

Strengthening Connections between Local Food Producers and Early Childhood Educators

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Notes

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Introductions & Issue Background

- Group Introductions
- Context: Early Care & Education (ECE) programs are looking to source local food for their students' meals and connect with RI farmers for educational opportunities.
 - What is happening so far in Rhode Island Farm to ECE
 - RIDOH x Market Mobile CSA Pilot
 - Funding from RIDOH Heal Program (\$75,000)
 - Key partners - (FFRI - food hub, RIDOH - oversight and funding, Brown University - evaluation, SNAP Ed - educational materials, SCLT - main vendor)
 - Who it's for - providers in Central Falls and Pawtucket
 - What will they be getting - several boxes of produce for education and meal preparation
 - RI Farm & Sea to School Institute & ECE COP & Institute
 - The RI Farm & Sea to School Network is a statewide coalition that provides leadership, coordination, and advocacy to expand farm to school efforts in Rhode Island cafeterias, classrooms, and communities. The Network facilitates a Farm to ECE Community of Practice that meets quarterly, and hosts a year long farm to school training, called the RI Farm & Sea to School Institute that trains K-12 and Farm to ECE educators in implementing farm to school activities for their students.
 - Anticipated LFS Funding for ECE programs operating CACFP to order local foods
 - \$375, 634 for childcare facilities partnering in the Child and Adult Care Food Program - RIDE is in the process of applying. Intend to subcontract to Farm Fresh RI based on previous success with last round of LFS funding and K-12 schools. Also considering how different the ECE world is!
 - Farm to ECE Community of Practice

- Organization meets once every three months. A time to hear updates and share ideas. Contact hello@rifarmtoschool.org to be added to the group!

Questions:

- Where is the CSA box program getting consumed?
 - Family child care centers
 - Mostly for taste test, if very small they place then they could use in schools
- What is in the box?
 - Half bustle box 2-3 items, 10ish pounds, items source through market mobiles
 - 1 item will have educational information to accompany it
 - Items that are in season - mushrooms, beets, radishes (change each time)
- Size of center will determine the number of boxes
- Receiving a CSA box will be a first come first served roll out
- What age group is ECE?
 - Birth - 5ish
- Who is in charge of ECE centers?
 - Some state run, some headstart, some for profit

Innovators Compass Question: What will help farmers and local food producers sell more products to Early Care & Education Centers?

- **1. Who is involved?**
 - **People:** Farmers, Distributors, Manufacturers (food producer, caterer, the "maker"), kids, owner of centers, KIDS, parents, food service management, person making food person decisions (could be the main educator or food service team, center staff)
 - **Orgs:** B&M, Oncore, RIDE, DHS, Farm Fresh, Funders local and state (Foundations that offer grants),
 - Agricultural land
- **2. Observations: What is happening and Why? What do you know about this market?**
 - Limited storage space (maybe only have one refrigerator)
 - Some kids can't eat solid food
 - Staff capacity and turnover
 - Hard to scale down for a small school - we don't benefit from economies of scale. It can be hard to meet children's dietary needs.
 - Limited vendors for childcare
 - Small children often have strict diet
 - Recipes can be difficult
 - When a caterer is in charge, center might not have menu autonomy

- Integrating local food into CACFP approved recipes can be challenging
- **3. What matters most? Principals**
 - Food safety is critical - especially with younger population
 - Want students to be fed
 - Recipes that are culturally inclusive / family cultures included
 - Sustainable
 - Kids should never go hungry
 - Nutritional content
 - Chemical free produce and humanely raised livestock
 - Educational aspect - teaching kids where this comes from
 - Getting student buy in
 - Parent involvement
- **4. Ideas: What ways are there?**
 - CSA Box with education material
 - Each farm pays with a local meal? (check
 - Bigger food budget for local food and subsidies
 - Send excess food home with students at no cost
 - School field trips to local farms, bringing farmers in to meet students
 - RIDOH Working on field trip or classroom visits to integrate producers and young children
 - Project Chick - [Historic New England](#)
 - School garden and tastes test at every school
 - Work w ECE providers for EASY local recipes
 - Standardized cookbook? RI specific
 - Childrens workshop
 - Connecting local producers with ECE providers
 - Group local centers by location for buying groups
 - More shared processing infrastructure
 - Light processing that farmers could share: peels, cutting machines
 - Could be so helpful for home providers!!!!
 - RI Cookbook for CACFP providers with value added items + organized to highlight seasonality
- **5. Experiments: What's a step to try?**
 - Bigger Food Budget, subsidies for local purchasing
 - More shared processing infrastructure
 - Continue to advocate for federal funds
 - Pair each center with a local farm (or many!)



Attendance

Jen Goodwin - RI Dept. of Education

Allie - assistant director of hunger relief at FF

Cayne - Market Mobile Distribution

Annie Bahr - Director of Finance at Montessori Community School of Rhode Island

Blaine Ramahlo -RI Farm & Sea to School Institute Coach

Jeff Matteis - African Alliance

Benny Barber - Hope and Main

Shelby Doggett - Hope and Main