Early childhood is an important period for developing healthy eating and physical activity behaviors, yet 25% of preschoolers are overweight or obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014). This project explores the current published research and national implementation of one recently developed strategy aimed at preventing early childhood obesity: Farm to Preschool.

### Abstract

**Introduction**

- With 12.5 million children under age five in a regular childcare arrangement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), early education settings are critical contexts for activities aimed at promoting healthy eating.
- Farm to preschool (F2P) programming connects early care and education settings to local food and/or food producers with the objectives of serving locally-grown, healthy foods to young children, improving child nutrition, and providing related educational opportunities.
- Among older children, farm to school activities are associated with increased consumption of produce, increased willingness to try new healthy foods, and increased knowledge about healthy eating (Joshi, Azuma, & Feenstra, 2008).
- As a new movement, little is known about the reach and impact of F2P activities. The current project consists of a systematic literature review to summarize the state of F2P published research and reports the findings of a national survey of early care and education staff on F2P implementation.

**Methods**

- **Literature Review:** systematic search of academic databases
  - Peer-reviewed journal articles, published 1994-2015
  - Research studies involving preschoolers and locally grown food
  - Coding scheme: (1) procurement/use of local food in child care; (2) educational activities related to local food; (3) edible gardens; (4) promoting families’ & staff’s access to local foods
- **Surveys:**
  - Designed based on review of literature and existing farm to school surveys
  - Administered electronically in 2012- link sent to National Farm to School Network (NFSN) F2P subcommittee twice to distribute to relevant networks, listservs, websites; announced in NFSN national F2P electronic newsletter
  - Survey assessed implementation of F2P including:
    - Kinds of programming & types of food incorporated
    - How programming engaged families

**Literature Review Results**

- 14 articles met inclusion criteria
- 13 of these articles published 2011-2015
- Types of F2P programming
  - Educational activities (N = 11)
  - School gardens (N = 6)
  - Promoting/increasing access to local foods (N = 3)
  - Using local food in meals/snacks (N = 4)
- Methodologies employed:
  - Described developing intervention, provided pilot data or plans for pilot study (N = 2)
  - Process evaluation to determine implementation facilitators and challenges (N = 2)
  - Evaluated program impact (N=11)
- All articles reported one or more positive impacts of F2P
  - Increased child consumption and/or liking of produce
  - Positive response from parents teachers to F2P activities

**Farm to Preschool Survey Results**

- **Respondents:** 512 early education staff
- Sites located in 39 states & Puerto Rico
- Sites served at least 163,450 children
- Rural (50.8%), suburban (35.7%), & urban (34.2%) sites
- Fruits and vegetables most commonly incorporated item (used by 81% & 88% of respondents, respectively)
- F2P activities most commonly coordinated by teachers, program directors, and administrators (56%, 45%, & 36% of respondents respectively)

**Conclusion**

- The F2P movement is growing but in its nascent & research is only beginning to emerge
- Published literature focuses heavily on program development, feasibility, and acceptability
- Paucity of research on impact of F2P using randomized controlled trials
- There is a dearth of research on F2P programs that serve locally grown food in classrooms and on family engagement components of programming
- Research only on interventions with fruits and vegetables, but survey respondents purchased other local food (e.g., milk, eggs)
- Policy implications: make programs aware of outside funding & expand funding options
- Partnerships are important for sustainability of programming
- NFSN, national organizations focused on young children

**References**


The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.