

WATERMELON and WIGGLES



Gardening at your Center & Farm to Childcare

Eating habits are established early in childhood, making the childcare setting an ideal and important place to support kids in lifelong healthy meal patterns. Farm to Childcare is a federally funded program and the goal is to support childcare establishments and local farmers in creating that environment of improved childhood nutrition.

Farm to Childcare provides activities that encourage children to try new foods and help them understand where their food comes from. The local food producers and child care settings are a good fit for each other. Child care centers have the ability to support local agricultural farms, and those local producers can likely fulfill smaller purchasing volumes that are more economical to early childcare settings. Interested in learning how Farm to Childcare might work at your center? Want some ideas like gardening, farm visits and food-related activities? Find more [Farm to Childcare](#) information here. Also, check out this [factsheet on general tips, including the 'why' and 'how' of starting your own initiative](#).

MOVERS & SHAKERS Upcoming Events

Check out the orchards!

Late summer into fall is a great time to check out the area's orchards on a field trip. Admission is often free, with activities like hayrides and activities for kids.

Pick berries, apples, pumpkins and gourds and enjoy time outside with the children in your care and observe the growing harvest. Want to check out orchards all over Minnesota and find the ones closest to you? Search this [Minnesota orchard directory](#).

For
Toddlers
and
Preschoolers!

Everyone can be involved with these garden-themed activities!

"Grow It, Try It, Like It" Nutrition Education Kits! This garden-themed education material supports child care staff as they introduce preschoolers to peaches, strawberries, cantaloupe, spinach, sweet potatoes and crookneck squash. Print these [coloring pages](#), have lunch parties, find letters to parents, and so much more.

Make a Mystery Box: (Grow It Try It Like It: page 45)

- 1 Take a large cardboard box and cut a hole in the side (four inches across) so a child can put their hand inside. Repeat with an additional 3-6 boxes.
- 2 Place one fruit or vegetable inside each box. Decorate as desired.
- 3 Introduce the box to the children and tell them to reach their hand inside. Offer to feel inside first, if any kids are nervous.



- 4 Instruct the kids to describe what they feel. You can suggest descriptive words like: bumpy, sharp, heavy, etc.
- 5 Remind children to keep guesses a secret until everyone has had a chance to feel inside.
- 6 Then remove the fruit or vegetable and use corresponding activity guides from each "Grow It, Try It, Like It" fruit or vegetable lesson plan to further your activity.

Infant Connection

As older children guess the secret mystery box item, feel free to include infants by also having them touch and taste (size appropriate) fruit and vegetable samples. Exposing infants early to different healthy foods will help them to accept these foods in their preschool years and later into life.

– Infant Food and Feeding, American Academy of Pediatrics



Local Produce Vendor

The [Hmong American Farmers Association](#) (HAFA) sources fresh produce for early care settings in the Metro.



This organization is based in Dakota County and has been instrumental in increasing the healthy affordable foods in urban and suburban communities.

Fruit-astic Salsa Snack!

Ingredients:

- 2 cups diced fresh pineapple
- 2 medium tomatoes, chopped
- 3/4 cup chopped sweet onion
- 1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped (optional, for some spice)



In bowl, combine all ingredients. Cover and chill in the fridge. Serve with whole grain tortilla chips.

Source: <https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/pineapple-salsa>

Resources you'll dig:

Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal planning? Serving milk? Choosing breakfast cereals?

Team Nutrition brings you short monthly CACFP webinars: [Thirty on Thursdays Training](#). These trainings can be viewed live, and are also recorded in English and Spanish in case you miss one.

Free Healthy Food Training Posters

[These posters](#) are designed to help implement CACFP meal patterns and visualize a reimbursable meal. Breakfast, lunch, and snack ideas for different age groups are available and printed in English on one side, Spanish on the other. If you are a CACFP participant, these printed materials are free to you! All others are welcome to use the downloadable version and make copies.

Success Story!

Playhouse Child Care Center in St. Cloud first got connected to Farm to Childcare when they started visiting local farmers markets and speaking with growers. [Renewing the Countryside](#) also supported Playhouse's efforts by providing local grower contact information, helped develop an activity planner that includes ideas for staff to use, provided resources for weekly produce and information on how to get parents involved. Playhouse's primary food vendor (Sysco) started carrying many local products. They also deliver to the childcare center, which was a huge factor in procuring food items. Field trips to local farms (Svihel Farms & Ferndale Farms) are planned a few times a year.

Each Playhouse site uses tractor tires filled with dirt to plant seeds to educate kids about the growing process and for small taste testing. Catherine, the Safety and Wellness Administrator for Playhouse, mentions that starting slowly and taking your time in implementation is key to successful programming because it takes time and people investment. There are many resources available! "One of the biggest reasons for Playhouse to get involved was to help curb childhood obesity, support our local farmers and teach children where their food comes from."



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