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# CACFP SUPPORTS LOCALLY GROWN FOOD

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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) administrators, and partners to enhance CACFP operations by serving locally grown foods to children in child care centers and child development homes.

CACFP is a federally funded program that provides aid to child care institutions and facilities for the provision of nutritious meals and snacks that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children. The program is funded through USDA, administered through the Iowa Department of Education, and serves infants, children through 18 years, and adult day care centers. Meal and snack reimbursement rates vary depending on center vs. home and are based on income levels.



Early childhood is the ideal time to establish healthy eating habits. Farm to early care activities can increase children's willingness to try new foods and help them become familiar with local foods they will see in school. Farm to early care creates a reliable outlet for producers and the smaller purchasing volumes for early child care settings are a good fit for local farmers.

The CACFP meal patterns are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and scientific recommendations from the National Academy of Medicine. There is a separate vegetable component and a separate fruit component and juice is limited to once per day. Two different vegetables may be served instead of fruit at lunch and supper. USDA has developed optional best practices that include incorporating seasonal and locally produced foods into meals.

CACFP providers can define "local" however they choose. Local foods can be produce, dairy, grains, meats (state or USDA inspected), eggs, and beans. CACFP operators can find local products through many sources, including food hubs, farmer's markets, distributors, grocery stores, local orchards, or direct from producers. Child care may also be able to grow enough in a garden to meet some of their food needs.

CACFP categorizes costs associated with growing food that will be used in CACFP, either as part of the meal service or for nutrition education activities, as allowable. Costs may include seeds, fertilizer, labor, plot rental, etc. Food grown in a garden on site or offsite, can be used in the CACFP meal or snack and claimed for reimbursement, or utilized for tastings.

The Farm to CACFP online module at [Iowa Learning Online Professional Development](#) is a great place for a child care center or home provider to get started with serving locally grown foods. The training is free and credits for 1 CACFP training hour after the participant successfully completes the module.

[Team Nutrition's Grow It, Try It, Like It!](#) curriculum assists child care providers in offering garden-themed nutrition education to children ages 3 to 5. Through the activities in Grow It, Try It, Like It!, children touch, smell, feel, and taste new fruits and vegetables.

[Iowa MyPlate Coloring Sheets](#) can be used to highlight foods grown locally. MyPlate Grocery Store Bingo is a fun and interactive game that children can play while grocery shopping with adults. Younger children can search for foods of various colors and shapes.

The [Farm to CACFP webpage](#) offers resources, Local Food Coordinators, Farm to Preschool Network, Gardening with CACFP video, and other valuable resources.

The Iowa Department of Education was recently awarded the [2020 Farm to School Grant by USDA](#) to improve access to local foods. A "Choose Iowa Food of the Month" campaign will be developed to increase children's access to local food and support local producers by increasing connections to Child Nutrition Programs. Sub-grants will be awarded to support local level implementation in schools, summer food service program sponsors, and CACFP centers.

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