**Background**

Farm to Preschool is an experientially-based program focusing on fresh fruit and vegetables. It integrates gardening, nutrition education, taste tests, farmers’ market fieldtrips, parent and teacher workshops and local food sourcing.

- Children as young as 3 are at risk for developing diabetes, heart disease and other conditions due to poor diet and obesity.
- Children’s food preferences and habits form during the preschool years, and early patterns are indicative of later eating habits.
- Farm to Preschool (UEPI, Occidental College) is designed to influence early childhood eating habits and to expand the Farm to School network of programs.
- Program in low-income Head Start and state preschools in Los Angeles and San Diego Counties and Kauai, Hawaii since 2009.

**Curriculum**

- **Harvest of the Month (HOTM)**—features a seasonal fruit or vegetable each month
- Lessons designed to be teacher-taught, once a week with a monthly taste test of the HOTM food item
- Lessons aligned to Head Start learning domains and DRDP-R
- A two year curriculum featuring 10 vegetables and 5 fruits that include:
  - Local food system concepts including: farming, farmers’ markets & seasonality
  - Plant life cycles through gardening activities and science discovery labs

**Experiential Activities**

- Science Labs
- Taste Tests & Cooking
- Gardening
- Interactive Books
- Language and Arts
- Farmers’ Market Fieldtrips
- Farm Fieldtrips
- Farmer in the Classroom

**Local Food Sourcing**

Local food is seasonal, fresher and supports the local economy. A growing majority of children age 0-5 spend most of their day in child care, receiving more than half their meals at preschool. Since preschools serve meals and snacks through multiple means, a variety of strategies were explored to address the specific needs of each site, including:

- Community Supported Agriculture
- Farmers’ Market
- Produce Distribution Companies
- Cooperative Buying

**Parent Workshops**

Parent education is key to the success of the program. Workshops are interactive, bilingual and offer: nutrition education on parent-requested topics, cooking demonstrations, information on local farmers’ markets, WIC and Cal Fresh, opportunities to share stories and ideas for healthy living.

Topics include:

- Nutrition for preschoolers
- Understanding food labels
- Food safety
- Preventative health with promotoras
- Strategies for picky eaters
- What is organic?
- Home & container gardening
- School food advocacy 101

**Physical Activity**

Tutti-Fruti (developed by Dr. Yancy at UCLA) physical activity breaks with healthy eating themes during group times and during transitions such as from inside to outside play.

**Preschool Wellness Policy**

Wellness policies are not required in preschools, but can play a key role in prioritizing healthy behaviors at preschools and at home. Wellness policies help schools determine what health guidelines (nutrition, physical activity and well-being) should be implemented and how to best sustain them in their classroom environment. Components could include guidelines for:

- Meals & Beverages
- Local Food Sourcing
- Birthday Snacks
- Gardening
- Fundraisers
- Physical Activity

**Evaluation**

Statistically significant results between pre and post tests (pilot vs. control sites)

- Child surveys: increase in knowledge of fruits and vegetables
  - Less likely to indicate liking unhealthy foods (trend towards changing food preferences)
  - Increase in knowledge of where food comes from
  - Increased preference for vegetables
  - More likely to try an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable

- Parent surveys: demonstrating improved knowledge of:
  - Local farmers’ markets
  - Identifying risk factors for diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol
  - Healthy eating practices
  - Reading nutrition labels

- Qualitative results:
  - Preschoolers enjoyed taste tests
  - More families started shopping at farmers’ markets
  - Preschoolers asked their parents to buy more vegetables
  - Centers initiated CSA programs for teachers and parents

**Program Dissemination**

- Developed & administer the Farm to Preschool website: www.farmtopreschool.org
- Co-leading a national network of programs with colleagues across the nation through the National Farm to School Network
- Developing a CA state network of programs
- Curriculum and parent workshop templates posted online: http://www.uepi.oxy.edu/programs/farm-to-preschool/
- Program offered in over 50 preschools and Head Start centers in Southern CA
- Program distributed to 1,500 family home care providers in Southern CA
- Expanding throughout CA and the Southwest
- Train the Trainer and program trainings available for preschool & family childcare
- Harvest of the Month curriculum being tailored to family child care sites