

Farm to Table Partnership



Assessing Delivery Models for Childcare and Senior Meal Programs



**FARM
to TABLE**

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Cover photo: Rochelle Carlson (right) and staff accept Catholic Community Services’ first produce delivery from Ralph’s Greenhouse.

Introduction

The Farm to Table (F2T) Partnership was funded by Public Health Seattle-King County through the federal stimulus grant, Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW), from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From August 2011 through March 2012, partnership grantees developed and pilot tested models for procuring and delivering produce from local farms to senior meal and childcare programs.

[Northwest Agriculture Business Center](#) (NABC) was one of the partners in this project. Our role was to develop linkages between local farms and the participating senior meal and childcare programs with the goal of creating sustainable purchasing models.

This assessment includes a summary of the type models employed, their successes and challenges, and considerations for future Farm to Table efforts. The report provides an explanation of the six different models we explored, including relevant background information, how the models were utilized, a summary of essential components for successful deployment, and considerations for customization.



Farm to Table kids at Beacon Hill CSMA

Delivery Models

Farm to Site Commercial Delivery

Commercial delivery provides direct delivery from farm to site in bulk quantities. Bulk sizes are generally as follows:

- 3–4 pound case of pre-cut greens. Greens are pre-washed and loose. Need to be rinsed prior to use.
- 20–25 pound cases, 25–50 pound bags. Bulk produce sold by weight. Examples include potatoes, leeks, carrots, parsnips, beets, etc.
- Cases sold by count (specific count in each case). Examples: 12 heads of romaine; 24 bunches of pre-cut rainbow chard; 18 bunches of rainbow carrots; 36 bunches of radishes.
- Sales by the pound; generally herbs sold in 1 pound bags.



Full Circle Farms makes a delivery to the Refugee & Immigrant Family Center (RIFC).

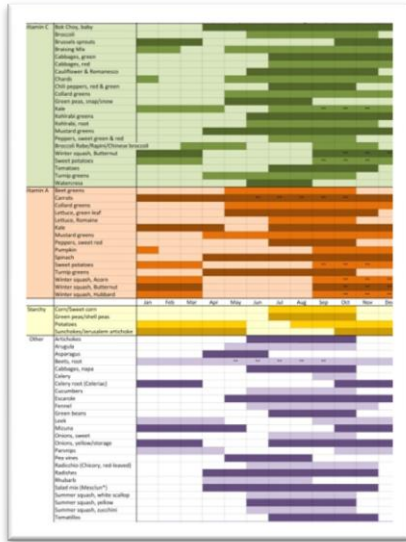
F2T partners selected two local farms to participate in the commercial delivery pilot, Full Circle Farm and 21 Acres.

- Both offered free weekly delivery with minimum orders of between \$50–\$75.
- Full Circle Farm offered a special “\$1, \$1, \$1” rate for pilot sites—each product is sold at \$1 per pound (herbs excluded) or \$1 per bunch, with a \$1 charge for split cases (handling fee for buying less than full case).
- 21 Acres also sold split cases at the same rate as full case with \$1 handling fee.
- Both farms billed “net 10,” with payment due on the 10th of month following delivery.

Initially, orders were placed through NABC. Later, sites ordered directly from the farm. A goal from onset of program was to develop direct farm-to-site sustainable relationships. Some farms sent weekly e-mails with their product selections. Most sites opted to be included in these distribution lists; however, access to e-mail was a challenge for some programs.

Many senior meal programs prepare their menus two months in advance to accommodate publishing deadlines and to allow time for dietician review. While participants appreciate having menus posted in advance so they can plan their visits according to meal preferences, this can present a challenge for cooks who want to use fresh local produce. Weather and other factors can impact what might be available in a given week from a local farm. Some ideas to address this challenge:

- Designate one day a week as “Farm Fresh Fridays” (or some catchy name on any day of the week). Participants may not know exactly what will be served, but they know it will be local and fresh.
- Use general descriptions for menu items (e.g., “locally grown vegetables” instead of “broccoli”).



Colorful seasonality charts help guide menu planning

- Provide cooks with information on seasonality (what produce is available at what time of year) and nutrient content (e.g., what type of local produce is a good source of Vitamin A). This will help them with advance menu planning, and provide them with the tools they need to rework menus on short notice. See the [Farm to Table Seasonality Chart](#) for nutrient information on Washington grown produce.

Pilot sites and F2T partners developed materials to educate participants about the farm-to-table connection. For senior meal sites, these included table-tents with information about the local farmer or facts about the featured vegetable. Childcare sites provided informational flyers for children to bring home to their families, and they incorporated healthy eating and/or growing food into their curriculum on farm days.

Another fun idea would be to develop baseball cards for farmers and/or vegetables which children could trade. These materials helped prepare program participants for menu changes, and they fostered a demand by participants for more local produce.

The commercial delivery model works well when these conditions prevail:

1. Twenty or more children or seniors eat at the site daily;
2. Menus (and dietitians who write the menus) have flexibility to incorporate seasonal offerings;
3. Chef or cook is willing to incorporate local seasonal items into menus;
4. Sites require delivery;
5. Sites want to take advantage of “B” graded produce that’s available and economical.

Food Service Distributor

The site purchases produce from a local foodservice distributor, either a produce or broadline (variety of products) distributor. The site manager calls the distributor to place an order, generally with 1–2 day advance notice. Foodservice distributors vary in size, capability and willingness to participate.

Distributor considerations:

- Minimum orders: small distributors generally request \$100 per order for delivery; larger distributors can require \$350–750 per order.
- Willingness to provide produce from local farms: distributors will have some established relationships with local farms but may not guarantee specific produce from any one farm. Distributors may have varying commitments to when they purchase local produce (year round or selected seasons) and what type (conventional or organic) and may identify type of produce on price list or invoice. Designation of “local” may vary by distributor.
- Full case and split case offerings, A and B graded produce available.
- Broadline distributors have full array of products that can be used at the site (all foods, cleaning supplies, equipment, etc). This enables meeting delivery minimums.
- Delivery hours: routes and delivery times vary between distributors, as does their willingness to work with site delivery needs. This requires communication.

- Size of truck: semi-trucks used for delivery are sometimes too big to navigate neighborhoods; some distributors have smaller trucks and vans to accommodate.
- Billing: most will require payment from 10–30 days from date of invoice/delivery.

The Food Service Distributor model works well when these conditions prevail:

1. Site needs constant source of supply of specific produce regardless of local or not.
2. Site serving 20 meals (not snacks) per day, 4–5 days per week; or site hosts large events.
3. Site has central delivery location and can redistribute among their sites.
4. Site has storage capabilities.

What about pick up at Costco, Smart & Final, Cash & Carry?

Pick up requires a time investment by the shopper as well as cost of labor investment by employer. These businesses are part of the foodservice system. They may/may not

- Deliver
- Sell local produce
- Sell Organic Produce
- Provide billing options

Food Aggregation

This model utilizes both the Commercial Delivery and the Foodservice Distributor models. Generally, two or more sites agree to combine their orders to meet the specified minimum dollar delivery from the farm/distributor. The farm/distributor will deliver to the specified site, but will bill each participant site separately.



After participating as an F2T pilot site, the Sno-Valley Senior Center now receives most of their produce from their neighbors, Full Circle Farm in Carnation, Washington.

Example: Farm to site delivery with \$50 minimum. Site A is the selected site for the delivery. Site A's order is \$31; site B's order is \$25. The combination of both sites is more than \$50 which meets the delivery minimum. Delivery made to Site A; the Site A manager signs all delivery documents/invoices and properly stores the produce. Site B will pick up their order and invoice at Site A at agreed upon time.

This model works well when these conditions prevail:

1. Cooperating sites want to buy bulk produce but can't meet delivery minimum.
2. Cooperation and coordination between sites is easy.
3. Sites are located nearby geographically and aggregators have time to travel to pick up produce.
4. Drop site is able to keep produce at full integrity (chilled or cool)
5. Drop site has space to accommodate.

Community Food Hub (“Good Food Bag”)

The Good Food Bag model enables families, staff and employees to pick up and purchase produce at the site for home use. The model is patterned from the Canadian Good Food Box program which is a successful distribution program that provides affordable food to families via volunteer efforts.

Distribution sites are formed around “natural hubs” – places where families and/or food buyers for those families congregate. Each distribution site has a champion – a person in a position of authority and/or influence that has both vision and leadership. That individual leads the communications, process, and volunteers to enable food distribution to families. Senior centers, childcare sites and community centers are natural food hubs.



Parents at RIFC’s childcare program fill up their “good food bags” with fresh produce when they pick up their children.

Site leadership explains the program to the families, answers questions and signs up participants. They also survey participants about how much they are willing to spend for a bag of local organic produce (our families requested \$5–\$8/bag) and what types of produce they prefer (some understanding of what is grown locally and in season is required to help expectations align with available selections.). Finally, they identify a distribution day and time that will meet the needs of participants and site leaders/volunteers.

Enough local produce is ordered to accommodate the committed participants. Produce is delivered the day prior to the distribution date and stored in a cool, dry place. The perishable items are kept refrigerated.

On the day of Good Food Bag distribution, the produce is set out on tables in the bags/cases they have been delivered in. These are opened and made ready for personal distribution.

Money (cash or check) is paid, and the participants fill their bags. Each item has been tagged as to how many pieces can be put in the participants’ bag. Some produce may need to be proportioned: herbs, clean and trim greens, etc.

Variations to the above model may include:

- Produce can be pre-bagged for participants allowing for quick pick up.
- Participants can pre-pay prior to pick up (generally guarantees all produce that has been ordered will be sold). Childcare sites could add the price of the bag to the participant’s monthly fee.

The farm invoices the site for the order, and the site pays the farm after the site has collected payment from participants. Produce orders for food hub models will typically be more than \$100, so delivery minimums from farm to site are not an issue.

The Community Food Hub model works well when these conditions prevail:

1. The site is a natural food hub.

2. The site has a champion(s).
3. The site can responsibly handle money.
4. There is responsible supervision in place for produce to be received, handled and distributed to participants.
5. The site has a clean, covered area where food can be distributed and people can congregate.

CSA Models: Open and Closed Sites

The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) site model features regular (usually weekly) delivery of a box of mixed produce from a local farm to the site. The box typically includes both vegetables and fruit from the local farm, but farmers may supplement with produce from other farms in order to increase variety. CSA boxes can be organic or conventional. City of Seattle Child Care programs used only farms with organic produce during their pilot program.

Most farms encourage members to use the farm’s website and online tools to set up and manage their accounts (e.g., make payments, request changes to box contents or schedule, put deliveries on hold). However, many farms provide phone based customer service for members

who may have difficulty accessing online accounts. The following is typical of information be asked when setting up an account:

- Site name, address, phone, and primary contact person;
- Delivery requirements (e.g., best time for delivery);
- Payment parameters (e.g., pre-payment required, credit card on file);
- Other: discount opportunities, first delivery confirmation, other questions.



Prospect Preschool students enjoy a delivery of fresh local produce from Full Circle Farm.

The site can be designated as a CLOSED or OPEN site.

Closed Site

The produce box is available for purchase only by the staff and program participants (e.g., families of children attending the childcare program, or senior center members). Sites generally elect for this option if there are security or space issues, or if there is a desire to “phase into” the program prior to becoming an open site. CSA participants manage their box and payables directly via the farm’s website or through customer service.

Open Site

The produce box is available for anyone in the local community to purchase and pick up at the site. This provides an excellent opportunity for programs to reach out to their local communities. CSA participants manage their box and payables directly via the farm’s website or through customer service.

Considerations for childcare sites with CSA Model:

1. Children love fruit, especially bananas and oranges. Local fruit in Western Washington is often limited to apples, which become available in late August/early September. We opted for CSA Boxes that included fruit from outside our local farms so that these preferences of the children and site managers could be met. Other fruits that were included in the boxes: melons, pears, apples, plums. No apricots or cherries included due to small size of fruit with pits (choking issues). All produce is A grade.
2. Stretch Produce—Most families eat limited produce and often opt for items like bagged mini carrots, bagged sliced apples and limited fresh selections (oranges, bananas) for serving at home. The children often do not know what the vegetable looks like in its natural state. We designated that “whole and stretch vegetables” should be included in the CSA boxes. This meant the children would see whole rainbow carrots with tops, radishes with roots and top, kale, rainbow chard, pluots, parsnips and much more. We asked that one or two of these stretch vegetables are included in the weekly box. That would give both the site manager and children an opportunity to prepare, eat and discuss a manageable number of new items and still receive the majority of items that were familiar and comforting to them. Recipes were included in the boxes. (For seniors, these “stretch” foods will be familiar foods and hopefully associated with many fond memories.)



Typical of the early season items available in RIFC’s “good food bag.”

3. Logistics—With the CSA model, the site has control over the delivery schedule from week to week. By calling, e-mailing or managing their account on line they can request specific changes to the established schedule of deliveries. This allows for customization when the site may be closed.

4. Customization—Some farm partners allow for the CSA Box to be customized by substituting a few items and/or requesting certain produce never be shipped. Other farm partners do not normally allow for substitutions, but they did pilot this approach with F2T buyers. One farm developed a new type of CSA box for the childcare sites, and now offers the “Healthy Kids Box” to all their customers.

5. Price—Most CSA Boxes will be \$25–\$39. Sites had mixed reviews about the value of the box. They recognized that quality was superb, the selections good and the price vs. what they could purchase at the local store for same organic produce was better. But the comparison generally settled on the price of conventional vs. organic and the limitations of their budgets. For sustainability of this model, price vs. perceived value remains the issue. It is likely that CSA Boxes will become part of childcare provider purchases, but may not replace all conventional produce.
6. Incentives/free produce—Some farms offer incentives for frequent purchases. For example, one farm provides a free box for every 26 boxes shipped to the site. Farms have also been known to include “extras” for programs serving children and older adults.

Considerations for senior meal programs with CSA model:

1. Seniors living alone may not eat enough to utilize a standard sized box of produce.
2. Seniors may not be able to prepay for the CSA box.
3. Seniors may not be able to cook at home.

An alternative model for senior meal programs would be for the site to purchase commercial produce, repack the produce into smaller portions and sell in smaller units to the participant. The Good Food Bag model would also be another option.

The CSA model works well when these conditions prevail:

1. Any number of children at the site (box sizes vary; if more needed, order more boxes);
2. Dietitians allow menu's to be flexible so they can allow for seasonal selections;
3. Chef or cook engaged in local, seasonal produce and preparing new recipes;
4. Sites require delivery;
5. Sites willing and able to pay a bit more for top quality local organic produce.

Virtual Food Hubs and Farm Aggregation

Virtual Food Hub / Online Procurement.

NABC recently launched a new online tool, [Farm to Table, powered by Local Orbit](#), to connect local farms with Farm to Table buyers (senior meal and childcare providers, community centers, community kitchens and hospitals). The tool allows buyers to see all farms that deliver to their



Cooks from the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe participated in several training retreats on using traditional foods, including local produce, in their meal programs.

geographic area, and what products are available, including prices and order minimums. The farms update their product information weekly. The website is truly a “one stop shop.” One payment (for all orders!) is submitted to Local Orbit who, in turn pays all the farmers.

Planning and development for the online tool took place during the CPPW grant period (through March 2012). The tool was tested in the summer of 2012 with a few buyers and producers, and is now available to all F2T partners.

NABC recently partnered with [21 Acres](#) to serve as an aggregator or Food Hub for F2T buyers using the online procurement tool. 21 Acres receives delivery of all produce

ordered by F2T sites and aggregates the produce -- combining orders from multiple farms into one delivery order for each site. 21 Acres accept deliveries from farms daily and provides delivery to F2T sites twice weekly.

Farm Aggregation / Food Hub

- Option 1: One farm serves as an aggregation point for other farms in their geographic area. Local farms deliver their produce to the aggregating farm which increases the quantity and variety of produce available for customers. Sites order from and pay the aggregating farm directly for all purchases. Sites may opt to pick-up purchases directly from the farm or request delivery to the site.

- Option 2: Local farms are exploring opportunities to aggregate within their own geographic areas and collectively transport their products into specific markets for distribution. Sites can order from several different farmers who would then aggregate those orders at a designated location and deliver to the site. This model is still only in the discussion stage among farms in our region, so specific details (e.g., payment methods) are as yet undetermined.
- Option 3: A local business or community organization can develop their own CSA box program. The organization developing the CSA box purchases produce directly from local and regional farms for resale to CSA members or other customers.

Other Keys to Success

Community Events/Kick-Off Events

The goal of a community or kick-off event is to bring groups of site managers together to share the vision and desired outcomes for the project, and to provide an opportunity for questions and peer-to-peer idea exchange. The environment should be friendly and open, providing a forum for participants to express their needs and concerns. The events are a



Senior Service’s meal site coordinators visited a local farm to learn more about the type of local produce available and different ways to prepare it.

great opportunity to gather information about the level of experience, knowledge, and enthusiasm participants will be bringing to the project.

The event may feature hands-on activities such as a cooking class or skill building session, as well as demonstrations, nutrition education, a visit from a local farmer, and presentations about local produce. Take-away materials for participants can include: recipes, seasonality charts, nutrition education materials, and fresh sheets and information about local farms.

For sites that are beginning CSA or Food Hub models, they may want to host a family or community night to promote interest and participation. Childcare, senior, and community centers can invite their attending families and communities to a fun filled evening of activities to learn more about purchasing local produce at the center.

Farm tours are also an excellent way to build enthusiasm for Farm to Table efforts. During the F2T pilot, senior meal program site coordinators and cooks participated in a local farm tour and training conducted by [Washington State Department of Agriculture’s \(WDSA\) Farm to School Program](#). The training included information on the types of local produce available during each season, storage and safety considerations, a cooking demonstration and recipes, and a knife skills class. Site coordinators returned to their programs with a desire and the skills needed to incorporate more local produce in their programs.

Recipes

It was challenging for many sites to cook with the “stretch” selections. Recipes and personal exchange of successful preparation techniques by fellow site managers proved invaluable. WSDA developed an online recipe bank as part of their [Washington Grown Food Kit](#) to help childcare providers and senior meal programs find delicious ways to prepare fresh Washington produce.

Engaging Relationships

The most successful sites have developed strong relationships with their local farmers. By getting to know each other at community events, during produce deliveries, and by taking tours of local farms, sites and farms are better able to communicate with and understand each other. Farm tours and farmer visits to the sites help participants develop an awareness and appreciation of locally grown fresh produce.

For children, touring a farm or holding a freshly picked radish may be a new experience; for older adults, this may bring back memories of their childhoods. At some sites, the farmer is considered a “hero” or “rock star.”



Other successful engaging relationships occur among the staff and children. Creating curricula around seed planting and vegetable growing, healthy eating and other activities enhance the opportunities to change eating habits and interest by the children for eating of new foods. If children are asking questions, that is a good sign:

- What is a root and what does it do?
- **Can we eat it right out of the box?**
- When we plant seeds how long will it take to grow and what will it look and taste like?

Senior meal programs provide older adults with the opportunity for social engagement and to meet their nutritional needs. A meal made with high quality ingredients enhances this experience and encourages participation. Many of the older adults in the F2T pilot sites grew up on farms and described their fond memories of eating fresh and local before those became marketing buzz words.

Stipends

Stipends are one step on the path to sustainability. Site managers want to offer local organic produce, but they are concerned about what they perceive as the increased cost. Offering subsidies to help offset initial costs is one way to address these concerns and give sites the motivation to give F2T a try. Although stipends are not sustainable over the long term, in the short term, they help encourage new behaviors and give sites a first-hand experience with the value local organic produce.

Teamwork

Teamwork among F2T partners provided both the vision and performance for the project. Having partners at the table with a deep understanding of senior meal and childcare programs proved invaluable. Program staff from Seattle Human Services (Aging & Disability Services and Youth & Family Empowerment divisions) was able to identify sites that would

have the most interest and ability to purchase local produce. They knew which sites would be engaged and receptive.



U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Kathleen Merrigan, visits the Central Area Senior Center, a Farm to Table pilot site.

NABC staff provided the outreach to the farms. They understood which farms had the right combination of capacity, interest and ability to bring local organic produce into the city. This role was critical to the program's success. NABC was the "go to" organization for site managers and cooks whenever they had concerns about produce, orders or delivery logistics.

Other Farm to Table partners, included: WSDA Farm to Schools; Seattle Parks & Recreation; King County Housing Authority; Senior Services; Muckleshoot Indian Tribe;

Catholic Community Services of Western WA; Lifelong AIDS Alliance/Chicken Soup Brigade; Public Health Seattle-King County; and the Coalition for Safety Health and Early Learning.

Sustainability

Our #1 goal! Everything we did, all that we tested, all those working with and in the Farm to Table project focused on sustainability.

How do we continue without the outside funding and staff that helped make this connection happen? To that extent:

- Sites now connect directly to the farm, both through the relationships built during the project and via the Farm to Table online procurement tool.
- Local farms recognize the value of this new customer base – Farm to Table is on their radar. Farms that participated in the grant phase of the project are continuing to serve F2T sites, and new farms are joining.
- The City of Seattle recognized the value of this program and provided additional stipend funding to encourage more programs to give Farm to Table a try.
- Over 50 participating childcare centers and senior meal programs are more aware about the value of purchasing locally and are committed to incorporating local produce into their meals.
- Participants at these sites, more than 6,000 children and adults, are also more aware. Children are asking their parents to prepare these foods at home, and seniors appreciate the improved quality of food available in their programs and are attending more frequently.
- New communities and institutions are engaged about local produce local farms and are testing different procurement models in order to find an approach that meets their needs and aligns with their values and budget.