IOWA FARM TO EARLY CARE EDUCATION

2023 SUCCESS STORY

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YEAR 1 OF THE IOWA FARM TO EARLY CARE EDUCATION AWARDS SUPPORT EXPANSION OF LOCAL FOOD PROCURMENT, GARDENING, AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.

Interest in and momentum for Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) has been increasing in Iowa for several years. Early care providers across the state have experienced positive outcomes from investing in opportunities for on-site gardening, local food sourcing, and transformational family engagement within their businesses. Kids can develop positive experiences with local food, providers support local farmers, and families connect to share and celebrate food cultures and traditions with one another.

The state of Iowa recognized this growing interest and need for enhanced investment in Iowa Farm to ECE in 2021 when the Governor’s task force on childcare designated $1,000,000 to the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (IDHHS) to support healthy food programs in Iowa early care and education. In October 2022, the IDHHS established an intergovernmental agreement with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Farm Food and Enterprise Development’s Food System Team to implement program to support and expand farm to ECE efforts via training and monetary awards. Food System Team staff leading Farm to School and Early Care Network initiatives across the state developed a two-year award program that will run March 2023 – August 2024 and deliver over $600,000 to early care and education providers to lead on-site farm to ECE projects.

Awards ranged from $500-$2,000. Providers with underestimated and/or underrepresented identities qualified for additional funding of $1,000. Underestimated and/or underrepresented identities qualified providers for social equity included:
- BIMPOC providers (BIMPOC: Black, Indigenous, Mixed People of Color)
- LGBTQIA+ providers
- Providers with low-income (defined: providers making less than $40,000 per year)
- Disabled providers
- Refugee and immigrant providers

RESPONSE

In year 1 of the award program, over $300,000 was awarded to 162 Iowa early care and education providers. 109 awards were granted to support on-site gardening and allowed for providers to purchase tools, infrastructure, and other inputs and supplies needed to start or grow their garden initiatives. 37 local food procurement awards were granted to providers to spend directly on local food, defined for the purposes of this project as food grown within Iowa or bordering counties. Providers used the funding to purchase local food, including fruit and vegetables, meat, eggs, cheese, yogurt and grains, taste testing supplies such as tasting cups and utensils, and small kitchen appliances like benders and food processors. 16 family engagement awards were granted to early care sites to support providers in
planning and implementing events and other opportunities for connecting with the families of the children they serve. Providers used this funding to host events like family garden nights, creating signage and outreach, purchasing supplies for hands-on activities, and in many cases, providing stipends to families to attend. 94 providers were awarded social equity funding to support their business in implementing the farm to ECE initiatives.

**OUTCOMES**

A final questionnaire was developed and shared with all awardees via Qualtrics. All awardees were required to submit this final questionnaire and within it, certify their project completion, and share details about their project activities and the impacts of their initiatives. 100% of awardees completed this final questionnaire, sharing accounts of revitalized gardens, impactful family engagement events, countless experiences of kids trying and enjoying local foods, and so much more. Quotes from providers regarding each of the awards is below. With the success and lessons learned in the roll-out of the first year of awards, the Food Systems Team staff is looking forward to opening a second round of awards in early 2024, which will total $300,000.

**Family Engagement Award, Quote from Provider:**

“We had a Farm to Early childhood night! We had local farmers bring in animals for a petting zoo and farm equipment. We had tomato plants to plant in pots for families to take home and crafts with farm animals. We also had snacks that were locally grown and produced in Iowa! It was such a wonderful evening and both parents and kids loved it! It gave children the experience of farm life if they had never been on a farm. They were able to play in the dirt and pet the animals and set on the farm equipment. We also sent home books that were related to farm.”

**Local Food Award, Quote from Provider:**

Local Food Award, Quote from Provider: “I have accomplished introducing new fresh, foods to the children. The ECE project allowed me to purchase a blender and vegetable chopper. This helped me to incorporate fresh veggies in meals easier. The kids loved trying new things. I made fresh salsa for the kids to try, using all things purchased from the local Farmers Market. The kids all took some home to share with their families as well. This project had a positive impact as it allowed me to purchase fresh fruit/veggies from local stands in the community. The kids got to try many new foods and I bought items in bulk and tried

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“We strive to instill the importance of fresh, local fruits and vegetables in a growing child’s diet and the importance of time spent outside. Our garden experience has encouraged us to be outside daily, and we know that it has also impacted our daycare families to eat healthier and to get out in the gardens together.”

-- Garden Award, Quote from Provider
many new recipes. The kids were willing to try the new items purchased and we read books and discussed different things we would try. This helped introduce them to new things and allow me with the funds to bring fresh, healthy produce and farm fresh products into my daycare. The parents were grateful for this opportunity and getting their children to try new things."

The 2023 Iowa Farm to ECE Award program successfully granted over $300,000 to Iowa early care and education providers, investing in opportunities for growing garden initiatives, local food purchasing, and family connection.

For more information on the Iowa Farm to Early Care Education Awards, contact Chelsea Krist at cekrist@iastate.edu or visit iowafarmtoschoolearlycare.org