

# From Seed to Harvest:

## SUMMARY OF MICHIGAN PROCUREMENT PILOT



Meagan K. Shedd, PhD

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Center for  
Regional Food Systems

# Acknowledgements

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## AUTHOR

**Meagan K. Shedd, PhD**

Assistant Professor

Farm to Early Care and K-12 Education

Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems and the Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Network is grateful to the Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Procurement Pilot Participants for their involvement in the pilot and their tireless efforts on behalf of Michigan's youngest children.

The authors would also like to thank Andrea Weiss of Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems for communications guidance, Natalie Tomlin for copyediting, and Emma Beauchamp for design.

The Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Procurement Pilot are generously supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Some of the data included in this report was collected with funding provided by the Association for Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN). The ASPHN's farm to ECE grantee programs are supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of cooperative agreement number NU38OT000279 (total of \$1,435,000). Ten percent is supported by an ASPHN's farm to ECE grantee program, which is funded by the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity (DNPAO)/ National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP)/CDC/ HHS. The contents of this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, DNPAO/NCCDPHP/CDC/HHS, or the U.S. government.

Published in November 2022.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Shedd, M. K. (2022). *From seed to harvest: Summary of Michigan procurement pilot*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. East Lansing, MI. <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/from-seed-to-harvest-summary-of-michigan-procurement-pilot>

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# Executive Summary

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## KEY OUTCOMES

- Mini grants supported 33 ECE sites, with \$25,500 awarded in all three priority communities
- Michigan met the goal of a 20% increase in provider participation
- The three core elements of Farm to ECE are supportive, not mutually exclusive
- 35.3% of programs scored >50% of best practices at post-assessment on Go NAPSACC, compared to 23.1% of programs at pre-assessment
- End-of-grant survey of participants indicated positive reactions to procurement pilot, including ease of application, implementation, and overall satisfaction with participation

**Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) is a group of strategies and activities that increase access to healthy local foods, gardening opportunities, and education about food, nutrition, and agriculture. These are the core components of Farm to ECE.**

Farm to ECE can be used in any type of early care and education setting to teach children about where food comes from and to improve children's health. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems received funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) to address a specific goal of supporting a procurement pilot to self-assess current practices, identify goals to support those practices, and monitor progress in establishing Farm to ECE.

The Farm to ECE procurement pilots were intended to help ECE staff obtain locally grown, healthy foods from a variety of sources—including direct from farmers as well as through farmers' markets, food hubs and/or distributors—to serve in meals, snacks, and/or as part of educational activities. Through these pilots, the goal was to develop collective local food sourcing solutions driven by the unique needs and goals of each community.

In response to participant feedback, the procurement pilot also developed into a shared learning collaborative, with participating sites meeting regularly to share and discuss Farm to ECE implementation strategies, engage in training and technical assistance (TA) opportunities (with credit available through Michigan's MI Registry early childcare provider system), and receive a monthly newsletter offering resources.

Michigan had 33 sites participating in the pilot in each of the three identified communities, meeting the first of the originally identified goals. One of the original goals indicated the procurement pilot would support ECE sites through institutional "buyer clusters." One way this was accomplished was through the awards of mini grants in which \$25,500 was awarded to participants to support their work in Farm to ECE with a focus on local procurement. Providers also received strengths-based self-assessment data available in "real time" via Go NAPSACC, Farm to ECE workshops three times a year, as well as online webinars with professional development credit available in MIRegistry (available "on-demand"), and a Farm to ECE Procurement Pilot monthly newsletter.

A total of 17 sites (out of 33 total WKKF funded procurement pilot sites) completed both pre-and post- self-assessments for analysis. Among sites completing post- self-assessments, 35.3% of programs had scores meeting greater than 50% of best practices, compared with 23.1% of programs with scores greater than 50% at pre- self-assessment. Results support observations of procurement pilot applications and Go NAPSACC Action Plans, particularly in years three and four of the pilot, with an increase in gardening and facilitating learning about how food is grown.

An additional end-of-grant survey (including both WKKF and Farm to Early Care and Education Implementation Grant or FIG-funded procurement pilot participants) indicated participants found the Go NAPSACC resources, including provider information, menus, and family resources identified as the most helpful tool, with the monthly newsletter offered by CRFS including information and resources in purchasing of local foods, gardening, nutrition education, family engagement, racial equity, grant and funding opportunities, and “sharing” and the Go NAPSACC Action Plan tied for second most helpful.

It was also uncovered that the three core elements of Farm to ECE (purchasing, gardening, and nutrition education) are not mutually exclusive, but rather supportive in their goal of improving health outcomes and upholding early care and education environments.

Unanticipated outcomes of the procurement pilot are also discussed in the full report, including additional funding opportunities with FIG, increased participation in the Michigan Farm to ECE Network, the Michigan Grow More Awards, Online Training and Technical Assistance opportunities and the ways in which providers utilized them, and racial equity workshops. The lessons learned from the procurement pilot are also offered.

## The three core elements of Farm to Early Care and Education:



**The core elements of Farm to ECE, gardening opportunities; education about food, nutrition, and agriculture; and access to healthy local foods; are supportive, not mutually exclusive.**

# Introduction

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**Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) is a group of strategies and activities that increase access to healthy local foods, gardening opportunities, and education about food, nutrition, and agriculture. These are the three core components of Farm to ECE.**

With about 12 million children under the age of five receiving care outside of the home (Child Care Aware, 2019), early care and education programs providing quality food and learning environments for the young children in their care are especially important. Farm to ECE is one approach that ECE programs take to support the children and families they serve.

Farm to ECE can be used in any type of early care and education setting to teach children about where food comes from and to improve children's health, which are two reasons it is appealing. Options for ECE vary, but Farm to ECE can take place in every type of early care and education setting, including child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start and Early Head Start, and preschools housed in K-12 school districts.

Early care and education providers know the importance of a child's earliest years. Children's preferences and willingness to try new foods develop when they are very young (Johnson, 2016; Nicklaus, 2016; Shedd et al., 2018). This can set the stage for healthy eating for the rest of their lives. At its core, Farm to ECE matters to ECE providers because the children, families, and communities they serve gain access to high quality, fresh food that helps them learn and grow. Simultaneously, opportunities and support for Farm to ECE are important in that they capitalize on the earliest experiences of children, supported by the adults caring for them.

## GOALS OF THE PROCUREMENT PILOT

On August 1, 2018, Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems received funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) to address a specific goal of supporting a procurement pilot in at least two of the three WKKF target cities. More specifically, identified goals included:

- Support procurement pilot in at least two of the three WKKF target cities through institutional buyer clusters to increase good food access for ECE settings using Go NAPSACC (Farm to ECE self-assessment) to self-assess current practices, identify goals, and monitor progress in establishing Farm to ECE within sites;
- Identify baseline data in WKKF target communities using Go NAPSACC yearly, with a 20% increase in provider participation (30 total by year three);
  - Analyze/share results of self-assessment data with pilot group each year to inform practices;
  - Host one Farm to ECE workgroup workshop each year;
  - Develop additional procurement best practice knowledge products informed by community group(s).

# Context and Background

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**The Farm to ECE procurement pilots were intended to help ECE staff obtain locally grown, healthy foods from a variety of sources—including directly from farmers as well as through farmers’ markets, food hubs and/or distributors—to serve in meals, snacks, and/or as part of educational activities.**

Through these pilots, the goal was to develop collective local food sourcing solutions driven by the unique needs and goals of each community. In response to participant feedback, the procurement pilot also developed into a shared learning collaborative, with participating sites meeting regularly to share and discuss Farm to ECE implementation strategies, engaging in training and technical assistance opportunities (with credit available through Michigan’s MI Registry early childcare provider system), and receiving a monthly newsletter offering resources.

To be eligible, sites had to provide care for children ages birth through age 5 and could not be limited to after school care. Programs did not have to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), but received regular information regarding the program as well as technical assistance as part of their participation in the pilot.

## WHICH SITES WERE ELIGIBLE?

Eligible ECE sites included:

- family-based sites
- child care centers
- Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)
- Early Head Start
- Head Start
- private preschools and/or public preschools within school districts.



# Overview of Activities

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In the first year of the pilot, participating sites took part in a learning collaborative consisting mainly of training and technical assistance, with professional development opportunities to improve access to high quality foods as well as enhance their early care and education environments. This was accomplished using the Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE self-assessments to identify baseline data of best practices at each site, with subsequent development of corresponding Action Plans to determine next steps for each early care and education site.

After the first year, feedback from the ECE providers indicated barriers to implementation and a need for funding. As a result, competitive mini-grants were offered in each of the three communities. An application was released, sharing information about the requirements for funding, and indicating that mini-grants could be used to address any or all three core components of Farm to ECE, including supporting food procurement practices, gardening, and nutrition and agriculture education activities.

## **Some examples of funding support included but were not limited to:**

- Purchase of a CSA membership to source more local food
- Purchase of specific kitchen equipment for classroom tasting demonstrations
- Purchase of gardening materials, such as seeds, soil, raised beds, etc.; equipment for classroom gardens
- Other ideas to increase and sustain local buying capacity.

## **Participants receiving funding were also made aware of participation expectations included the following:**

- Completion of procurement pilot documentation, including:
  - Go NAPSACC pre-assessment and Action Plan to receive mini-grant funds
  - Documentation of fund utilization
  - Mini-grant year-end summary
- Completion of post-self-assessments (approximately 6 months after pre-assessment and development of Action Plan with goal setting);
- Participation in community check-ins as part of a learning collaborative with CRFS and other state partners at the start of the project and every 3 months after to share challenges and best practices (lasting approximately 1 hour each);
- Receipt of training and technical assistance from MSU CRFS staff regarding local food procurement, nutrition education, and/or gardening;
- Participation in free online or face-to-face workshop(s) through MI Registry;
- Receipt of free Farm to ECE resources, including local food procurement guide.



# Growth by Year

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## YEAR ONE

In the first year of the procurement pilot, 11 early care and education sites agreed to participate in the inaugural group, including five from Battle Creek, two from Detroit, and four from Grand Rapids serving a total of 715 children.

Each site completed a Farm to ECE Go NAPSACC self-assessment to establish baseline data regarding best practices in Farm to ECE and seven of the sites completed Action Plans using Go NAPSACCs Action Plan templates. Not all the providers completed Action Plans for several reasons, including technological challenges, capacity issues, and attrition in the pilot itself. Providers also shared multiple challenges in the first year regarding follow up or year one “post self-assessment” including capacity at the provider level and confusion regarding Michigan NAPSACC and Go NAPSACC and the overlap between the two. At the time, Michigan NAP SACC (a variation of Go NAPSACC but consisting of specific questions using the physical activity and nutrition components of the self-assessment tool) was in use by the state of Michigan and providers thought their participation in Michigan NAPSACC with the state meant they had completed GO NAPSACC for the purposes of the procurement pilot. Additionally, if they had completed Michigan NAP SACC, they declined participation in *another* self-assessment despite it consisting of a separate module or construct, as they viewed it as duplicative.

Despite the challenges noted above, participating providers indicated that the opportunity to collaborate with partners and others “doing this work” was helpful and offered feedback to improve subsequent procurement pilot years, including a better format for professional development opportunities for participants and a refined structure of the pilot to improve access to high quality foods as well as the early care and education environment. That feedback was incorporated into the subsequent year, or year two.

## YEAR TWO

Using provider feedback, the second year of the procurement pilot included mini grants to encourage participation. Using a “request for applications” or RFA process, early care and education sites submitted applications indicating how they would address any or all three core components of Farm to ECE, including supporting food procurement practices, gardening, and nutrition and agriculture education activities. The RFA was released in March 2020, and a budget and brief plan of work was requested, with sites asked to complete the Farm to ECE self-assessment in Go NAPSACC and complete an Action Plan consistent with the application within two weeks of notification of funding.

Mini-grants of \$500 were awarded in the second year, with a total of \$6,500 granted to 13 sites, including five in Battle Creek and eight in Detroit.

Consistent with the advertised outline of activities, the group met twice during the year virtually with an additional in-person session at the onset for the group of Battle Creek providers. Sessions were also recorded to encourage participants unable to meet during scheduled times to review recordings at their convenience, which was based on feedback from the previous year. Several individual virtual sessions were also scheduled to enable training and technical assistance in the use of the self-assessment tool (Go NAPSACC) as well as local procurement options and the incorporation of local foods into menus.

It is important to note that during the second year of the procurement pilot, the COVID-19 pandemic became a factor for the early care and education sites participating in the procurement pilot as well as sites across the state. Because Center for Regional Food Systems staff were no longer able to provide on-site support or site visits, they shifted to remote work and supported the sites using online platforms.

Providers grappling with staffing issues and whether to stay open shared that they were less interested in or able to handle “one more thing,” such as participation in the Farm to ECE pilot, and only one of the 10 sites completed the year-end Go NAPSACC self-assessment. The follow up conversations with providers revealed that their priorities were pandemic-related and also suggested a need for increased and specific outreach for participants in year three.

## **YEAR THREE**

Year three was similar to the second year of the procurement pilot in offering an application for participation in the procurement pilot with a mini-grant for providers to encourage participation in shared learning. As year two’s mini-grant was slightly truncated, year three’s mini-grant offered a full year to implement planned activities outlined in the application.

However, the pandemic created recruitment challenges. Many of the Centers participating in the previous year were not operating or were functioning in limited capacity when the application was released. The pandemic also further revealed both the fragility and deeply rooted inequities of the intersecting but rarely aligned systems of food and childcare, with many sites closing when Michigan went into lockdown. Some of these closures were permanent, including two of the procurement pilot sites from the first year. This also resulted in limited access to food for many children and for the sites that remained open, the cost and availability of food was (and continues to be) prohibitive. During the first six months of the pandemic, ECE attendance was reported to be cut nearly in half with lockdowns or unemployment. For further context, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) surveyed 7,500 respondents in summer 2021 and showed that the childcare sector continues to struggle, with 80% indicating staffing challenges, with low wages as a main obstacle for recruitment and attrition, and 33% considering leaving ECE. More than half of minority-owned programs may close for good (NAEYC, n.d.).

Despite widespread and personal outreach, sites declined participation for a variety of reasons, including staff and administrative capacity concerns, uncertainty about implementation due to safety concerns with Farm to ECE activities, and overall, the additional burden. In the second year, 10 sites were awarded \$5,000 mini-grants, including two in Battle Creek, seven in Detroit, and one in Grand Rapids. Participation in the “lunch and learn” sessions during the third pilot year was sparse. Four sessions were offered based on the group’s feedback for best time of day to gather (lunchtime) and were offered quarterly beginning with an orientation when funding was disseminated. By the third session, however, only two directors were able to attend the sessions which were recorded for later viewing. The pilot also sent a monthly newsletter to participants which received positive feedback, particularly from the group of home-based providers in Detroit.

## YEAR FOUR

The final year of the procurement pilot mirrored the previous two years by using an application process for mini-grants. Noting the challenges with the pandemic and need for increased funding to support providers as well as the availability of funding based on reduced participation numbers in years two and three, the final year allowed for increased mini-grant opportunities to support providers in implementing Farm to ECE activities in the three core elements noted above. The RFA was released in July 2021, with applications including a budget requested within 4 weeks. Sites were notified of their award and were given one month to complete the Farm to ECE self-assessment and Action Plan in Go NAPSACC (consistent with application) to receive funding.

In the final year of the procurement pilot, 14 sites were awarded \$1,000 (total of \$14,000) to implement Farm to ECE activities as identified in their applications for participation in the procurement pilot. Of the 14 sites participating in the last year of the WKKF pilot, sites include two in Battle Creek, 11 in Detroit, and one in Grand Rapids.



**35% of Procurement Pilot Participants implemented gardening activities as part of their Farm to Early Care and Education curriculum.**

Photo Credit: Peranica Williams

## SUMMARY OF FARM TO ECE ACROSS PROJECT

**Michigan had 33 sites participating in the pilot in each of the three identified communities, meeting the first two goals identified in the original goals.**

One of the original goals indicated the procurement pilot would support ECE sites through institutional “buyer clusters.” Mini-grants as part of the Procurement Pilot offered a total of \$25,500 to participants to support their work in Farm to ECE. While the use of Go NAPSACC as a self-assessment tool was instituted (an original goal), the use of buyer clusters was used in only one target city and mainly due to additional support from a partner organization (National Kidney Foundation of Michigan (NKFM)). In this community, project participants were able to blend and braid funding to receive community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes funded by a separate NKFM project, supplementing what was received in the boxes with procurement pilot funding to implement and maintain garden spaces and purchase cooking equipment at their ECE sites. Both funding sources were used at these sites to maximize nutrition education and learning opportunities, and to support the use of Go NAPSACC in self-assessment of current practices, identify provider goals to create an Action Plan, and monitor progress in Farm to ECE activities to reach the self-identified goals. In the other two priority communities, procurement funds were used primarily for the purchase of materials that would enable the overlap of the three core elements, as it was uncovered through the learning collaborative that the three core elements of Farm to ECE are not mutually exclusive, but rather supportive in their goal of improving health outcomes and upholding early care and education environments. This included the purchase of raised beds or materials to construct them as well as soil, seeds, and plants for ongoing gardening activities as well as experiential learning activities about how food is grown. Children were able to actively participate in the growing process and harvest and prepare product as part of snacks and meals. Providers were also keen to purchase materials that would last beyond the procurement pilot and enable ongoing Farm to ECE activities.

**\$25,500**

worth of mini-grants  
awarded to pilot  
participants

**Michigan also met the goal of a 20% increase in provider participation, or 30 ECE providers participating within the communities by year three, noting there are 33 sites participating across the years of the pilot.**

More information regarding change in best practices using Go NAPSACC is available in the next section. While a total of 33 sites used Go NAPSACC in the pilot at the end of the funding period, it is important to note that this does not mean all 33 sites used Go NAPSACC at the beginning of the pilot and are continuing to use the self-assessment tool. Rather, sites were added each year and some sites discontinued participation, as described earlier.

Sites had access to their self-assessment data in real time and could see in Go NAPSACC if and how they were making progress in the number of best practices met. To aid in the process of progress-making, MSU CRFS hosted Farm to ECE workgroups and workshops on a regular basis to address questions and concerns regarding procurement, gardening, and nutrition education. The initial or introduction sessions of each pilot year served as orientations, with subsequent sessions informed by community or group input to meet the needs of participants, including presentations or sharing by group members. Additionally, each month a newsletter was sent to procurement pilot participants sharing resources in procurement, gardening, nutrition and agriculture education, family engagement, racial equity, grant opportunities, and sharing between and among sites. Sites were invited and encouraged to share the newsletter with colleagues as well.

## RECAP OF GOALS

Original Goal	Deliverable
Support procurement pilot in at least two of the three WKKF target cities through institutional buyer clusters to increase good food access for ECE settings using Go NAPSACC (Farm to ECE self-assessment) to self-assess current practices, identify goals, and monitor progress in establishing Farm to ECE within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participation in Battle Creek, Detroit and Grand Rapids</li> <li>● 33 sites participating using Go NAPSACC self-assessment</li> </ul>
Identify baseline data in WKKF target communities using Go NAPSACC yearly, with a 20% increase in provider participation (Total of 30 by year three)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 33 sites participating at end of year three</li> </ul>
Analyze/share results of self-assessment data with pilot group each year to inform practices; Host one Farm to ECE workgroup workshop each year and develop additional procurement best practice knowledge products informed by community group(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sites able to see self-assessment data in real time</li> <li>● Farm to ECE workshops hosted at least three times per year</li> <li>● Farm to ECE Procurement Pilot newsletter sent monthly</li> </ul>

## END OF GRANT SURVEY AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF BEST PRACTICES

In July 2022, a survey was sent to the W.K. Kellogg procurement pilot participants as well as recipients of Farm to Early Care and Education Implementation Grant or FIG funding to learn more about the sites receiving funding, Farm to ECE activities in which they participated, Farm to ECE resources accessed and degree of helpfulness of those resources, and challenges and success in implementation of Farm to ECE. In addition to the distribution of the survey, sites were asked to complete the Farm to ECE self-assessment in Go NAPSACC online, allowing six months between the “post assessment” and any previous assessments they may have conducted. The survey was sent to 45 sites (including the 14 participants in year three of the WKKF procurement pilot as well as the 31 participants funded by FIG) and had 44 respondents within the month it was open. Responses were anonymous and could not be separated by grant type, thus are reported in aggregate for the purpose of this report.

Among respondents, 21 indicated they are center-based (47.7%), 21 are family child care sites (47.7%), and 2 identified as “other” (4.5%), sharing they are Great Start Readiness sites. Enrollment at sites ranged from 4 to 190 children, with a mean of 36.9. Median enrollment, which was 21, was also calculated to account for larger center enrollment outliers.

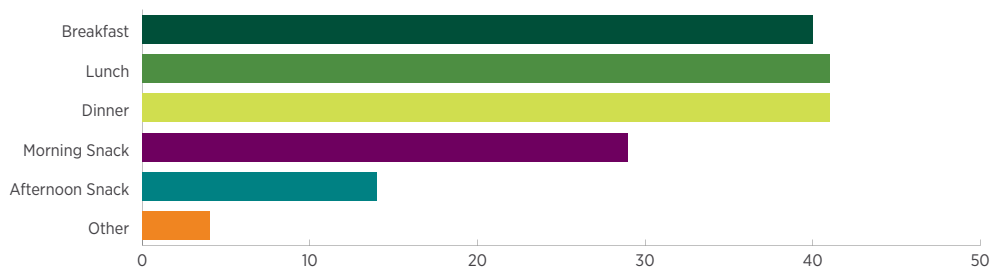
## FUNDING SOURCES

Participants in the “WKKF Cohort” received \$1000 subgrants, while those in the “FIG Cohort” received \$500 subgrants. Mean funding for recipients was \$694.90. The survey asked about additional funding sources, including the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan’s Kids & Farms. Of the 44 respondents, 31 indicated participation in CACFP, or 70.5% (13 or 29.5%) not participating. For 10 Cents a Meal, 43 responses were available, with 9 indicating participation (20.9%) and 34 (79.1%) not participating. It is important to note that while CACFP participation is a requirement for 10 Cents a Meal participation, at the time of the procurement pilot, 10 Cents a Meal was available for Centers only.

## MEALS SERVED

Participants shared meals or served additional food at their sites as well (Figure 1). The 44 respondents reported that meal service was distributed across breakfast, morning snack, and lunch. Of note, four respondents indicated serving meals in addition to breakfast, lunch and dinner, including an evening snack (n=2), with additional responses including sending home dinner with families (n=1), or providing food on weekends (n=1).

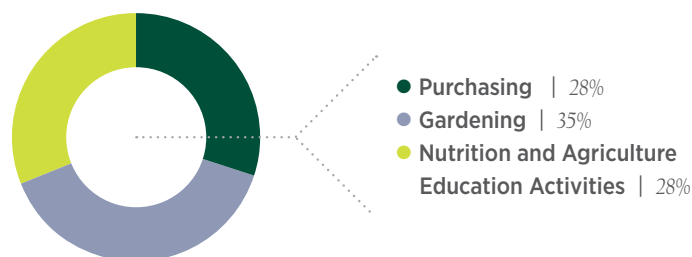
*Figure 1. Meals Types Served by Procurement Pilot Participants*



## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

As noted earlier, Farm to ECE is comprised of three core elements, including obtaining local foods, gardening, and nutrition and agriculture education. When asked about the Farm to ECE activities as part of participation in the Michigan Farm to ECE Procurement Pilot, respondents noted participation across all three core elements, suggesting overlap in activities among providers and that engagement in these elements is not mutually exclusive (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Farm to ECE Activities Among Pilot Participants*





## HELPFULNESS OF RESOURCES

When asked about the “helpfulness” of particular resources offered during the course of the procurement pilot, 39 participants responded to this section of questions. Combining responses of “extremely helpful” and “helpful,” the Go NAPSACC resources, including provider information, menus, and family resources were identified as the most helpful tool by 37 of 39 participants (Figure 3). The monthly newsletter offered by CRFS, which includes information and resources concerning the purchasing of local foods, gardening, nutrition education, family engagement, racial equity, grant and funding opportunities, “sharing,” and the Go NAPSACC Action Plan were tied for second most helpful (35 respondents indicated “extremely helpful” or “helpful”), followed by the Go NAPSACC self-assessment (34).

*Figure 3. Usefulness of Michigan Procurement Pilot Resources*





## GO NAPSACC DATA

**Additional analysis of Go NAPSACC data looking only at participants in the WKKF Cohort was also conducted.<sup>1</sup> Data was analyzed to determine if participants in the pilot had positive changes from pre- to post-scores in Farm to ECE self-assessment practices and what, if any, best practices were affected.**

The list of procurement pilot sites participating in each of the three years was cross-referenced with the Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE self-assessment summary report (Go NAPSACC, 2022) digitally available to state program administrators at the conclusion of the grant period. The data set was cleaned, with data entered into the Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE analysis tool provided by Go NAPSACC in spring 2022. A total of 17 sites (out of 33 total WKKF funded procurement pilot sites) completed both pre-and post- self-assessments for analysis (table 1). Analysis indicates that although sites increased their Farm to ECE self-assessment score from pre- to post- by 1.0 point, the increase is not of statistical significance. With 26 sites completing pre-self-assessment data, this result should be interpreted with caution due to the lack of post self-assessments completed. Of the post self-assessments completed, 35.3% of programs had self-assessments with scores greater than 50% of best practices met, compared with 23.1% of programs with scores greater than 50% at pre- self-assessment.

Among specific farm to ECE practices in the cohort, nine practices saw a negative change across the period of data collection including “Preschool children have the opportunity to meet a farmer 1 time per year or more and families are invited to attend” (n=8, D=-0.75) and “The materials used to help preschool children learn about food and where it comes from include a variety of posters, pictures, books, and props” (n=17, D=-0.35). Two practices remained static (no change), including “During the growing season, preschool children do cooking or taste test activities with fresh fruits or vegetables 1 time per week or more.” Analysis also noted no change for the best practice of “Professional development on Farm to ECE covers a variety of topics about buying and using local foods and educating children and their families about local foods.”

Positive changes were noted for eight specific practices, with the greatest increase from pre- to post- self-assessment noted in “The program has a garden that helps children learn how food grows and produces enough fruits and/or vegetables to be part of preschoolers’ meals or snacks” (n=17, D=0.65) followed by “Children do a variety of activities to help plan, plant, care for, harvest, and learn from the garden” (n=17, D=0.59) and “During the growing season, structured gardening time is provided to preschool children 2 times per week or more” (n=17, D=0.59). Both practices support observations of procurement pilot applications and Go NAPSACC Action Plans particularly in years three and four of the pilot, with an increase in gardening and facilitating learning about how food is grown.

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1 See Table 1.

**Table 1. Changes in Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE Best Practices**

Best Practice	n	% Meeting Best Practice (Post)	Change (Mean)
A variety of local fruits, vegetables, herbs, grains, dairy products, and/or protein foods are offered over the course of the year	17	41	-.18
Over the course of the year, local foods are offered as part of meals or snacks 1 time per week or more	17	53	-.029
During the growing season, local fruits and/or vegetables are offered as part of meals or snacks 3 times per week or more	17	53	-.29
The program communicates about local foods included in meals or snacks through menus, farm information, recipes, signs, marketing materials, and/or other strategies	17	12	-.18
The program has a garden that helps children learn how food grows and produces enough fruits and/or vegetables to be part of preschoolers' meals or snacks	17	41	.65
Over the course of the year, 7 or more different fruits and/or vegetables grow in the program's garden	17	35	.29
The program's garden grows a variety of herbs, fruits, and/or vegetables to reflect the diverse food traditions of enrolled children The program's garden grows a variety of herbs, fruits, and/or vegetables to reflect the diverse food traditions of enrolled children	17	24	.29
During the growing season, structured gardening time is provided to preschool children 2 times per week or more	17	59	.59
Children do a variety of activities to help plan, plant, care for, harvest, and learn from the garden	17	59	.59
Teachers offer planned education on food and where it comes from 1 time per week or more	17	53	.24
During the growing season, preschool children do cooking or taste test activities with fresh fruits or vegetables 1 time per week or more	16	50	0.00
Preschool children have the opportunity to meet a farmer 1 time per year or more and families are invited to attend	8	13	-.75

**Table 1, continued. Changes in Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE Best Practices**

Best Practice	n	% Meeting Best Practice (Post)	Change (Mean)
The materials used to help preschool children learn about food and where it comes from include a variety of posters, pictures, books, and props	17	59	-.35
Teachers talk with children informally about where foods come from or how they grow each time they see an opportunity	17	35	-.18
All staff participate in Farm to ECE professional development related to their jobs 1 time per year or more	17	53	.18
Professional development on Farm to ECE covers a variety of topics about buying and using local foods and educating children and their families about local foods	17	35	0.00
The program connects families to local foods in a variety of ways, including offering information, tastings, and opportunities to get involved with gardening and food education activities	17	18	-.029
Input from families is used in menu planning so that menus regularly include meals and/or snacks that reflect the cultural, ethnic, and/or religious food traditions of enrolled children	17	35	.06
There is a written policy on Farm to ECE that includes a variety of topics related to the local foods that the program serves and other efforts to educate children and families and connect them to local foods	17	18	-.12

## CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION

One of the challenges of the pilot has been ensuring that sites participate across all four years. Feedback has been positive regarding training and TA, especially opportunities for free, online trainings that are available for credit in MIRegistry. Providers who chose to not continue in the pilot shared that it was due to issues with staff capacity, the pandemic, or a combination of both.

Challenges related to the pilot itself were also shared, including supply chain issues and finding local product, issues with local wildlife in child care gardens, and the decimation of a greenhouse by a summer storm. Regardless of these issues, in the end-of-grant survey, the challenges shared related mostly to external factors taken in stride by providers.

## SUCCESSSES

Providers also shared successes that resulted from their participation in the pilot program. It is important to note that there are subtle differences in each of the “cohorts” that may have affected perception of participation, despite applications for expectation being nearly identical for the WKKF and FIG cohorts. Meaning, the WKKF pilot cohort extended for a full year with two cycles granting \$500 and the final cycle granting \$1,000 while the two FIG pilots lasted approximately six and nine months and granted \$500. Regardless of cohort, participants were expected to complete a Farm to ECE Go NAPSACC self-assessment and Action Plan as grant recipients, update Action Plans, participate in learning collaborative sessions, and complete a post-Farm to ECE Go NAPSACC self-assessment at the conclusion of the grant. Additionally, participants were asked to complete an “end-of-grant” survey in July 2022. When prompted to share additional thoughts about the procurement pilot in the survey, one provider noted the ease of application and low-maintenance aspect of participation:



The simplicity of application, minimal restrictions on purchases, and low reporting requirements made it much easier to ask for what we truly needed and not spend excessive amounts of time with paperwork. I hope this opportunity continues for providers across Michigan regardless of their stage in F2ECE implementation.

One provider underscored their use of the validated self-assessment tool—which was introduced as a strengths-based tool to inform early care and educator practice—as well as the wealth of resources shared: **“I applaud the Farm to ECE and the procurement pilot grant program for the introduction to the GONAPPSACC program.”**

When asked to share successes with the Michigan Farm to ECE Procurement Pilot, most responses centered around children’s learning experiences or the tasting of new fruits and vegetables either grown by the children or purchased locally, such as **“It has been a real joy to see the children’s excitement about trying new vegetables, fruits & herbs, and learning about how and where they grow!”**

Facilitating skill development as part of the learning experiences is an essential aspect of Farm to ECE which can be documented for accreditation. A simple purchase such as the one shared here demonstrates the value of the overlapping core elements of Farm to ECE:



We have successfully grown seedlings under the grow light we purchased with this grant money. Children, families, and staff engage with the plants. They observe the growing plants and they give them water with a spray bottle as they move to and from their classrooms. Also, the nylon knives purchased with some of these funds allowed children to safely, independently cut seed potatoes during a garden lesson focused on planting potatoes.

The ability to engage families in the experiences is an important aspect participants shared as well, with different participants noting:



We had amazing family engagement getting garden beds ready to plant, and the children were able to harvest a few vegetables we planted.



We had a HUGE success. Many families joined our free events at the local orchards and we put up many foods in every families pantries for use throughout the year with their family.



Children have increased the amount of fresh foods that they are eating weekly from our garden and they are also able to bring fresh produce home to their families.

Another participant shared the family connections their site was able to foster as a result of the procurement pilot, celebrating the sense of belonging and inclusion that came as a result of Farm to Early Care and Education programming:



I cannot express the joy YOU brought to the families in our center by Blessing us with this grant. Many parents have shared the community feeling they now have for the first time in their lives because of our family activity orchard trips and the other growers in the area. It is priceless to see the tremendous joy they feel by being invited and included. It was such a touching scene for me to see parents with vehicles making arrangements with parents without vehicles to get them to the events. None of my families knew each other prior to this year now the friendships they “have GROWN” due to this grant are just beautiful.

# Unanticipated Outcomes

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The primary mechanism for sharing information about the Michigan Farm to ECE Procurement Pilot was the Michigan Farm to ECE Listserv. Michigan is also a recipient of Farm to Early Care and Education Implementation Grant (FIG) funding from the Association for State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN). The Network Listserv was used to invite participation for focus groups and regional networking events, as well as to share the request for applications for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded procurement pilot opportunities and Network meetings and other professional development opportunities.

## **FIG PROCUREMENT PILOT**

With funding from Centers for Disease Control, the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists working to increase the capacity of 10 states and the District of Columbia to strengthen their state Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) initiatives through the Farm to ECE Implementation (FIG) program. Through the FIG, Michigan expanded the WKKF Farm to ECE pilot program, providing funding with a focus on equity. The Michigan team made sure their pilot applications were easy to read, free of jargon, and time-efficient to complete. Michigan received 65 applicants for the “FIG Procurement Pilot Expansion,” ultimately funding 31 spots in across two cohorts in the pilot. To date, the pilot has provided \$14,479.11 to support Farm to ECE activities, impacting 1,148 children. This pilot reached 17 counties in Michigan and the initial results indicate more than half of participating sites improved “best practices” in Farm to ECE using Go NAPSACC. The pilot is also helping build the Farm to ECE providers enrolled in the 10 Cents for Michigan’s Kids & Farms program, laying the groundwork for long-term benefits for Michigan children and food systems.

## **GROWING THE MICHIGAN FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NETWORK**

In May of 2021, the Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Network, or the Farm to ECE Network, had 66 members on the Michigan Farm to ECE Network Listserv, which is how the Network tracks membership. Prior to the pandemic, the Network met biannually, averaging about 30 members per meeting, with an Advisory Board of 12 members that met quarterly. The Advisory Board became the FIG Implementation Team in November 2020, meeting monthly.

In early 2020, the Michigan Farm to ECE Network launched its webpage to serve as a resource for early care and education providers and other stakeholders involved in Farm to Early Care and Education. Since May of 2021, when Network activity began being actively tracked, membership has nearly doubled, with an additional 60 members subscribing to the Listserv. Access to the MI Farm to ECE Network page shows 1,226 pageviews from May 1, 2020 to August 15, 2022 (Table 2). The landing, or homepage, saws 272 views or 22% of traffic. Top information or resource-specific pages include nutrition and agriculture education activities (203 pageviews or 16.5% of views), procurement resources (143 pageviews or 11.6% of views), and racial equity resources (117 pageviews or 9.5% of views).

**Table 2. Michigan Farm to ECE Network Website Pageviews**

Page	URL	Pageviews (5/1/2020- 8/15/2022)
Michigan Farm to ECE Network Resources landing page	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/michigan-farm-to-ece-Network/resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/michigan-farm-to-ece-Network/resources</a>	272
Procurement Resources	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/procurement-resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/procurement-resources</a>	143
Gardening Resources	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/gardening-resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/gardening-resources</a>	87
Nutrition and Agriculture Education Activities	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/nutrition-and-agriculture-education-activities">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/nutrition-and-agriculture-education-activities</a>	203
Racial Equity Resources	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/racial-equity-resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/racial-equity-resources</a>	117
Family Engagement Resources	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/family-engagement-resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/family-engagement-resources</a>	32
Farmer Resources	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/farmer-resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/farmer-resources</a>	17
Additional Resources	<a href="https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/additional-resources">https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/additional-resources</a>	41
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>912 Pageviews</b>



## MICHIGAN GROW MORE AWARDS

The Michigan Farm to ECE Network also wanted to raise awareness of Farm to ECE and acknowledge early care and education providers, farmers, and food producers doing extraordinary work in Farm to ECE. The Michigan Grow More Awards was established by a workgroup within the Network for that purpose, led mainly by providers within the workgroup to name and develop the parameters of the award.

In its inaugural year, the workgroup determined eligibility for the Michigan Grow More Awards for early care and education providers engaged in Farm to ECE efforts, including child care centers, family care homes, Head Start and Early Head Start, tribal child care programs, and preschools based in K-12 schools. Nominations for providers (either through self-nomination or from others) could include one or all of the following areas, with activities taking place in an ECE setting with children birth through age five:

- Procurement: purchasing or obtaining food grown or produced locally
- Gardening: planting, growing, and harvesting of fruits, vegetables, and edible plants
- Nutrition and agricultural education activities: educational opportunities related to food, nutrition, and agriculture that help children learn about how food grows and where it comes from

Nominations for farmer and/or food producer included anyone who grew or provided one or more varieties of local/Michigan crops/products for an early care and education (ECE) site (e.g., farmer with CSA, local chef donating extra produce from garden) and/or worked with ECE providers to offer education opportunities on their farms or via virtual field trips.

The first round of awards took place in October 2021, with six early care and education sites receiving awards in procurement, gardening, and nutrition and agriculture education. Request for nominations for the 2022 Michigan Grow More Awards were shared August 15, 2022 with intention to announce recipients at the October 2022 Michigan Farm to ECE Network meeting.

## ONLINE TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The MSU CRFS team assumed state administrative duties for Go NAPSACC in October 2018 and also participates in Go NAPSACC's national advisory group or NAG. A key goal for Michigan was to expand access to providers in using the Farm to ECE self-assessment tool in Go NAPSACC, as well as other modules in Go NAPSACC, to identify best practice standards in their early care and education sites and facilitate children's development of healthy habits for eating, physical activity, and oral health. Use of Go NAPSACC has expanded to include family resources and half hour training modules.

Michigan also uses MI Registry as a mechanism for early care and education providers to engage in and track professional development opportunities. MSU CRFS hosted Farm to ECE trainings via MIRegistry during the WKKF funded project period for providers to receive professional development credit, including a "Farm to Early Care and Education 101" (Webinar, 114 participants), "Cultivation Social-Emotional Health with Farm to Early Care and Education" (In person, 6 participants), "Sprouting in Winter: Indoor Gardening for Beginners" (Webinar, 192 Participants), and "10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids & Farms Provider Training" (Webinar, 10 participants).

Additionally, CRFS worked with Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and University of North Carolina Go NAPSACC to coordinate Go NAPSACC training completion with MIRegistry. This is significant not only due to the waiver MDE afforded for the 30-minute trainings (professional development typically must be 1-hour in length), but also because the two systems are able to "communicate" with one another, thus eliminating the need for staff time to enter provider information into the registry system after completion of the trainings. Go NAPSACC offers 37 half-hour trainings for providers to complete free of charge, which increases the number of health and wellness options available to providers in the system as well.

## RACIAL EQUITY WORKSHOPS

The Michigan Farm to Early Care and Education Network (or, the Network), facilitated by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems, hosted the "Advancing Racial Equity in the Michigan Farm to ECE Network Workshop" as part of the Farm to ECE Implementation Grant (FIG), inviting all members of the Network, including procurement pilot participants. The workshop was conducted virtually by facilitators from the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) Center for Health Equity Practice over two days: July 12 and July 26, 2021.

Goals for participants in day one included developing a common vocabulary and understanding of key racial equity and food system terms and concepts. This was intended to prepare them to use a modified version of National Farm to School Network's Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool for Farm to School Programs and Policy in small groups on day two.

Day two goals included using the tool in small group discussions to examine the potential inequities embedded within the Network's culture that could present barriers to advancing equity through programming and policy initiatives. Additional goals for participants were to envision how collective power might address the systemic changes needed for social transformation within the Farm to ECE movement, consider community stakeholder engagement and contributions, and reflect on Network priorities for advancing racial and social equity. Participants were asked to spend time individually and in small groups to respond to the modified version of the racial and social equity assessment tool with specific prompts to guide discussions. After day two, the facilitators reiterated next steps to include additional work using the assessment tool and action planning. Participants were emailed a workshop evaluation survey using Qualtrics to gather additional feedback about the sessions.

A second workshop, “Michigan Farm to ECE Network Racial Equity Workshop: Moving from Assessment into Action” was planned and facilitated by Ebony Reddock of Bumblebee Design & Evaluation on June 29, 2022 with a survey to engage additional feedback. This workshop was intended to build on the racial equity workshop hosted by the Network in July 2021. In the session, participants discussed the results of the 2021 assessment as a group and broke into small groups to participate in action planning. A goal of this workshop was to develop a list of actions the Network could take to build further equity into their collective work. In total, 15 participants informed the “debrief document”—eight in the virtual session and seven completing the survey.

Results from this workshop include the identification of actionable steps based on three categories, including advocacy (noting in feedback to the facilitator that many organizations within the Network may exchange the term “education” for “advocacy”), practice, and data.

**The initial action steps based on discussion and survey responses include:**

**Advocacy (Education)**

1. **Bring more attention to Farm to ECE issues.**
2. **Engage constituents and build trust.**

**Practice**

1. **Increase Network participation from the Farm to ECE field.**
2. **Disseminate information about the Network widely.**
3. **Facilitate opportunities for self-directed learning.**

**Data**

1. **Use data to measure progress toward equity.**
2. **Use data to build the argument for increased funding to the FTECE space.**
3. **Pursue ways to diversify data by form and topic to help drive increased engagement in the Network.**

**These initial steps were further refined to prioritize three action steps:**

- **Engage constituents and build trust (Advocacy, point 2).**
- **Increase Network participation from the FTECE field (Practice, point 1).**
- **Disseminate information about the Network widely (Practice, point 2).**

# Lessons Learned (Implications)

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Using Go NAPSACC data as well as the end-of-grant survey consisting of both WKKF- and FIG-funded procurement pilot participants provides valuable information. Despite changes of non-statistical significance from pre- to post- self-assessment in Go NAPSACC, of the 17 sites completing post- self-assessments, 35.3% had scores meeting greater than 50% of best practices (up from 23.1% at pre-assessment). A review of the Go NAPSACC data suggests providers may need more or additional support relative to Go NAPSACC and the purpose of the self-assessments, with an emphasis on the tool as a strengths-based assessment as well as the resources available to providers within the state. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the bulk of the WKKF procurement pilot occurred during the pandemic. It is also important to acknowledge that this data is consistent with restrictions occurring during the pandemic and providers may have been less able to participate in Farm to ECE activities or less likely to complete administrative burdens, such as the completion of Go NAPSACC, as they attended to other more pressing needs within their site.

This was demonstrated as providers were less able to “meet,” but more likely to utilize resources at their convenience, as evidenced in the nearly 200 providers who took advantage of the online webinar “Sprouting in Winter,” as well as the survey responses about resources. Perhaps one important lesson from the pilot was the need for formative evaluation and ongoing feedback to address the evolving needs of participants and pivot accordingly. Feedback after the first year informed subsequent years, resulting in mini-grants awarding \$25,500 and informing professional development opportunities available in MIRegistry.

**The most important lesson learned from the pilot includes the supportive nature of the three core elements of Farm to ECE. Meaning, the ways in which ECE sites obtained food, engage in gardening, and facilitate nutrition and agriculture education activities did not occur as discrete actions but rather occurred together as supportive opportunities. Perhaps this is the most important takeaway from the pilot as this work serves to inform future Farm to ECE efforts in Michigan and other states.**

The end-of-grant survey of participants indicated positive reactions to the procurement pilot, including ease of application, implementation, and overall satisfaction with participation. A caveat in interpreting these results is that the survey includes both WKKF and FIG procurement pilot participants. However, the lessons learned from the WKKF-funded pilot informed the FIG-funded pilot, and the FIG-pilot could not have occurred without the benefit of the WKKF-funded project.

As with any harvest, the procurement pilot experienced challenges but also yielded important gains. Careful reflection on the process as well as the final outcome is imperative for this evolving work.

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## VISION

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

## MISSION

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

## ABOUT

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

### **Center for Regional Food Systems**

Michigan State University  
480 Wilson Road  
Natural Resources Building  
East Lansing, MI, 48824

[foodsystems.msu.edu](http://foodsystems.msu.edu)

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**MICHIGAN STATE**  
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Regional Food Systems