



Farm to Migrant and Seasonal Head Start In Action

MSHS operates in 40 states and provides services to more than 37,000 children annually.

WHAT ARE FARM TO MSHS PROGRAMS?

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) is a division of Head Start that serves the needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers' children and their families and operates seasonally based on the needs of agricultural labor.¹ Qualifying families earn at least 50% of their income from employment in fishing, agriculture, or agricultural-related work. MSHS operates in 40 states and provides services to more than 37,000 children annually, including early education services; medical, dental, and mental health screenings and referrals; nutritional services; parental involvement activities; and referrals to social service providers.² Programs are run by a regional grantee organization that oversees multiple sites, coordinates services, and often addresses food procurement. With a built-in connection to agriculture and seasonal operation, integrating farm to early childhood education (ECE) food purchasing and education practices is a natural fit to enhance quality programming.

Working with local food producers and vendors can increase access to a greater variety of foods and provide an opportunity to access foods that are culturally relevant to migrant populations. Farm to MSHS curriculum can highlight cultural food traditions of participating children, and on-site gardens can include herbs, spices, fruits, and vegetables that honor children's cultural food traditions. Together, these activities can help create an environment that reflects and celebrates the culture of children and families engaged in MSHS programs, such as the ones highlighted here.

¹ National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved from <http://www.nmshsa.com/about-us/>

² Schmit, S. (2014). *Migrant and Seasonal Head Start participants, programs, families, and staff in 2013*. Washington, DC: CLASP. Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/MHSH-PIR-2013-Fact-Sheet.pdf>





COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY (CAPSLO) MSHS, CALIFORNIA

Providers grow a variety of garden produce that is part of the curriculum as well as meals and snacks.

CAPSLO has been enriching its program by integrating farm to ECE initiatives since 2011. Providers got started by attending farm to ECE trainings and workshops and then purchased directly from several local growers, including a local commercial kiwi grower. For both on-site and central kitchens, CAPSLO makes a concerted effort to select locally grown products from its produce distributors. Additionally, by developing good relationships with local farms and farm managers, CAPSLO regularly receives donated produce.

Providers now grow a variety of garden produce that is part of the curriculum as well as meals and snacks. Centers use worm bins to enrich their understanding of recycling, biology, and soil building. Staff members have received training from Life Lab, the Outdoor Classroom Project, and the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Next, providers plan to build mentoring relationships between staff members who need guidance and colleagues at nearby centers who have made inspiring strides with farm to ECE. CAPSLO is also working to establish purchasing relationships with farms in the communities where it serves families.





Centers have switched the majority of their milk purchases to a local dairy, which has reduced cost significantly.

TELAMON CORPORATION MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START (MSHS), MICHIGAN

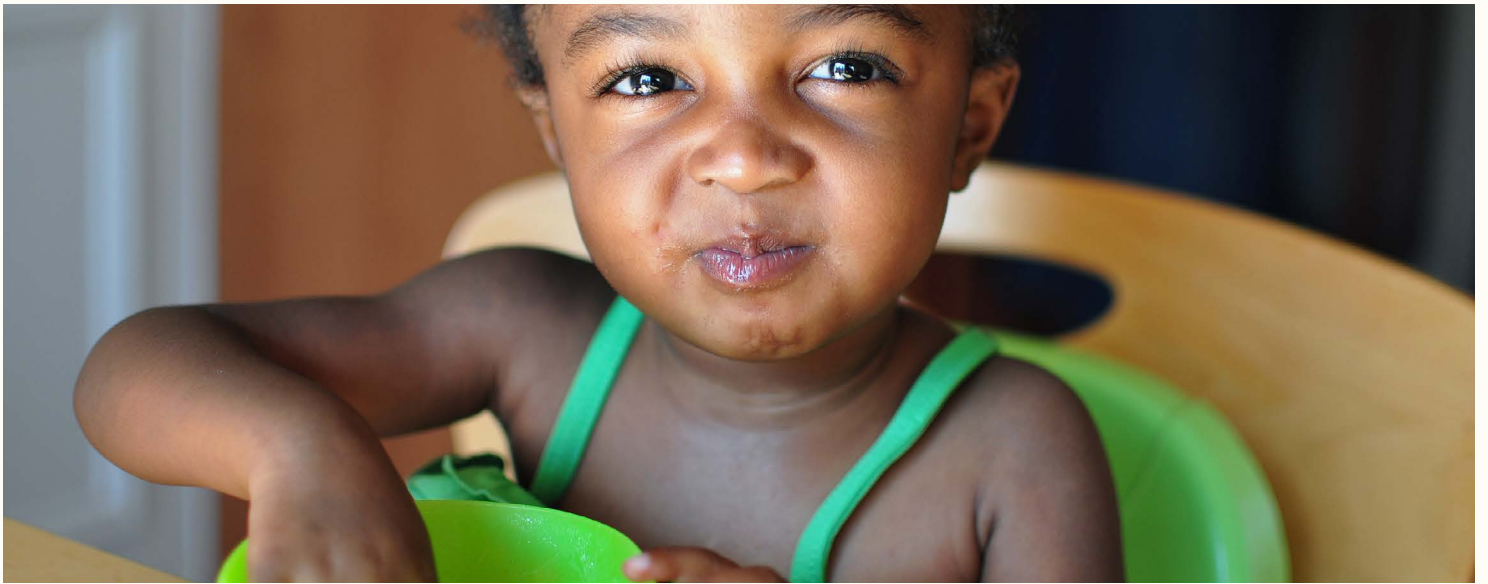
A few MSHS programs operated by Telamon Corporation in Michigan began purchasing local food as a way to provide healthy food to eat and hands-on learning about fruits and vegetables. Several centers in western Michigan have purchased local food from nearby farmers and grocery stores with help from the MI Farm to School Grant Program.³ Together, these centers have also switched the majority of their milk purchases to a local dairy, which has reduced cost significantly. In addition to local food purchasing, these centers have incorporated local food and farm to ECE into other aspects of programming:

- An on-site herb garden
- Field trips to local farms, orchards, and dairies
- Nutrition education with taste tests and classroom activities, including the Regie's Rainbow Adventure nutrition curriculum
- Local food served at family meetings
- Information on farm to ECE incorporated into the parent newsletter.

The farm to ECE program through Telamon has helped connect children to healthy, local food. Beyond that, the children, program staff, and families also benefit from the stronger community connections the program has fostered. Through farm to ECE, each of the programs involved has made connections with farmers and growers in its area, making the community more aware of the MSHS program as well. One center director remarked, "I think it's really important to not only have the fresh fruits and vegetables available that are locally grown but also to build the community relationships."

³ The MI Farm to School Grant Program provided up to \$2,000 in funding to K-12 schools, districts, and ECE programs throughout Michigan to support local food purchasing initiatives. This program was administered by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.





Parents are excited about the program. Some have helped set up garden beds and donated produce from the farms where they work.

EAST COAST MIGRANT HEAD START PROJECT, SOUTH CAROLINA

In South Carolina, MSHS center staff at two locations saw farm to ECE as a way to both connect with their community and have the opportunity to showcase their program. “Because we serve the migrant population, we’re invested in our community,” said one staff member. “We were more connected to local agriculture because of the nature of our program.” Program staff were also excited about the ability to provide children with real-life interactions with fresh fruits and vegetables.

By connecting to local farmers and farmers markets, center staff are able to access more locally grown foods, such as strawberries, cantaloupes, watermelons, cucumbers, and tomatoes, to serve in snacks and meals. They are also able to access local foods through grocery stores that label products as “Certified South Carolina Grown.” Farmers from whom they purchase also helped set up an on-site garden and donated seedlings for it. Parents are now excited about the program too, and some have helped set up garden beds and even made donations of produce from the farms where they work. Through the farm to MSHS program, center staff are bringing more nutritious foods into meals and snacks, educating parents on healthy cooking, and creating stronger connections to their community.





INSPIRE DEVELOPMENT CENTER MSHS, WASHINGTON

Through donations and partnerships, a new garden is established at an additional center each year.

Inspire Development Center manages MSHS programs throughout the state of Washington. In 2014, center staff got the idea from a farm to ECE training to start gardens at their centers. They approached local hardware stores and nonprofit organizations for donations of materials and asked parents, teachers, and local partners to construct beds at several sites. They also received donated plant starts from Future Farmers of America (FFA). By partnering with nearby Master Gardeners, staff were able to successfully establish gardens and create maintenance plans for them. Now, a new garden is established at an additional center each year. Parents are educated on gardens and nutrition, and garden-grown produce is used in taste tests, classroom education, and meals. Crediting this success to community partnerships, the program's lead nutrition specialist commented, "You have all these dreams and everything you want to do, and sometimes it's just those connections and things fall into place."



The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems advances regionally-rooted food systems through applied research, education, and outreach by uniting the knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders with that of MSU faculty and staff. Our work fosters a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the nation, and the planet by advancing systems that produce food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable. Learn more at foodsystems.msu.edu.

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