farm to ECE activities. With survey responses from 324 Wisconsin early care providers, and 240 indicating participation in farm to ECE activities, this is a higher response and participation rate than expected. In general, survey respondents perceived multiple benefits to farm to ECE and showed enthusiasm for farm to ECE regardless of their current participation in activities.

Participation in the survey was incentivized through Organic Valley product vouchers, which may have played a role in the higher-than expected response rate. As an opt-in survey, it is likely providers familiar with or supportive of farm to ECE were more likely to respond. Further, because the survey was only distributed through email networks, and not through an exhaustive list of all ECE sites in the state, it is very likely a high number of Wisconsin sites did not receive the opportunity to complete the survey. Due to these sampling limitations, the survey results do not represent the full spectrum of ECE providers in the state. In the future, a more equitable approach to survey distribution may not only yield a more representative sample, but could yield useful insights from providers less familiar with farm to ECE that impact resource development and trainings.

Another marker of enthusiasm is the 23% of respondents who report they currently do not currently engage in farm to ECE, but would like to in the future. This suggests there are still

audiences who are unfamiliar with farm to ECE practices who can benefit from entry-level training and resources. Further, of these 73 providers, open-ended survey responses suggest some currently *do* implement farm to ECE activities, but do not recognize or label them as such, or they do not see themselves as participating in a Wisconsin Farm to ECE “program”. This information will help the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group to modify messaging to better reflect the inclusivity of farm to ECE with the goal of helping providers better access resources, professional development offerings, and opportunities for peer learning that could support their efforts.

### **Challenges & Barriers**

Of the 240 survey respondents engaged in farm to ECE activities, there are common themes about the barriers and challenges faced in starting or increasing activities across the four farm to ECE activity areas. Primarily, lack of staff time, capacity, or interest ranks highly among all four activity types. Barriers relating to funding, costs, supplies, or space also rank within the top five barriers for each activity type. This class of challenges— funding, time, and space—are likely common to the ECE environment in general, and may not be specific to implementing farm to ECE activities.

Positively, “lack of support from site decision-makers or program administrators” is not a significant barrier to farm to ECE implementation, with less than 5% of respondents identifying this as a challenge among different activity areas. Similarly, lack of knowledge about potential garden, local food, or education activities is very low ranking barrier. However, a much larger number of respondents indicate they did not know of, or consider, including parents and caregivers in farm to ECE activities, indicating this may be an easy area for training and outreach.

### **Notes by Activity Area**

**Gardens:** The survey results demonstrate that farm to ECE providers are very familiar with the concept of gardening or growing food with children, engage in a wide variety of activities in this area, and perceive many benefits in these activities. A top barrier limiting participation in gardens is “limited outdoor space”. This suggests new resources can work to broaden the definitions of ‘gardens’ to include smaller outdoor areas, indoor growing activities or field trips to off-site gardens that are beneficial for children. Many of the challenges named by ECE providers are addressed in the new Wisconsin Farm to ECE resources.

**Finding, Buying, & Using Local Foods:** Many providers indicate they already incorporate local foods, especially in meals and snacks (79%). The predominate challenge associated with finding, buying, and using local foods is the perceived cost of local foods. This provides an excellent opportunity to provide education about the competitive prices of local foods, especially when purchased in season.

Currently, the predominant method of preparing meals and snacks for survey respondents is the onsite use of “scratch or fresh cooking” or purchases “heat-and-serve” foods. This suggests the biggest opportunity to impact the use of local foods is to continue to promote, support, and provide trainings to providers in this setting, where providers have direct control over the menu planning and purchase of foods.

It appears, especially for providers preparing meals onsite, the biggest challenge is the capacity to actually purchase local foods. The burden is almost palpable as providers, in many cases, drive personal vehicles to purchase food, dairy items, and supplies at grocery stores, warehouse stores, or other locations. Many report this process already consumes significant time, and are wary, or unable, to make extra stops to purchase additional local items. This suggests opportunities to 1) educate providers about how to identify healthy Wisconsin-grown items at the places they currently shop, 2) support providers in incorporating nearby local food options like farm stands or farmers’ markets, and/or 3) to continue to develop successful models that bring local foods to the ECE site like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, farmer deliveries, or similar.

This is where it is important to note that “farm to ECE” varies significantly from “farm to school” and is not just a ‘scaled down’ version of the latter. Children ages 0-5 have very different needs than those in the K-12 setting, and the infrastructure of the establishments differ as well. This is especially apparent in the purchasing and food preparation practices and facilities in the ECE setting. Unlike K-12 schools, which purchase food through broadline distributors, produce distributors, dairy vendors, and farm deliveries, ECE providers report purchasing food from grocery stores or co-ops (76%) and large retail warehouse stores (45%) requiring providers conduct weekly (if not more frequent) travels to a store to purchase items. Further, ECE sites purchase smaller volumes of food, often have limited (or no) storage capacity for bulk storage, and/or prepare food more similar to a home kitchen than a commercial kitchen familiar to K-12 schools.

Survey responses suggest, through open-ended responses, that additional resources are needed clarifying what foods are ‘local’, and how to identify them at a variety of different retail and wholesale venues in the state. Clarification may be needed between ‘buying items at a local store’ and ‘purchasing items grown or made in Wisconsin’, and highlighting the economic impacts to Wisconsin’s agricultural community associated with these items.

A minority of sites (10%) report food preparation taking place ‘offsite’, limiting direct control over foods used in meals and snacks. Most often this constitutes meals prepared and provided by the larger institution in which the ECE sites sits (e.g. hospital or university), or meals are vended by a caterer or third-party. This may provide an opportunity for an ECE program to serve as catalyst for greater farm to institutional efforts on a campus, or to query vendors about their inclusion of local foods.

The survey only asked providers about “onsite” and “offsite” food preparation, and did not include an option for food provided by parents or sites that serve no food. At least 8% of sites rely on meals or snacks provided by families, furthering the importance of family and caregiver engagement around farm to ECE and nutritious meal and snack opportunities. Future surveys will be retooled to include foods provided by families.

As “America’s Dairyland,” the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group has a specific interest in connecting ECE sites with Wisconsin-grown fluid milk, cheese, yogurt, and other dairy products. Understanding how ECE providers procure dairy products (grocery store 76%, large retail warehouse store 32%, distributor 28%, convenience store 23%) will help advance strategies for promoting Wisconsin-raised dairy.

Lastly, understanding that lack of kitchen and storage space is a barrier to using local foods, and knowing which facilities or equipment would be most helpful to ECE providers, can help provide guidance for including farm to ECE in YoungStar Quality Improvement Plans and using the YoungStar Micro Grant program for kitchen equipment to support local foods and/or gardens.

**Curriculum & Experiential Education:** ECE providers currently include a wide variety of farm to ECE activities in their programs: from cooking activities, to chef visits, to the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch. The predominate barrier to these activities is finding appropriate curriculum or lesson ideas to implement. This demonstrates the opportunity for the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group partners to highlight the existing curricula and resources specific to the early care setting to save providers time. As providers appear to lean heavily on informal resources (Pinterest, blogs) and formal resources (YoungStar trainings), any opportunity to streamline access to appropriate curriculum materials and their connections to learning standards is beneficial.

**Family & Caregiver Engagement:** This activity area may be the most effective for extending the nutritional and educational benefits of farm to ECE beyond the childcare setting. However, family and caregiver engagement appears to be the least implemented strategy of the four activity areas. This may be simply because sites do not think of extending farm to ECE activities beyond the early care setting, or lack ideas or resources for family engagement. By far, the most highly requested resource to support this activity area is *a list of activities and events appropriate for families and caretakers* (85%).

### **Training & Resource Dissemination**

Survey respondents, regardless of current participation in farm to ECE, were queried about their preferred ways to learn about farm to ECE in Wisconsin. The top two responses, online materials and fact sheets, were not surprising and further emphasize the need to provide flexible training opportunities and easy-access resources for busy providers. Responses support the use of the Wisconsin Farm to School and Farm to ECE Newsletter and

development of simple fact sheets available both online and in print. Webinars ranked highly as a preferred tool for learning about farm to ECE, likely for their ability to be archived and viewed at any time, while also providing professional development credits. The Wisconsin Farm to School Network currently offers quarterly webinars for farm to school and farm to ECE, but this suggests targeted webinars for an ECE audience may be beneficial. Most surprisingly, training field trips and site visits for ECE provider ranked highly as a preferred educational tool. Currently these opportunities do not exist in Wisconsin, but because of the peer-to-peer nature and ability to experience farm to ECE first hand, this may be an activity to pilot.

### **Racial and Social Equity**

Wisconsin Farm to ECE aims to promote racial and social equity and ensure all Wisconsin's children have access to high quality education and nutritious foods. One goal of the survey was to assess access to farm to ECE activities, and the associated benefits, by all children in Wisconsin.

YoungStar is Wisconsin's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and was developed with the goal to improve the quality of child care available for children in the state. Child care sites must participate in the YoungStar program to be eligible to accept Wisconsin Shares subsidy payments for child care. Not only does YoungStar develop and administer a standard for measuring quality childcare, it also creates incentives for providers to improve the quality of services with an emphasis on care for low-income children by tying higher-quality care to a higher Wisconsin Shares subsidy rate. YoungStar also offers professional development, microgrants, and technical assistance to support site improvement. According to annual reports from the Wisconsin Division of Early Care and Education, 76% of the state's regulated child care programs participate in YoungStar. Comparatively, 81% of the Survey respondents, and 81% of sites engaged in farm to ECE activities, participate in YoungStar, both rates above the state average.

The Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program (Wisconsin Shares) supports the cost of child care for low-income families while they are working or preparing to enter the workforce. Wisconsin Shares is implemented locally by 71 Wisconsin counties and 9 tribes.<sup>5</sup> Child care sites must participate in the YoungStar program to be eligible to accept Wisconsin Shares subsidy payments for child care. Throughout 2017, Wisconsin Shares supported care for 38,862 families and an average of 39,336 children per month.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, 75% of child care sites participating in YoungStar provided care for a child through Wisconsin Shares.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to compare this data to survey results, which summarize what percentage of children at a site access care through Wisconsin Shares. Future surveys will align data collection with metrics

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<sup>5</sup> 2017 Annual Report Early Care and Education in Wisconsin, Division of Early Care and Education, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, March 2018

<sup>6</sup> 2017 Annual Report Early Care and Education in Wisconsin, March 2018

<sup>7</sup> 2017 Annual Report Early Care and Education in Wisconsin, March 2018

already reported at the state level. Currently, just over half of survey respondents (55%) report providing care to 10% or fewer children served by Wisconsin Shares. Future Wisconsin Farm to ECE Surveys will better align survey questions to metrics collected at the state level.