

Results of the 2018 Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Support Organization 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, the 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. The Work Group also aims to ensure 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 Support Organization Survey

In March 2018, the first Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Support Organization Survey was conducted in the state. Early care and education (ECE) support organizations in Wisconsin provide a direct and important connection to providers. Staff at support organizations are already actively engaged with ECE sites as Technical Consultants, trainers, or specialists, and provide a natural channel to share farm to ECE resources with providers and to assess barriers to farm to ECE continuation. Further, support organizations may be the first point of contact when a site has a general inquiry or technical question about initiating farm to ECE activities, making support organizations staff a priority stakeholder group for the initiation and sustainability of farm to ECE activities with the providers they support.

This survey was developed parallel to the 2017 Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey, conducted by Community GroundWorks, and supported by the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group. The survey's target audience was individuals that train and support ECE providers. The goals of this survey were to:

- Assess support organization staff knowledge and understanding of farm to early care and education,
- Understand the resources support organizations need to best promote farm to ECE to providers and;
- Assess support organization perspectives on farm to ECE activities currently conducted in Wisconsin.

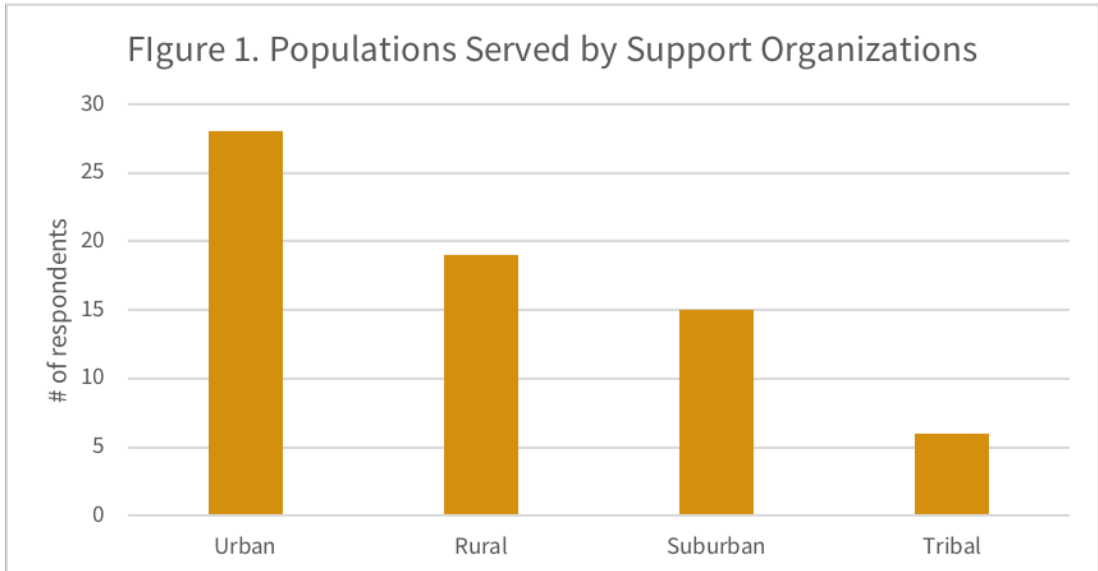
This project was funded by the WK Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.

Survey Methods

The inaugural Wisconsin Farm to ECE Support Organization Survey was conducted in March 2018. The survey was distributed by email directly to networks of Wisconsin ECE support organizations. This included all YoungStar Technical Consultants via Supporting Families Together Association, all ten Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and through Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners. To avoid confusion about the target audience and avoid ECE providers, the survey was not publicly promoted through listservs, newsletters, or websites.

Summary of Survey Findings

There were 30 responses by Wisconsin ECE support organization staff with titles including program coordinator, early childhood technical consultant, quality improvement specialist, YoungStar consultant, training specialist, nutrition specialist, and organizational leadership. The types of support organizations represented include: Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, technical colleges, early care and education associations, and advisory councils. Responses represent offices in eleven counties that provide services in 67 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties, 6 tribal communities, and some statewide representation. Survey respondents provide ECE support services in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities to varying degrees.

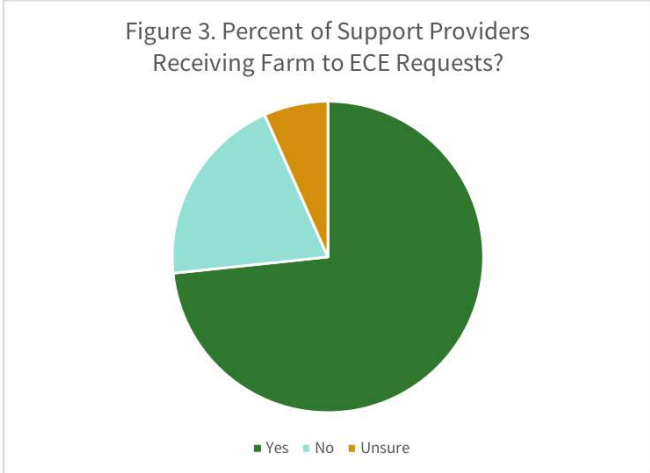
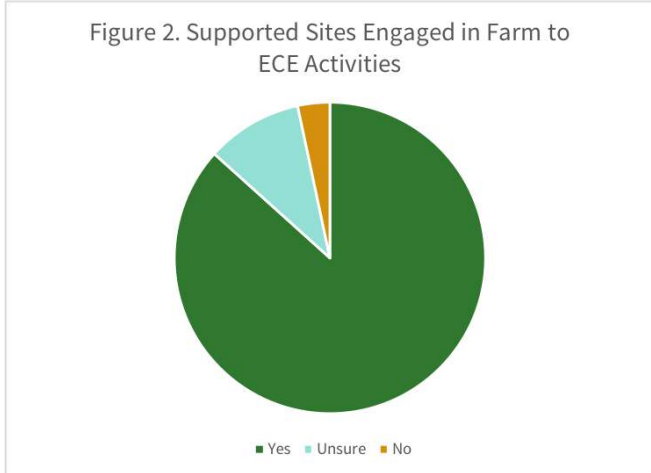


Engagement in Farm to Early Care and Education

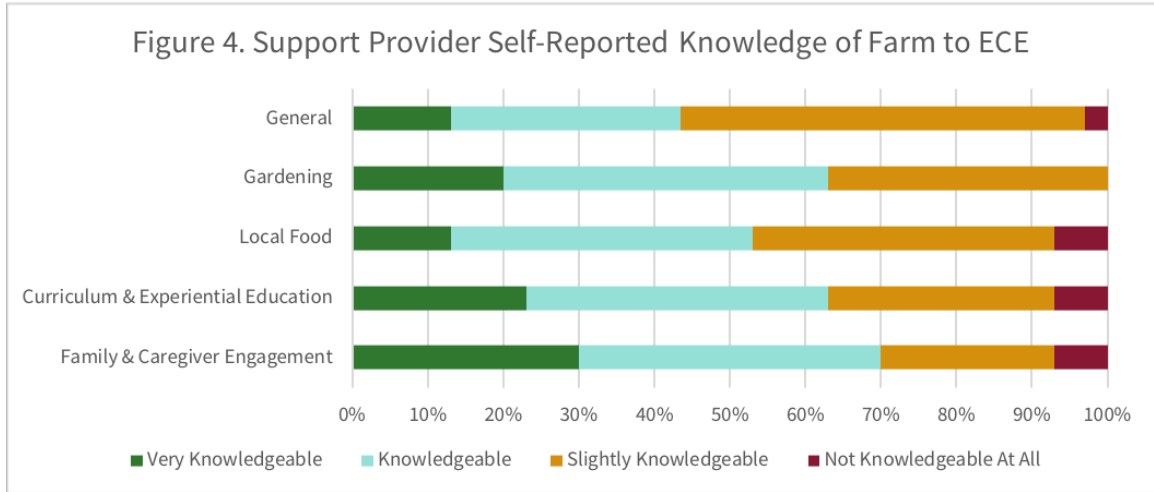
Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education (WI Farm to ECE) increases access to local foods and enhances the quality of education in all ECE settings through a variety of activities including:

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

Based on the above definition of Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education, survey respondents were asked about farm to ECE participation and requests for technical assistance. The majority (87%) of support organization staff reported that sites they work with are engaged in farm to ECE activities. A slightly smaller percent of respondents (73%) report receiving requests for technical assistance about farm to ECE from the providers they support.



In general, survey responses indicate support organization staff hold at least some knowledge about farm to early care activities. The survey assessed general knowledge levels of farm to ECE, as well as the four primary activity areas: gardening; finding, buying, preparing & serving local foods; curriculum and experiential education; and family and caregiver engagement. The results are indicated in Figure 4 below, and suggest that there is a solid foundation of farm to ECE understanding among those interacting with ECE providers.



With at least some knowledge of farm to ECE, support organization staff perceive a variety of benefits to these activities. The top three reported benefits are specific to children and include improving overall child health (97%), increasing child access to or consumption of healthy, locally-grown foods (93%), and improving child knowledge of where food comes from (93%). Ninety percent of respondents feel that farm to ECE activities can increase an ECE program’s connection to the community. Other suggested benefits include: obesity prevention, connection to arts, and community engagement. The full list of farm to ECE benefits are seen below in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Benefits of Farm to ECE

What do you see as the benefits of farm to ECE programming?	
Improve children's overall health	97%
Increase children's access to or consumption of healthy locally-grown foods	93%
Improve children's knowledge of where food comes from	93%
Increase program connection to the community	90%
Improve children's social skills or emotional development	83%
Impact overall family health	80%
Improve staff health and well-being	80%
Improve children's learning and cognitive development	77%
Increase family or caregiver engagement	77%
Improve overall program quality	77%
Increase children's readiness to learn	73%
Support the local economy	73%
Other (please specify)	17%

Farm to ECE Barriers & Needed Resources

As these support organizations and staff work directly with ECE sites and providers, they hold a valuable perspective on the barriers and challenges these sites face in implementing farm to ECE activities. The survey asked about the top five barriers and challenges sites face to engaging in these activities. The top three responses: lack of funding (80%); lack of provider time, capacity, or interest (73%); and lack of space for activities (53%) closely align with the barriers providers report in implementing these activities. A full list of perceived barriers and challenges is available in Figure 6 below.

Additional challenges include: a lack of awareness of the full benefits of farm to ECE, sustainability for teachers to regularly include farm to ECE in classrooms, and limited resources for training and support about farm to ECE.

Figure 6. Top Barriers to Implementing Farm to ECE Activities

Top five barriers to implementing farm to ECE activities at the sites you support?	%
Low/no funding to implement new activities	80%
Lack of provider time, capacity, or interest	73%
No/limited space for gardens or activities	53%
Sites do not know farm to ECE activities are an option	40%
Lack of knowledge about gardening, local foods, culinary skills, etc.	40%
Unsure how to find, buy, or prepare locally-grown foods	37%
Unsure about how to implement farm to ECE activities with children	30%
Unsure how to align activities to learning standards	27%
Lack of support from site decision-makers or program administration	20%
Insufficient kitchen equipment to prepare local foods	20%
Liability or food safety concerns	10%
Limited family interest	10%
Lack of curriculum guides	7%
Other (please specify)	7%
Language or cultural barriers	3%

ECE support organization staff were queried about the professional development opportunities and resources they find most helpful to learn about farm to ECE, in turn strengthening their ability to provide technical assistance to providers. The most highly recommended form of training was face-to-face or in-person trainings about farm to ECE (67%). Similar to the results of the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey, field trips or site visits were highly valued as a training opportunity (57%). Trainings in conjunction with existing resources or training sessions, like Active Early and Healthy Bites (43%) and YoungStar Technical Consultant webinars (40%), highlight the opportunities to work efficiently in partnership with existing networks and avoid training duplication. The full ranking of training opportunities is below in Figure 7. Additional training opportunities suggested by respondents include: alignment with CACFP trainings; video testimonials by ECE professionals; a train-the-trainer model with 'make and take' workshops that support ECE teachers; and simple lessons to ease implementation in the classroom, including easy activities to do with children. In

general, there was an enthusiasm to provide training for support organization staff to increase their ability to educate providers.

Figure 7. Useful Farm to ECE Professional Development Opportunities for Support Organization Staff

What professional development activities, trainings, and resources would be most helpful to advance <u>your</u> knowledge of farm to ECE?	%
Face-to-face or in-person trainings	67%
Webinar series on different aspects of farm to ECE	60%
Field trips or site visits	57%
Fact sheets	53%
Training(s) connected to Active Early/Healthy Bites	43%
Farm to ECE discussions on YoungStar Technical Consultant calls and/or webinars	40%
Peer groups or "Community of Practice"	37%
Newsletters, websites or blogs	37%
In-person training(s) at the annual YoungStar Conference	33%
Case studies and/or success stories	33%
Training(s) through CESA	23%
Other (Please Specify):	17%
Listserv	13%

When prompted for opportunities, locations, or existing events to hold face-to-face or in-person trainings, responses provided a variety of suggestions falling into two categories: trainings for ECE support organization staff and trainings for ECE providers. In both cases, respondents welcomed the use of their support organization facilities to host a training or suggested conducting training at existing local early care and education conferences. For trainings directed at support organization staff, using monthly staff meetings for in-person training was an option. As to trainings for providers, support organization responses included: setting up ‘mini conferences’ to train family child care providers; YoungStar and Food Program staff hosting trainings at sites throughout the service delivery area; or onsite trainings at ECE facilities so ECE staff can experience programming first hand to increase staff buy-in. Many of the responses highlight the natural fit for support organization staff to deliver farm to ECE trainings to groups or to individuals during site visits. General feedback included the following:

- Geographic: La Crosse, Tomah/Sparta, Stevens Point, Central Wisconsin
- Venues: State Fair Park, farmers’ markets, local churches, gardens, local kitchens, grocery stores
- Remote Opportunities: Using technology to minimize travel costs and increase participation
- Credits: Make Registry Credits available for ECE providers

In their role as direct technical assistance providers to ECE sites, support organization staff and technical assistance providers are poised to assess the farm to ECE resources most helpful to ECE providers. In-person trainings rank as the highest priority training method, which supports the existing training model in Wisconsin. The remaining resources are outlined below in Figure 8. Additional suggestions include: training kitchen staff, video lessons about gardening or cooking with children, and onsite technical consulting at programs.

Figure 8. Resources Needed to Help ECE Providers Implement Farm to ECE

What tools or resources would help providers better understand and implement farm to ECE? (may select more than one)	%
In-person trainings	83%
Presentations at conferences, trainings, or workshops ECE providers already attend	63%
Fact sheets	50%
Field trips or site visits	50%
Webinars	43%
Newsletters, websites, or blogs	43%
Peer groups or "Community of Practice"	33%
Case studies and success stories	23%
Other	23%

Open Ended Questions

“I think if we have something to spark providers interest, once they tried it and saw how easy it is they would want to do it more.” -ECE Support Provider

The survey closed with two open-ended questions for ECE support organization staff. The goal of these questions was to seek out additional training needs, training

methods, or thoughts on farm to ECE in Wisconsin that had not yet been addressed in the survey. Respondents were asked about additional trainings, tools, resources, policies or other support that would increase implementation of farm to ECE activities statewide, and at the sites they served. There were sixteen responses, and they are organized by themes below. Many of the suggested priorities align with results of the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey results.

General & Policy

- ECE sites are always looking for grants and funding opportunities
- Increase funding for ECE sites
- Increase farmer and grower awareness about farm to ECE
- We have been provided wonderful resources however, I need to make it more of a priority to communicate about farm to ECE it to sites I serve
- Increase the accessibility of farm to early care and education resources

Themes for ECE Provider Trainings

- Onsite trainings for ECE teachers
- Coaching that supports a program through farm to ECE implementation
- Hands-on training opportunities in gardening and cooking through the seasons
- Free or very low cost training opportunities
- Training sessions during evening hours or weekends

Farm to ECE Resources:

- Success stories, especially stories following sites through the process of farm to ECE, and the use of best practices
- Expand on Got Dirt? activities. Include additional learning activities or a sample lesson plan showing how farm to ECE can be incorporated into curriculum
- Ideas to include parents and caregivers on healthy eating habits
- Recipes that include healthy and appropriate ingredients in meals and menus
- Resources for afterschool programs
- Information with nutrition resources
- Resources highlighting the benefits of farm to ECE
- Resources outlining grants and funding opportunities, especially for gardens
- A kit including books and lessons for children and parents

Lastly, respondents were offered the opportunity to share additional thoughts or questions about Wisconsin Farm to ECE, including needs to best support sites in implementing these activities. There were 15 responses, with a summary below.

- *Teachers respond to concrete ideas, not theory or literature telling them this is a good idea. Most teachers would implement more farm to ECE if we show them how practical ideas can fit into most centers. When the resources have simple ideas that can be incorporated into any classroom, they can make small changes that would still promote good practices.*
- *Our staff has intense interest in supporting the child care workforce so they can offer activities that result in helping children reach their full potential.*
- *Programs need support with staff to tend gardens, implement curriculum, and prepare fresh food. This can include free trainings, coaching to implement activities successfully, and resources to support initial incorporation of farm to table.*
- *Many programs use a service that provides meals, and these meals are poor quality...getting [meal providers] onboard would be a benefit to all.*
- *Using the Wisconsin Youth Gardening Self-Assessment from YoungStar has been an effective way to help providers become more self-aware about what they are already doing that relates to farm to ECE. Because they see they are already doing some things, they feel encouraged and empowered to do more.*
- *Support organizations and providers are looking for grants and funding available to support farm to ECE efforts. Most programs who received a grant to maintain the garden use it effectively for farm to ECE.*
- *This is a valuable idea for Milwaukee child care providers.*
- *I have several sites implementing pieces of the program; however staffing issues have forced programs to prioritize other things. We need to find ways to help ECE programs value farm to ECE and simplify aspects that are easy to implement.*
- *It would be very nice to make resources available in Spanish and Hmong.*

Discussion

The first Wisconsin Farm to Early Care and Education Support Organization Survey results indicate positive feelings about farm to ECE activities, a solid foundation of understanding among support providers, and a willingness to continue to train providers about farm to ECE.

Support organization staff provide an extremely valuable role in educating and communicating with ECE providers in the state, as well as providing a direct communication channel to providers. Support organization staff are committed to training providers, with long term goals to create positive outcomes for children in

care, and they see farm to ECE as a strategy that supports these goals. Further, ECE support organizations seek to provide top-quality technical assistance to sites, they are also desiring to learn more about farm to ECE to include it as a useful tool in the training toolbox.

In their position, support organization staff lend a very valuable perspective as they visit a wide variety of early care sites and interact with providers regularly. They are in the strongest position to provide a realistic bird's eye view of the status of the early care world and the challenges therein. This includes thoroughly understanding the needs of providers when it comes to farm to ECE, and knowing how to best communicate farm to ECE content to these users.

Among survey respondents, attitudes toward farm to ECE are positive. This includes positive beliefs about the benefits of farm to ECE, especially the direct benefits to children's health, knowledge, and social-emotional development. This is coupled with a strong knowledge of farm to ECE, and a desire to learn more about the subject area, as well as conduct and even host trainings. Together these are important, as it means the main group of trainers and supporters who interact with ECE providers and staff bring a positive and encouraging attitude and energy about farm to ECE.

Survey respondents, who are deeply engaged with ECE providers, report that the sites they support engage in farm to ECE, and are also actively requesting information about the topic from support organizations. Support organizations are recognizing the importance of having easy-to-share materials about farm to ECE to provide when requested, and specifically include the need for resources in Spanish and Hmong to reach the diversity of providers across the state.

Although farm to ECE is taking place throughout the state, it's not without its challenges. The survey queried support organization staff about the barriers they perceive when sites implement farm to ECE at their sites. The goal is to use the information learned to guide the work of the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Work Group, and the development of trainings and resources. The top three barriers reported are funding; staff time, capacity, and interest; and insufficient space for gardens. All these challenges can be addressed by support organization staff with the help of farm to ECE training and resources.

Funding for ECE providers continues to be a priority issue in the farm to ECE landscape. Lack of funding is reported as the primary barrier for sites to implement farm to ECE activities, and both support organizations and providers repeatedly report

looking for “grants and funding opportunities for licensed ECE programs to support farm to ECE efforts”. As survey respondents note and experience demonstrates, even small sources of funding to establish gardens or increase capacity to use local foods are used effectively and with long-term impacts to program success and quality. Issues around insufficient funding can be addressed through better identifying and leveraging funding opportunities unique to the ECE setting, such as YoungStar micro grants.

Concerns around staff time, capacity, and interest can be addressed through resources that reinforce easy, quick ways to incorporate farm to ECE into curricula, snacks, and meals - and that also address objectives for learning and assessment. Staff interest can also be addressed through resources that reinforce the benefits of farm to ECE to the children, and encourage confidence in implementing these practices. The perception of inadequate space for gardens and challenges with garden management can be addressed with technical assistance documents, but also by helping providers realize that even small gardening efforts (including container gardening or growing plants in the classroom) can teach big lessons.

Support organization perspectives on farm to ECE trainings and resources are helpful for guiding future training opportunities. Currently, most farm to ECE trainings conducted in the state are in-person events nested within larger conferences or other ECE trainings. Survey feedback reinforces the idea that these face-to-face trainings are the most valuable training avenue. Responses also suggest it may be helpful to expand in-person trainings for support organization staff and providers to include those hosted and co-planned with Child Care Resource and Referral offices (or similar) or local early care sites, with an emphasis on experiencing current models of success. Parallel to results from the Wisconsin Farm to ECE Provider Survey, field trips or site visits for support staff were also highly valued as a potential training opportunity (57%). This is not a current training experience offered in Wisconsin, and may be viable to pilot with support organization staff at various places in the state.

Lastly, providing more introductory and basic training materials about farm to ECE with individuals who support ECE sites is a strategy that can create stronger advocates and trainers for farm to ECE, and in turn empower support organizations to effectively reach more providers about farm to ECE.