

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Defining, Buying, and Eating Local Food

Parents want their children to grow, learn and be well. Choosing nutritious foods for them to eat is one of the key ways to help accomplish these things. Nutrients help the body grow and be well and healthy. Let's talk about some places where good, nutritious foods can be found. Farm to Early Care and Education helps young children to learn about food and allows children to see where food comes from and how it is grown.

Farm to Preschool

How do you define *local*? According to USDA, you can define *local* or *regional* however you like. For example, it can be within the county or within the region (within 90 miles). USDA promotes Farm to Preschool, and foods can be sourced in a variety of ways. There are great sources of local food such as local farmers, grocery stores that carry locally grown food, and nearby farmer's markets. Perhaps you can partner with a farmer who can help you with specials on their food or can show children the entire process of farm to table.



Farm to School isn't just for K-12 institutions; an increasing number of early child care and education providers are engaging in Farm to Preschool activities. Farm to Preschool encompasses efforts to serve locally or regionally produced foods in early child care and education settings. It provides hands-on learning opportunities such as gardening, farm visits, and culinary activities and integrates food-related education into the curriculum. You can learn more about USDA's Farm to Preschool program by visiting here: www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-to-preschool

Decide how to involve children in your care in the process of learning more about Farm to Preschool. Consider a trip to a farm-whether it's during planting, growing, or reaping seasons. Have farmers come to your facility and bring fruits and vegetables so children may taste test the food while the farmers are there.



Communities Benefit

Serving local products helps the local economy as well. Buying local is a good way to support your community. Check to see if the funding you receive from the Child and Adult Care Food Program can be used to purchase food from farmers. Depending on where you live, you may have access to local produce, dairy, meat, grains, eggs, beans, and many other foods. Check out: *10 Facts About Local Foods in Child Nutrition Programs* at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/f2s/10Facts.pdf> or see www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp

Buying Locally

According to USDA, buying local includes all types of producers, such as farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and many other types of food businesses. Local can mean different things in different areas, and can vary from within a few miles to a few states.

USDA Food and Nutrition Service: TIP! Remember you can define local or regional however you like: within a certain number of miles from your school, within the state, or within the county. You might also choose to define the terms differently for different types of products. Involving food service staff, local growers, food distributors, and others in helping you define local will ensure that the definition suits your needs.



How can you help the children in your care experience fresh local food?

References

Community Food Systems. (2018, October 26). *Farm to CACFP*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/farm-cacfp>

Defining Local and Finding Local Foods. (2014, August 21). *Defining Local Foods*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/defining-local-and-finding-local-foods>

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