



REACH FOR THE STARS WITH FARM TO PRESCHOOL

Aligning Early Childhood Environment Rating
Scale (ECERS) with Farm to Preschool

**NC FARM to
PRESCHOOL
NETWORK**

Network Facilitators:
ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project)
NC CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program)



REACH FOR THE STARS WITH FARM TO PRESCHOOL

Aligning Early Childhood Environment

Rating Scale (ECERS-R) with Farm to Preschool (F2P)

The [North Carolina Farm to Preschool Network \(NCFPN\)](#) was convened in May 2015 by ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) and NC CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program). This group of stakeholders are committed to supporting and promoting farm to preschool programming across the state of North Carolina. NCFPN developed a definition for farm to preschool: *Farm to preschool enhances the health and education of young children by developing systems and experiential learning that connects children and their families with local food and farms. Farm to preschool includes any type of childcare that incorporates local foods through: meals and snacks, taste tests, lessons, farmer visits, cooking, growing food, and/or community and parent involvement.*

This resource, *Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool*, was created by NCFPN. Its purpose is to help child care centers and family child care homes integrate farm to preschool activities into their curriculum while addressing the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). This resource will benefit early childhood programs in North Carolina and across the country.

Reach for the Stars with Farm to Preschool is organized by four farm to preschool activities:

1. edible gardening with young children,
2. farm field trips/farmer visits with young children,
3. local food classroom cooking/taste tests with young children, and
4. local food served in meals and/or snacks.

In each of these activity components, the ECERS subscale, items, and indicators were aligned with suggested farm to preschool activities, providing ideas and prompts for early childhood educators. In addition to enriching the educational experience, this resource clearly demonstrates how star ratings can be achieved through farm to preschool programming. The indicator is not spelled out, only referenced by the number, and in the place of the indicator language is the suggested farm to preschool activity.

ACTIVITY:

Edible Gardening with Young Children

SUBSCALE	SPACE AND FURNISHINGS
Item	Child related display
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 Children display art that references experiences in the garden and includes pictures of themselves in the garden Indicator 7.1 Creative and Individualized displays depicting the garden are created by 50% of the children
Item	Space for gross motor play
Indicators	Indicator 7.1 Children utilize gross motor skills in the garden (weeding, digging, using a wheelbarrow) on a variety of surfaces (soft: dirt, wood chips/mulch, grass; hard: concrete surface)
Item	Gross motor equipment
Indicators	Indicator 3.1 Children have access to gross motor equipment (wheelbarrows, shovels, hoes, buckets) in the garden Indicator 5.1 Numerous gross motor equipment (wheelbarrows, shovels, hoes, buckets) are made available to children in the garden
SUBSCALE	PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES
Scale	Meals/snacks
Indicators	Indicator 3.2 Fresh, local produce picked from the garden is served as part of meal and/or snack Indicator 7.1 Locally grown food (from school garden or local farm) is served family style. Indicator 7.3 Staff and children discuss where their food comes from, who grew it, how did it get from the field to their plate, how it grows (on a vine, underground) and if it is or is not growing in the school garden
Item	Health practices
Indicators	Indicator 5.2 Staff eat fresh, local produce picked from the garden Indicator 5.3 Children have gloves (and/or aprons) on when working in the garden Indicator 7.1 Children wash their hands after working in the garden
Item	Safety practices
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 Staff put away garden tools when not in use Indicator 5.2 Safety rules for work in the garden are explained to the children Indicator 7.1 Small groups of children take turns working in the garden, to avoid many children using garden tools at the same time. Indicator 7.2 Children demonstrate the safe use of garden tools

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SUBSCALE	LANGUAGE—REASONING
Item	Books and pictures
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.2 Staff selects and reads a seasonally-appropriate garden-related book to children.</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Rotate books each season through activity centers to feature books that highlight garden related information and stories.</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Garden books based on a seasonal theme (planting the garden, insects of the garden, harvesting from the garden, food from the garden, cooking from the garden) are made readily available to children.</p>
Item	Encouraging children to communicate
Indicators	<p>Indicator 7.1 Staff and children talk about what they are experiencing in the garden, balancing time between staff and children</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Children dictate a variety of garden topics to staff: garden rules, garden tasks, garden questions to a local farmer, garden discoveries, amount of produce harvested</p>
Item	Using language to develop reasoning skills
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.1 While gardening teachers talk to children about concepts like big/little, alike/different, cause and effect, leaf or root</p> <p>Indicator 5.1 Take sequence photos (ex. steps of plant growing) and use for games or books</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Children are encouraged to connect what they learned in the garden to the food they are consuming at snack or a meal</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Children are asked to help figure out how many seeds or transplants to plant, how much space a vegetable needs to grow, how much water is needed for plants in garden</p>
Item	Informal use of language
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.3 Staff help children fill in their understanding of how a plant grows in the garden (ex. What plant comes from what seed, what plants need to grow, what plants grow under or above ground...)</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Individually, children explain and show staff their favorite part of the garden or favorite garden task. Teacher could use time working in the garden as a time to have one-on-one conversations with children.</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Open-ended questions dominate the conversation in the garden, with children responding to questions such as “why do you think earthworms are helpful in the garden?” or “why do we need to provide water for the plants?”</p>

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SUBSCALE		ACTIVITIES
Item	Art	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 7.2 Children draw pictures about their time in the garden and create a class book about the garden</p> <p>Indicator 7.3 Children are encouraged and provided space to extend their garden art project (garden mural, seed mosaic, building garden castle, etc.) for an extended period of time</p>	
Item	Dramatic play	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 7.3 Caps, overalls, garden tools, wheelbarrow, hay, cornstalks, buckets, pumpkins/gourds are all props that can be used for “life on a farm” dramatic play outdoors in the garden</p> <p>Indicator 7.4 A visit to a local farm or garden, in addition to stories and pictures, are used to enrich dramatic play as children pretend to be farmers, gardeners, chefs, cheese makers, spinners, scientists, etc.</p>	
Item	Nature/science	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.3 Children bring in materials from their home gardens or yards</p> <p>Indicator 5.4 –Making observations about what is going on in the garden (weather, seasons, observing insects/birds)</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Using the produce grown to do cooking activities, making predictions about what will happen in the garden (how many squash that will grow, how big a watermelon will get, etc.)</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Add photo books created and books about gardening topics</p>	
Item	Math/number	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.1/5.1 Have materials like scales, measuring tapes for counting and measuring</p> <p>Indicator 5.4 Counting items that are picked from the garden</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Making charts to compare heights, weights, days it take to grow, etc. from items in the garden</p>	
Item	Use of TV, video, and/or computers	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 7.3 Videos about gardens, farms, insects, etc. are used to support garden learning</p>	
Item	Promoting acceptance of diversity	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.1 Include books with images of non-traditional farmers (images of women and people of color); plant fruits/vegetables in the garden that celebrate ethnic diversity of children</p>	
SUBSCALE		INTERACTION
Item	Interactions among children	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 7.2 Children are provided opportunities to work collaboratively in the garden (preparing the garden for spring planting or fall harvesting, mulching the garden, watering the garden)</p>	



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SUBSCALE		PROGRAM STRUCTURE
Item	Schedule	
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 Create a garden calendar with children that can provide flexibility for lengthened activity in good weather	
Item	Free play	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.1 Children are allowed time for garden exploration as part of free play</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Different materials are added to the garden periodically (magnifying glasses for closer observation, scarecrows, trellis, different plants, etc.); new experiences are added (insect and weed identification cards, signs in the snow, color hunt, etc.)</p>	
Item	Group time	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.1 and 3.2 Small groups of children work together in the garden and/or provide opportunity for children to self-select time in the garden</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Staff take time with individual child, small groups, or whole group to provide educational interaction in garden (educational interaction could be looking for different colors in the garden, reading “Tops and Bottoms” book and finding tops and bottoms in the garden, sorting leaves, identifying insects, plan next year’s garden)</p> <p>Indicator 7.2 Gardens provide many opportunities for children to be part of self-selected groups (planting group, weeding group, watering group, harvesting group, weather station group, insect monitoring group)</p>	
Item	Provisions for children with disabilities	
Indicators	Indicator 7.2 Modifications are made in the garden that allow for the easy participation of children with disabilities (bed raised to level of wheelchair, garden paths smooth for wheelchair/walker access, etc.)	
SUBSCALE		PARENTS AND STAFF
Item	Provision for parents	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 3.3 and 3.4 Parents and family members are involved in all aspects of the garden; signage in garden (plant identification, garden rules, etc.) are in languages that reflect children’s families</p> <p>Indicator 5.2 Parents are made aware that garden program is a vital piece of experiential education and that the garden is used as a teaching tool, to bolster creativity and discovery</p>	
Item	Opportunities for professional growth	
Indicators	<p>Indicator 5.2 Staff are provided regular in-service trainings on how to best use the garden as an instructional tool (guest speakers could be area farmers, Cooperative Extension)</p> <p>Indicator 7.1 Staff are allowed opportunities to attend the National Farm to School Network conference, Children and Youth Gardening Symposium, as well as local and regional farm to school conferences.</p>	

ACTIVITY:

Farm Field Trips/Farmer Visits with Young Children

	SPACE AND FURNISHINGS
Item	Child-Related Display
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 Photos displayed on walls about current farm field trips or farmer visits. Indicator 5.2 Drawings children created about current farm field trips or farmer visits.
SUBSCALE	LANGUAGE—REASONING
Item	Books and Pictures
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 and 7.2 Create books about farm field trips or farmer visits that are available at all times.
Item	Encouraging Children to Communicate
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 and 7.2 Children create drawings about farm field trips or farmer visits and teacher dictates story from children about their experience. Indicator 5.1 Teacher asks open ended questions about what the children learned during their farm field trip or farmer visits. Indicator 5.2 Add farming supplies (hats, shovels, produce, baskets, etc.) to the dramatic play area or things you would see on farm (animals, food, tractors, etc.) to the block area.
Item	Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills
Indicators	Indicator 3.1 During farm field trips or farmer visits teachers talk to children about concepts like big/little, alike/different, cause and effect, leaf or root Indicator 5.1 Take sequence photos (ex. steps of plant growing) or photos of flowering plants and matching produce item then use for games or books Indicator 7.2 Children are asked to help figure out how many seeds or transplants to plant, how much space a vegetable needs to grow, how much water is needed for plants in garden
Item	Informal Use of Language
Indicators	Indicator 5.3 Staff help children fill in their understanding of what goes on at a farm (ex. What a typical day on the farm looks like, where the food goes after they grow it, etc.) Indicator 7.1 Individually, children explain and show staff their favorite part of the farm field trip or farmer visit. Indicator 7.2 Open-ended questions dominate the conversation during the farm field trip or farmer visit, with children responding to questions such as “what do you think the farmer does on a typical day?” or “where do you think the food they grow goes?”

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SUBSCALE	ACTIVITIES
Item	Fine Motor
Indicators	Indicator 3.1 and 5.1 Add puzzles, sorting items, beading items and sewing cards that have a farm theme (animals on the farm, items a farmer grows, etc.)
Item	Art
Indicators	Indicator 7.2 Children draw pictures about their farm field trip or farmer visit and create a class book about the experience.
Item	Music/Movement
Indicators	Indicator 7.3 During music/movement time children are encouraged to act like farm animals.
Item	Dramatic Play
Indicators	Indicator 7.1 Farm prop box filled with produce items, overalls, baskets, plastic hoes and shovels, gloves, buckets, etc. that can be rotated in center. Indicator 7.3 Caps, overalls, garden tools, wheelbarrow, hay, cornstalks, buckets, pumpkins/gourds are all props that can be used for “life on a farm” dramatic play outdoors in the garden Indicator 7.4 A visit to a local farm or garden, in addition to stories and pictures, are used to enrich dramatic play as children pretend to be farmers, gardeners, chefs, cheese makers, spinners, scientists, etc.
Item	Nature/science
Indicators	Indicator 3.3 Children bring in materials from Indicator 5.1 Add materials like seeds, fruit/vegetable plants, books showing farm experiences (animal, plants, etc.), simple games using real photos of fruit and vegetable plants or farm animals, puzzles with realistic photos of farm animals and plants to nature/science center Indicator 7.2 Add photo books created and books about farming from farm field trips or farmer visits
Item	Math/number
Indicators	Indicator 3.1/5.1 Have materials like scales, measuring tapes for counting and measuring to compare items observed during a farm visit
Item	Promoting acceptance of diversity
Indicators	Indicator 5.1 Include books with images of non-traditional farmers (images of women and people of color); plant fruits/vegetables in the garden that celebrate ethnic diversity of children

ACTIVITY:

Local Food Classroom Cooking/Taste Tests with Young Children

SUBSCALE	SPACE AND FURNISHING
Item	Child-related display
Indicators	Indicator 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 Taste tests of garden produce (grown by children or by area farmers) is displayed by children, relating to the farm to preschool activities, and displayed at eye-level This could also be relevant to serving local food in snacks - the children display the snack
SUBSCALE	PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES
Item	Meals/snacks
Indicators	7.1, 7.3 Children help set up taste tests during snack times. Conversation is encouraged among the children during the snack/taste test (talk could be about time spent in the garden, where the food came from, etc)
Item	Health practices
Indicators	7.1 Children taught to manage health practices independently (washing hands and putting on apron before a cooking lesson, washing hands before participating in a taste test)
Item	Safety practices
Indicators	5.1 and 5.2 Staff anticipate and take action to prevent safety problems (moving hot dishes out of children’s reach) and staff explain reasons for being safe to children while they are cooking 7.1 Cooking area is arranged to avoid safety problems (food preparation equipment is sized appropriately, younger children prepare food at a separate time from older children) 7.2 Children understand the safety rules regarding food preparation and follow the rules.
Subscale	LANGUAGE—REASONING
Item	Books and pictures
Indicators	7.1 Books and other language materials about food preparation are rotated to maintain interest. 7.2 Some books relate to current classroom activities or themes (recipe books with picture instructions, books about children cooking and eating are displayed near the food preparation area)

ACTIVITY:**Local Food Served in Meals and/or Snacks**

SUBSCALE	PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES
Item	Meals/snacks
Indicators	<p>5.2 Atmosphere at meal times and snack are pleasant and social, children talking about their garden, cooking, farm field trips.</p> <p>7.3 Children are engaged in mealtime conversations about where their food comes from, how it was grown, if they cook at home with food from their gardens, etc.</p>
Item	Health Practices
Indicators	<p>5.2 Staff model healthy eating habits by highlighting items in their lunch that could be grown nearby, if they grew it themselves or purchased from a local farmers, and engaging children in this discussion.</p> <p>7.2 Children are taught to wash items from the school garden before they consume it.</p>
SUBSCALE	LANGUAGE—REASONING
Item	Books and pictures
Indicators	7.1 and 7.2 Recipe books featuring foods that could be grown on local farms are rotated to maintain interest.
SUBSCALE	ACTIVITIES
Item	Nature/Science
Indicators	5.4 Teachers discuss with children about how local food is grown, harvested and delivered to child care (share how this is different than food coming from other states or countries).
Item	Promoting acceptance of diversity
Indicator	7.1 Foods, that reflect the ethnic makeup of the children and their families, are grown in the garden or sourced from local farms, and served as snacks or meals.
SUBSCALE	PARENTS AND STAFF
Item	Provisions for Parents
Indicators	5.2 Handbook includes a statement about purchasing local foods - could include information about where they purchase and even how frequently local is served in the menu.



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