

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Preschool ideal time to focus on healthy eating

We recently moved, and my children are attending a new child care center. I'm surprised at how much it focuses on healthy eating and exercise, and I wonder if it's a bit too much for preschoolers. Could it lead to a backlash later?

Actually, early childhood is the ideal time to establish healthy eating and physical activity habits. In fact, researchers of a recent study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* recommend promoting healthy diet and exercise with children as young as 3 to 5 years old to help prevent cardiovascular disease later in life. In their study, young children who were introduced to a heart-healthy lifestyle program showed better attitudes, habits and knowledge about heart health up to three years afterwards than children who weren't exposed to the program. They were also less prone to be overweight or obese.

One way preschools and early child care centers can improve child nutrition is by providing healthy, locally grown foods. According to data gathered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, farm-to-school programs in schools improve acceptance of healthier foods in cafeterias by 28 percent and reduce the amount of food that students throw in the trash by 17 percent. And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention supports such programs in early care and education settings, saying that such activities help to shape early taste preferences and support the formation of healthy habits to last a lifetime. "Farm to Preschool" activities include:

- Purchasing locally grown foods for snacks and meals.



photo: iStock

- Garden-based educational programs.
- Cooking demonstrations with local foods.
- Classroom visits from farmers.

If your children's child care center doesn't already have a local foods program up and running, there are plenty of resources available to help. Both the National Farm to School Network (farmtoschool.org) and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service's Farm to School program (www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school) have information specifically for preschools and other early child care centers. Among their tips:

- Start small, perhaps with a special local foods event or by providing one local food item each month.
- Start simple. Fruits and vegetables are often the easiest locally sourced foods. Local milk is usually easy to find, too.
- The child care center's current food service company may be able to supply locally grown foods — the center just needs to ask. The center can also seek out local farmers willing to sell foods directly. State leaders with the National Farm to School Network can help link up your children's center with local farmers. To find your state's leader, see the listing at farmtoschool.org/our-network.

Nov. 6, 2015

By Martha Filipic
614-292-9833
filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor: This column was reviewed by Carol Smathers, Ohio State University Extension field specialist in Youth Nutrition and Wellness, and the state lead for Farm to School.

Chow Line is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

College Marketing and Communications
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1043
614-292-2011

208 Research Services Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

© 2015, The Ohio State University

CFAES provides research and related educational programs to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information: go.osu.edu/cfaesdiversity.