Farm to Early Care and Education in Vermont

Ramin Badiyan
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Nicole Becher
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Nicholas Bompastore
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Stephen Daniels
UVM Larner College of Medicine

Katherine Price
UVM Larner College of Medicine

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/comphp_gallery

Part of the Community Health and Preventive Medicine Commons, and the Health Services Research Commons

Recommended Citation
Badiyan, Ramin; Becher, Nicole; Bompastore, Nicholas; Daniels, Stephen; Price, Katherine; Rohwer, James; Link, Heather; and Greene, Cynthia, "Farm to Early Care and Education in Vermont" (2018). Public Health Projects, 2008-present. 257.
https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/comphp_gallery/257

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Public Health Projects, University of Vermont College of Medicine at ScholarWorks @ UVM. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Health Projects, 2008-present by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UVM. For more information, please contact donna.omalley@uvm.edu.
Authors
Ramin Badiyan, Nicole Becher, Nicholas Bompastore, Stephen Daniels, Katherine Price, James Rohwer, Heather Link, and Cynthia Greene

This book is available at ScholarWorks @ UVM: https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/comphp_gallery/257
Farm to Early Care and Education in Vermont

Badiyan R¹, Becher NA¹, Bompastore NJ¹, Daniels SD¹, Price KE¹, Rohwer JK¹, Greene CL², Link H¹
Larner College of Medicine at UVM¹, Vermont FEED²

Introduction

Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) is a program of the National Farm to School Network that aims to extend the core elements of Farm to School into ECE settings (e.g., preschools, childcare programs) with the goal of improving the health of children ages zero to five and enhancing their educational experience with food and nutrition. Farm to ECE involves food-based learning activities, school gardens, and the use of local foods in meals and snacks to accomplish this goal. Farm to ECE is still in its early stages of development nationwide, including Vermont. The purpose of this project was to gather baseline Farm to ECE data for the state of Vermont to assess the extent to which Farm to ECE is already being implemented statewide, and to identify areas for improvement and future Farm to ECE research.

Methods

A 23-question survey was created based off of the 2015 National Survey of Early Care and Education Providers administered by the National Farm to School Network. The survey was built with SurveyMonkey and distributed through the Vermont Child Development Division to over 600 recipients. Multiple choice and yes/no questions explored attitudes towards Farm to ECE. Questions on demographics assessed number of children in each childcare program (e.g., preschools, childcare programs) with the goal of improving the health of children ages zero to five and enhancing their educational experience with food and nutrition. Farm to ECE involves food-based learning activities, school gardens, and the use of local foods in meals and snacks to accomplish this goal. Farm to ECE is still in its early stages of development nationwide, including Vermont. The purpose of this project was to gather baseline Farm to ECE data for the state of Vermont to assess the extent to which Farm to ECE is already being implemented statewide, and to identify areas for improvement and future Farm to ECE research.

Results

Our survey provides a start to understanding food and nutritional education in ECE providers in VT. At least one meal is served daily at 93% of centers surveyed. Providers are a significant source of food for young children, and it is encouraging that most programs serve local foods (84%).

Cost and food quality were the most important factors when determining where to buy food. Cost was considered the most reported barrier to acquiring local foods, specifically. Following cost, seasonality was the second most reported barrier. A surprising 43% of participants said they purchased from farmers markets.

Being a northern state, Vermont has a challenge of providing accessible produce year round. Among the top reported purchased food were apples, berries, cucumbers, and carrots, which have limited growing seasons.

Educating providers about what constitutes Farm to ECE is another area to address. Among participants, 80% reported that they do not currently have Farm to ECE activities in their program; however, when polled on activities at their center, 96% of participants who originally answered no, marked at least one activity that qualifies as a Farm to ECE event. This indicates a gap in understanding what Farm to ECE is and its accessibility to providers.

Conclusions

Farm to School promotes childhood nutrition and supports local economies. Integrating Farm to School into early education in VT can have similar benefits. Going forward, further data collection should focus on the challenges of seasonality in order to provide year-round access to affordable, quality, local food in early care settings. The State of Vermont would like to extend the Farm to School Program to 75% of Vermont schools by 2025. Based on the results of this project, we suggest that a similar goal be established for Vermont-based early care programs targeting improved nutrition for Vermont’s youngest children and while supporting local farms and markets.

References