



# Crunch Munch and Chomp

Findings from  
Farm to Early Childhood  
Education in New Mexico

By Sayrah Namasté and Angelina Lopez-Brody

*American Friends Service Committee*



Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz 12345678910

We take care of

- ourselves  
rest, eat, listen  
be careful, learn  
self-regulate, try  
behave, drink

- each other  
get things, be kind  
help hurt friends,  
not hurt anyone,  
don't punch or kick,  
find things for friends  
and teachers, share.

- our community

Felix  
Lilian  
Michael  
Zoey  
Olive

Yesterday was  
Sunday  
Today is  
Monday  
Tomorrow  
will be  
Tuesday

“Most of the kids asked for another one. They also enjoyed meeting farmer Fidel and asking him questions about his profession—that was special for us.”  
—Albuquerque Teacher

# Crunch Munch and Chomp

Findings from  
Farm to Early Childhood  
Education in New Mexico

By Sayrah Namasté and  
Angelina Lopez-Brody

*American Friends Service Committee*



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

# Contents

Acknowledgements 3

Introduction 4

Who is AFSC? 5

Executive Summary 6

History 10

A Closer Look at  
Healthy Food Campaigns 18

Case Study 26

Conclusion 28

Appendices 30



# Acknowledgments

*This Guide was created with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the American Friends Service Committee.*

**We are grateful to:**

All of the farmers who grow food and worked with us to feed our children: Chris Chavez, Matthew Draper, Donne Gonzales, Fidel Gonzalez, Juan Gonzalez, Casey Holland, Serafina Lombardi, Santiago Maestas, Reuben Preut, Xochitl Romero, Micah Roseberry, Leroy Vaughn, Amzie Yoder, Agri-Cultura Network, Vida Verde Farm, Los Jardines Institute

Debbie Lopez, Nutrition Manager at YDI Head Start and all of the Early Childhood Education staff who participated in Albuquerque, Espanola, Velarde, Alcalde, El Prado, Abiquiu, Wagon Mound, Taos, Ranchos de Taos, Questa, Tesuque & the Pueblo of Isleta

Tina Kachele of Kristina Kachele Design, LLC

Soumya Bhat and Jeff Capizzano of the Policy Equity Group

Colleen Matts and Meagan Shedd at Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems

The AFSC NM Program Advisory Committee: Mari Simbana, Lauro Silva, David Henkel, Rosemary Blanchard

Theresa Kirby and Ronna Bolante, AFSC Communications Department; Maria Brazil, AFSC NM; and Sarah Ruth Finkel and Jennie Greb, contractors.



# Introduction

In 2015, the American Friends Service Committee of New Mexico, a social justice organization supporting local farmers as well as people lacking access to healthy food, began a Farm to Early Childhood Education Center (ECE) project. After five years of trial and error, and helpful feedback from farmers and ECE staff, we decided to document what we had done to share with others interested in Farm to ECE and to amplify the voices of those on the frontline of this work. We hope this guide will be useful to those involved in similar work in New Mexico and around the country, just as we learned and were inspired by our peers during this time!



*We believe Farm to ECE programs can play a pivotal role in helping children get the nutrition they need.*

A review of recent research from the Policy Equity Group found that 12.5 million children under age 5 in the United States spend an average of 33 hours in non-parental ECE settings each week. These arrangements can provide the opportunity for children to learn about the importance of nutrition and physical activity, and potentially develop life-long food preferences and healthy habits.

According to guidelines from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, children should receive one-half to two-thirds of their daily nutritional intake while attending a full-day ECE program. High-quality ECE programs can have sustained impacts on children's health and well-being, making them the prime setting to apply health and nutrition interventions according to the

National Symposium on Early Childhood Science and Policy. Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child documented that a healthy diet and daily physical activity supports healthy brain development. Unfortunately, the Centers for Disease Control reported only one in ten children eat the recommended daily serving of vegetables, which contributes to health problems. And New Mexico has the second highest rate of child food insecurity in the nation.

We believe Farm to ECE programs can play a pivotal role in helping children get the nutrition they need, and all of us at AFSC are excited to be finding ways to make a difference in a program that helps both children and farmers.

# Who is AFSC?

Founded in 1917 by Quakers, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. We work with communities and partners worldwide to challenge injustice and build sustainable peace with justice. Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light of each person, we focus on advancing peacebuilding, just economies, healing justice approaches, and humane immigration responses so all people can flourish.

In 1974, Quakers in New Mexico invited AFSC to begin a program. After assessing what the community needed support with, the New Mexico People of the Land Program was started in 1976. The overall mission is to revitalize small, sustainable farms throughout the state, thereby protecting culture, natural land, water resources, and jobs, while improving the health of New Mexico's children and their communities. We provided farmer to farmer training programs in Albuquerque, Espanola and Anthony, NM. We build infrastructure for small family farms around the state, including 35 passive solar cold frames and 5 walk-in coolers. We also incubate farmer cooperatives and have built a network of small-scale family farms across the state and Pueblos.

As part of our motto "Kids Win When Farmers and Schools Work Together" we have managed a Farm to School program for six years and a Farm to Early Childhood Education Centers for five years. Our healthy food campaigns, like *the Great Carrot Crunch*, *Cherry Tomato Chomp*, and *Give Peas a Chance*, get children excited about eating healthy with fun classroom activities.

*The overall mission is to revitalize small, sustainable farms throughout the state, thereby protecting culture, natural land, water resources, and jobs, while improving the health of New Mexico's children and their communities.*



# Executive Summary of Findings

**W**hen AFSC first set out to develop a Farm to ECE program, we were inspired to support the local farmers we had worked with over many years and to reach young children who don't often get access to healthy, organic local vegetables and fruits.

I (Sayrah Namasté) had experienced being on government assistance as a young mother through the Women, Infant and Children nutrition program and my own daughter had attended Head Start. My daughter thrived with great teachers and educational classroom activities, and as a parent it was easy to be involved. In those days the WIC program provided large amounts of cheese and milk to encourage calcium intake but both my daughter and I are allergic to dairy. And the food assistance could not be used for local or organic food so I would longingly walk past the beautiful organic produce to find the food listed in my WIC booklet. Many years later, I drew on those personal experiences to help to create a Farm to Early Childhood Education (ECE) program.

Working together with farmers and early childhood education staff to create a Farm to ECE program was a learning experience for AFSC's New Mexico program and our partners. Here are some of the key insights and experiences we gained that may be helpful to others engaged in this work.

## Understand Farmers' Needs

AFSC worked entirely with small-scale sustainable family farms with whom we had existing relationships. The farmers were interested in having a new market and in their food reaching children, but they needed AFSC to help them reach that market. The small quantities needed by ECEs were a good fit for small farms. Getting a fair price for their produce was a major concern for farmers.



*We based our campaigns on what New Mexico farmers could grow consistently and what young students would eat . . . We provided ECE staff with enough vegetables for students and staff to eat as well as activity guides, posters, and stickers for students who ate a vegetable . . .*

### **Learn about the Opportunities and Obstacles for Early Childhood Education Centers**

Most early childhood education staff were not accustomed to sourcing local food. The ECEs we worked with served 10-100 students in their facilities. Our surveys revealed that they sourced food from stores like Shamrock Foods, Sam’s Club, or Wal-Mart. The ECE cooks we worked with liked the idea of getting local, healthy food as well as supporting family farms. However, they were not sure how to do that without AFSC’s help. Pricing was a major barrier for the schools.

### **Adapt to Encourage Regular Farm to ECE Sales**

We began the project working with three ECE cooks in Albuquerque to source local food from farmers in our network each week, but it did not gain traction. During many months of the year, the food farmers were growing did not fit with the menus planned at the ECEs. Children would not eat food they were not familiar with, and food service directors didn’t want to purchase food that would be thrown out. As a result, we pivoted to healthy food campaigns to spotlight specific vegetables and include fun activities and incentives for children such as stickers, coloring pages, etc.

### **Conduct Comprehensive Campaigns**

After trying to get ECEs to purchase from local farmers but only getting spotty sales, we pivoted to comprehensive healthy food campaigns, building on the successful model of the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch in the Midwest. We based our campaigns on what New Mexico farmers could grow consistently and what young students would eat (such as carrots, peas, and cherry tomatoes). We provided ECE staff with enough vegetables for students and staff to eat as well as activity guides, posters, and stickers for students who ate a vegetable (see Appendix A for examples). Since many ECEs are required to do a healthy food activity each month, and it was not extra work, they were eager to be a part of this program, and the campaigns clearly made an impact. Many ECE staff told us that they made an entire day out of the campaign. One Head Start teacher asked us: “Does every Head Start in New Mexico participate



**“Some students had never tasted a carrot before. Most liked it!”**  
*—Albuquerque Head Start teacher*

# Executive Summary of Findings (cont.)

in these?” When we told her that just a couple dozen did, she said she was going to email her colleagues and encourage them to do it.

## **Provide Coordination**

From the beginning, we brought together farmers and school staff to discuss their interests and needs. Farmers knew their growing season, crops, vegetable sizes, etc. Teachers and Head Start administrators knew their school calendars, menus, food needs, and children’s preferences. AFSC provided staff to coordinate all the aspects so that farmers could focus on growing food and ECE staff could focus on encouraging healthy eating and learning.

## **Find Ways to Subsidize Pricing**

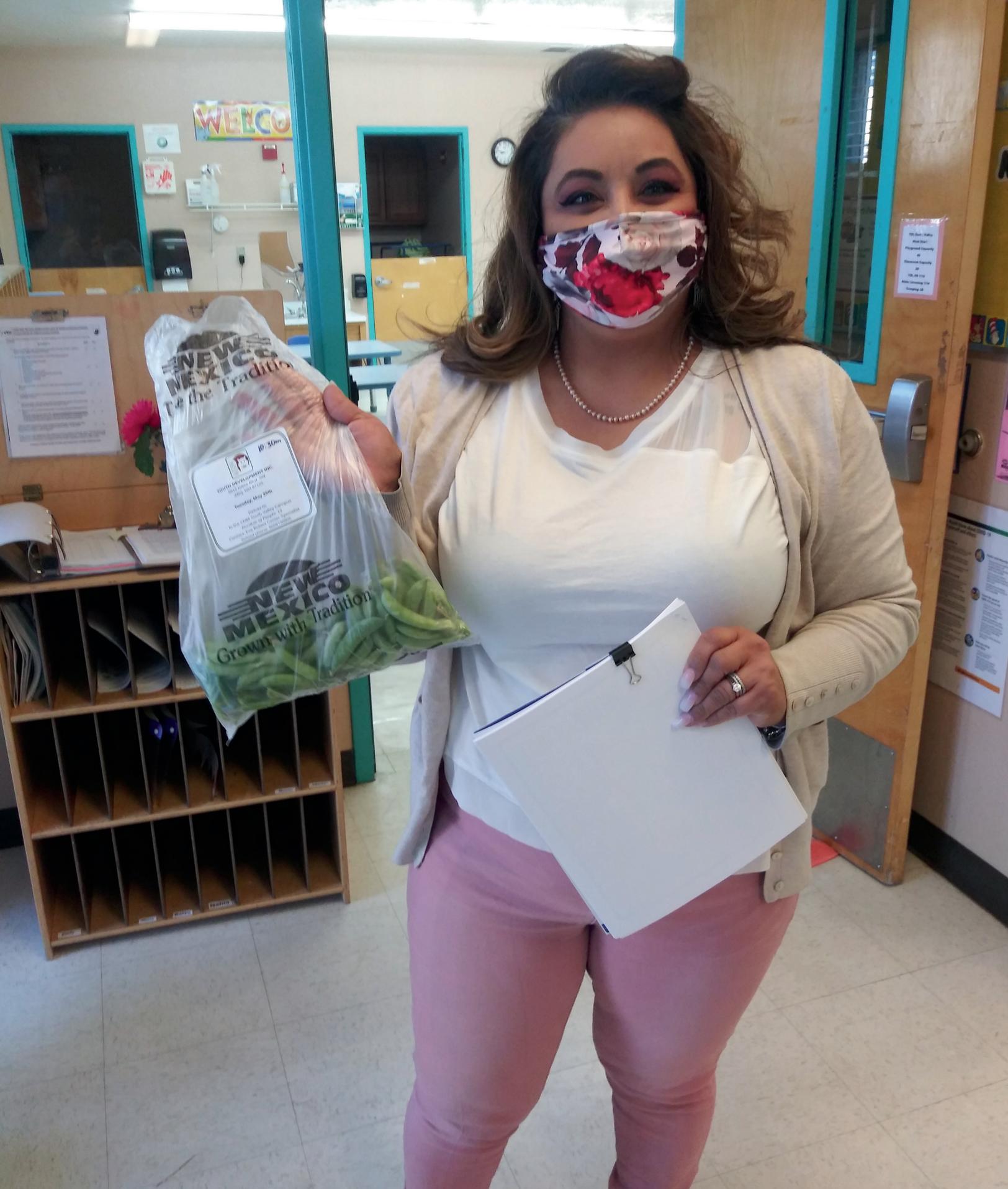
Since we identified that price point was an issue for the small family farmers and the ECEs, we raised funds to provide a 50% subsidy for the cost of the food. Even with this subsidy, regular Farm to ECE sales did not happen. When we pivoted to the healthy food campaigns, we raised funds to cover 100% of the costs of the produce, activity guides, posters, and stickers. The result was a tremendous increase in participation. We believe subsidies are key to success since our food system has no level playing field for small family farms and since institutions usually must choose food based on the lowest prices.

## **Collect and Respond to Feedback**

We always collected ECE staff and farmer feedback, both verbal and written, throughout the years. We made adaptations based on the feedback, since they were the frontline workers and knew what worked and what didn’t. We also made sure there was a complete feedback loop so farmers could hear how the teachers and students reacted to their food. Feedback was not homogenous. For example, one preschool asked us to only provide orange carrots after we gave them tri-colored because the children fought over who got a purple carrot; another school in the same city asked that we provide tri-color carrots because some children were intrigued by carrots of different colors and more willing to eat them.

## **Grow Partnerships**

We learned from other states’ Farm to ECE pilot programs that they were working in coalitions. We were not aware of others doing Farm to ECE in New Mexico, and so we did not have a coalition as we piloted this work. Our partners were farms, ECEs, and funders. However, Farm to ECE work has gained more interest in New Mexico, and we hope to work in coalition going forward.



“They loved eating the peas, and staff enjoyed the connection with local growers. Stickers are always a big hit!!!” —Albuquerque Pre-K Teacher

# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work

## Initial explorations, 2015

Since 2015, AFSC's New Mexico program has managed a Farm to School project that benefits local farmers and students from kindergarten through high school in several districts around the state. AFSC Program Director Sayrah was inspired by research done by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which showed that reaching children ages 0-8 years old is crucial. We began exploring how to reach even younger children with local, organic produce grown on sustainable family farms. Research from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation shows that the earlier a child is exposed to healthy foods, the more likely it is that healthy eating habits will be formed. These habits are protective of long-term health and have the potential to help close racial and socioeconomic health disparities.

After securing funding, we hired contractor Sarah Ruth Finkel to research early childhood education (ECE) in New Mexico. Her research showed that ECE sites are licensed through the state agency Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD). Sayrah and Sarah Ruth met with CYFD staff Pam Mitchell and Teresa Taylor and found out about how meals are served at ECEs. We also learned about the Chile Plus curriculum, which offers lessons on healthy foods and physical activities. We learned that the USDA was encouraging ECEs to buy local food. Pam Mitchell invited AFSC to present information about buying local to their annual mandatory ECE staff training in 2016.

## Supporting farm to market efforts, 2016

During this time, we were able to meet with the staff at Peanut Butter & Jelly (PB&J) preschool and brought them samples of local produce. We learned that the school usually purchased their vegetables from Sam's Club, Shamrock Foods, or Wal-Mart; that they bought fairly small quantities weekly; and that they would like to buy local food but thought that meant having to shop at



*The earlier a child is exposed to healthy foods, the more likely it is that healthy eating habits will be formed.*

*Jennie's research on other states' Farm to ECE programs showed that they had more success when fresh produce was incorporated in creative ways, beyond solely consumption.*

the Saturday farmers' market. We also reviewed the monthly meal menus to identify which produce they served that local farmers could grow.

### **Cultivating Farm to ECE regular sales, 2017**

AFSC then hired Jennie Greb to be a broker specifically to support sales to ECEs by local farms working with AFSC. She created a survey for ECEs to understand their needs around pricing, types of produce, quantities, and delivery dates (see Appendix B). She found that one-on-one meetings were more effective than surveys for understanding ECE staff's needs and interests. Jennie's research on other states' Farm to ECE programs showed that they had more success when fresh produce was incorporated in creative ways, beyond solely consumption.

This deeper engagement could include the development of curriculum and recipes, creating school gardens, facilitating field trips to the farm, or involving the family by either sending home vegetables or inviting family members to regular dinners, for example. Additionally, research revealed that the majority of programs are heavily reliant on grant funding. While the source of the funding varies (including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Walmart, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and crowdsourcing, among others), it was rare to find a program that did not utilize additional financial support. Finally, it is important to note that many programs were simply dedicated to bringing more produce in general to ECEs, as opposed to local produce. These programs did not have to address the higher costs of local, organic fruits and vegetables.

On the ground in Albuquerque, PB&J Family Services and Building Bridges ECE purchased local produce several times. One of the items PB&J was interested in buying from local farmers in October was small pumpkins for their students. We realized this was probably for Halloween decorations and wanted to encourage healthy eating, so we procured local small edible pumpkins and created a card for each family with recipes (like toasted pumpkin seeds) and information about the health benefits.



# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work (cont.)

To reach out to Spanish-speaking in-home ECE providers, Jennie created a Spanish-language flyer about local produce purchasing. In August, AFSC sponsored a luncheon for Educadores para los Niños del Futuro, a cooperative of over 50 in-home daycares that each serve approximately 10 children per day. AFSC provided an all-local food lunch to demonstrate the types and quality of food the children in these daycares could be consuming. Jennie led a presentation on buying local and a good Q&A session about buying local and price points. However, this luncheon did not lead to any partnerships or purchases from local farms by the co-op.

## Learning from other Farm to ECE programs

At the invitation of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Sayrah began attending the Policy Equity Group annual national conferences for Farm to ECE pilot programs in Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Georgia. Learning about other states' efforts to expand Farm to ECE programs helped us understand the national and local landscapes better. She connected with Lacy Stephens of the National Farm to School Network (NFSN) and joined the NFSN listserv to get resources and stay in contact with other practitioners. Listening to her peers at the Policy

*ECEs were used to the prices at Sam's Club and Wal-Mart, which are far below what a local farmer can charge and still make a living.*

Equity conferences who were further along in their Farm to ECE work helped shape AFSC's work. She reached out to some of the pilot projects to learn more.

## A new idea emerges after regular sales never take root, 2018

Hoping for more success with an Albuquerque-based farmer co-op, AFSC contracted with the Agri-Cultura Network (ACN) to broker and try to set up regular sales with ECEs. With permission from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, we used part of our grant for a one-year pilot to subsidize the cost of local food by 50%. ECEs were used to the prices at Sam's Club and Wal-Mart, which are far below what a local farmer can charge and still make a living. We focused on PB&J Family Services. Although PB&J bought some food from ACN, regular sales never happened because often what ACN had available didn't fit with the ECE menu, and the timing of when ACN shared their weekly produce list on Fridays didn't work for menu planning at the ECE.

We worked with a farmer in the Pueblo of Jemez whose son was enrolled in the Walatowa Head Start. She wanted her food to reach the students. In April they gave a presentation to all 17 staff of that Head Start which resulted in the director wanting to purchase from the farm. Sayrah discussed with the farmer and the Head Start director, Lana, which crops the children would eat—namely carrots and possibly salad or spinach. Lana explained they do not have a

# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work (cont.)

budget for this, so AFSC agreed to subsidize the sales. AFSC provided farm materials, seeds, irrigation, and post-harvest handling supplies to the farmer, and she supplied her son's Head Start with some carrots. However, consistent sales didn't gain traction.

In December 2018, Sayrah visited colleagues in the Farm to ECE movement at the Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Regional Food Systems. She had met them at the Policy Equity Group conference that year. Those colleagues successfully piloted the healthy food campaign "The Michigan Apple Crunch," and had expanded it to the whole Great Lakes region. After hearing about their success with an event-based Farm to School approach, she knew she had to try it in New Mexico. MSU gave permission for us to replicate their work in New Mexico. Because regular sales to ECEs did not meet the current needs of the ECEs, AFSC pivoted to healthy food campaigns in 2019 to make taste testing local veggies exciting for young children.



*ECE cooks and teachers told Sayrah that they would welcome vegetables in their classrooms, especially if they were kid-friendly, not choking hazards, and did not require extra preparation.*

## Developing the *Great Carrot Crunch* campaign, 2019

AFSC's New Mexico program worked with folks on the ground to design a campaign that would work for New Mexico. Because apples do not grow consistently well in New Mexico like they do in Michigan, Sayrah discussed the idea of carrots with farmers and teachers. In our Farm to School program, we had surveyed food service directors about which vegetables students preferred. Carrots were routinely very popular among students. The Las Cruces food service director had told us the students loved the "bugs bunny carrots" which were carrots with the greens still attached.

In January 2019, AFSC held gatherings of farmers and school staff in Albuquerque and Española to explain the *Great Carrot Crunch* idea and get feedback on how and if it would work for ECEs

# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work (cont.)

and farms. Everyone was very enthusiastic about the campaign and gave great feedback on how AFSC should pilot it. ECE cooks and teachers told Sayrah that they would welcome vegetables in their classrooms, especially if they were kid-friendly, not choking hazards, and did not require extra preparation. Head Starts (federally-funded preschools for families at or below the poverty line) are required to do a monthly nutrition activity with their students. The Head Start teachers welcomed having a healthy food campaign provided as a nutrition activity. Farmers could only provide local food during the growing season, which limited when preschools could hold these events.

Local, sustainable small-scale family farms internalize many of the costs that “big ag” externalizes by mistreating the land and the workers – and therefore for small organic farms’ to make it, they need to charge a price that is higher than you would find for conventionally-grown produce. AFSC decided to fully pay for the event materials to reduce the burden on tight preschool budgets and provide local organic farmers a fair price. After listening to both farmers and ECE staff, carrots emerged as a reliable crop that was available during the school year as well as being safe and fun for kids.

In May 2019, we piloted the first *Great Carrot Crunch* campaign. We provided ECE staff with enough vegetables for students and staff to eat as well as activity guides, posters, and stickers (see Appendices C & D for examples). During the week of the Crunch, preschoolers got to munch on local organic “Bugs Bunny” carrots while learning about healthy eating and the letter “C.” We rewarded every child who tried a carrot with a sticker. The *Great Carrot Crunch* campaign was so successful that we repeated it in October 2019. Over 3,000 students “crunched” once or twice in 2019. The feedback from schools and farms was overwhelmingly positive.



*After listening to both farmers and ECE staff, carrots emerged as a reliable crop that was available during the school year as well as being safe and fun for kids.*

# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work (cont.)

## Expanding the healthy food campaigns during the pandemic, 2020

Following the success of the 2019 *Great Carrot Crunch* campaign, which saw participants from over 60% of YDI Head Start programs, AFSC looked forward to more fresh ideas that would introduce and engage students with both healthy eating and new produce.

The AFSC annual Statewide Farmer Gathering in January 2020 brought farmers to the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center for a day long peer-to-peer experience. Farmers were very interested in hearing about each other's growing seasons and challenges. We organized a panel discussion with two farmers and one teacher who participated in the *Great Carrot Crunch* to share their experience. This led to a lively discussion among the farmers about campaigns for 2020, and a request that AFSC expand the program from just carrots to include salad turnip and cherry tomato tastings for the children. Farmers who signed up to participate in future Farm to ECE work came to a gathering in February 2020 and helped plan out three campaigns for 2020. They got very excited about sharing little-known salad turnips, which taste like a cross between an apple and a carrot, with children. They came up with the name of the next campaign: *Terrific Turnip Tasting*. Farmers at the Mountain View Community Garden wanted to share their abundance with the community and suggested the *Cherry Tomato Chomp*. The farmers were also excited to grow carrots again for the *Great Carrot Crunch*.

As Sayrah recruited schools and Angelina created the print materials for the *Terrific Turnip Tasting*, the COVID-19 pandemic hit New Mexico. The shutdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic challenged AFSC staff to rethink our approach in reaching kids. We decided to take it where they were – at home! Rather than using the prior classroom-based approach, the *Terrific Turnip Tasting* expanded to engage the whole family with a “grab n’ go” model at several elementary schools.

In August 2020, we held the *Cherry Tomato Chomp* with several ECEs and K-8 students at one school. Because schools were still in flux due to the pandemic, fewer schools were able to participate in the *Cherry Tomato Chomp*. See the case study later in the booklet for



“Some of the [children] liked the tomatoes, some of them didn’t like the taste. The parents really like the tomatoes and the activities that came with the tomatoes”

# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work (cont.)

*Read more in the chapter about the healthy food campaigns.*

the pop-up Preschool Garden with which we were able to support COVID-safe outdoor learning at one school.

In October 2020, we held the next *Great Carrot Crunch* campaign for eight ECEs serving low-income children and one elementary school. Because of COVID-19 travel restrictions, all the schools were in Albuquerque.

## **More New Mexico agencies get involved in Farm to ECE**

Another development in 2020 besides diversifying the healthy food campaigns was expanded interest from the State of New Mexico in Farm to ECE. AFSC staff Sayrah and Angelina had calls with staff at the Public Education Department (PED) and the Department of Health's Healthy Kids Healthy Communities Program. Both departments were part of the New Mexico Farm to School Alliance and were working to adapt the PED's Farm to School program to the Early Childhood Education and Care Department as well as the Aging and Long Term Services Depart-

*Every survey we gave to ECE staff came back with nearly 100% responses saying they wanted to participate again, so recruitment was easy.*

ment. The DOH received a FGH ("Fig") grant to implement a pilot Farm to ECE program in New Mexico in several counties that AFSC does not work in.

## **Appreciating the model AFSC's New Mexico Program has created, 2021**

In March 2021, we met with farmers virtually to plan out healthy food campaigns for the year. By now farmers were very invested in these campaigns and were especially happy that their food was reaching low-income children through Head Start. We decided to try a new crop, sweet peas, as well as cherry tomatoes and carrots. These were the crops the farmers could grow that match the needs of the ECEs, which prefer vegetables that do not require preparation. Farmers estimated dates for the year and then AFSC staff recruited ECEs to participate and created materials for the new crops. Our focus was Head Start because they serve low-income children, and we expanded to recruit ECEs run by the City of Albuquerque. Every survey we gave to ECE staff came back with nearly 100% responses saying they wanted to participate again, so recruitment was easy.

In April 2021, AFSC staff Angelina and Sayrah presented the Farm to ECE work at the first annual New Mexico Grown Institute Conference. This was a virtual gathering for New Mexico's Farm to Cafeteria Practitioners. The New Mexico Grown Institute provided a forum for skill-building, networking, dialogue, and collaboration between and among stakeholders in the Farm to

# History of AFSC Farm to ECE Work (cont.)

School, Farm to Senior Center, and Farm to ECE ecosystem. Participants came from across the New Mexico Grown value chains, including farmers, nutrition professionals, educators, advocates, and public officials. The presentation gave the AFSC NM staff the opportunity to explain our years of experience in linking ECEs, predominately Head Start programs, with locally grown vegetables and fruits. We shared trials and errors, as well as successes with healthy food campaigns such as the *Great Carrot Crunch* and *Cherry Tomato Chomp*. We showed examples of the healthy food activity guides and survey results from New Mexico ECE staff and farmers. Participants tried out some of the healthy food activities that we created for the Farm to ECE programs. We received positive feedback from participants, particularly those who are implementing Farm to ECE strategies.

## A new crop in 2021

Our *Give Peas a Chance* campaign reached over 480 preschoolers at 22 sites in Albuquerque, Bernalillo, and the Pueblo of Isleta. Several ECEs made an entire day out of the *Give Peas a Chance* healthy food activities we provided. YDI Head Starts and City of Albuquerque Pre-Ks participated. The Pueblo of Isleta Head Start and Child Care Center participated for the first time. When Sayrah explained to ECE staff that we take the lead from ECE teachers and local farmers, they were interested in a campaign using a native crop and requested activities that had indigenous representation. Sayrah received permission from partnering organization CESOSS to use a couple dozen pages from their *De La Tierra* coloring book created by Pueblo and Diné artists. AFSC provided 20 coloring books to the Pueblo of Isleta Head Start and is exploring with Isleta farmers what a collaboration might look like to get their traditional foods into the school.



*Several ECEs made an entire day out of the Give Peas a Chance healthy food activities we provided.*



“Some of the children did not want to try the snap peas but after observing their peers all the children tasted them. Out of 35 students only 3 did not like them.”  
—Child Development Center Teacher

# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns

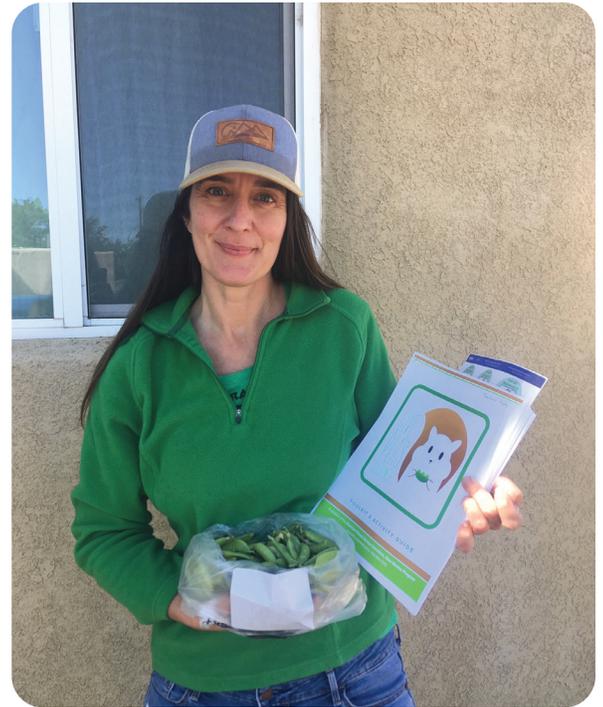
In this section, we will dig deeper into what a healthy food campaign is. We will discuss how they started in New Mexico, how they're coordinated, how we can continue to improve them, as well as highlights from campaigns.

## What is a healthy food campaign?

AFSC's healthy food campaigns encourage kids to try a healthy, local vegetable in an exciting special event. Exposing young children to nutritious, fresh vegetables and fruits can have long-term positive impacts on their health. ECE sites choose one day in a specified week to hold the campaign in their classroom(s). AFSC sends a campaign poster to each school ahead of time to help get the school community excited. Lesson plans for activities about the spotlighted vegetable and farming are provided to teachers. Many schools have used the activities provided to plan a whole day devoted to the campaign's vegetable.

On the big day, AFSC staff deliver enough produce for each child and staff person to taste test and snack on. They also deliver activity guides and stickers for each person. Each child is rewarded for trying the local vegetable with a sticker. Teachers and staff participate, modeling healthy eating for the children. We have certainly found that our motto for Farm to ECE is true in these campaigns: "Kids Win When Farms and Schools Work Together".

AFSC provides each school with all of the materials and produce at no cost in order to pay the farmers a fair price and to ensure that preschools can access these quality vegetables with no cost barrier. The campaigns have proven to be an effective way to generate regular Farm to ECE sales, which we had struggled to encourage even with a 50% subsidy for ECE sites. With AFSC's coordination, the burden of organizing and paying for such a campaign is removed from the shoulders of ECE staff who are already busy caring for and teaching the children in their charge.



*AFSC's healthy food campaigns encourage kids to try a healthy, local vegetable in an exciting special event.*

*By putting farmers and ECE staff's feedback into the foundation of our healthy food campaigns, AFSC was able to create a model that met everyone's needs.*

Teachers, parents, and farmers have repeatedly given very positive responses to this model of Farm to ECE in post-campaign surveys. The size of the produce orders for these campaigns are a great match for the production levels of small-scale sustainable family farms. Additionally, farmers have expressed how excited they are to get their nutritious veggies to young children in their communities.

### **Comparing apples to . . . carrots? Or, how the campaigns started**

After several years of trying to cultivate direct Farm to ECE sales, the healthy food campaign model opened up a new path for AFSC's Farm to ECE work. Farm to Institution campaign events happening in the Midwest with apples and cherries inspired Sayrah to try something similar in New Mexico. She knew from her work with farmers that New Mexican apple production is not consistent. She adapted the Farm to ECE campaign idea to a crop that farmers grow consistently in New Mexico and that is popular with children: carrots. After the former trial and error with direct sales, AFSC decided to center the experience of frontline workers when creating the new model. When she organized meetings with local farmers and ECE staff to explain the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch and the idea to create a Great Carrot Crunch Campaign here in New Mexico, the response was overwhelmingly positive. It was very helpful to have both farmers and Head Start teachers and administrators in the same room. Farmers knew their growing season and the sizes and varieties of carrots while school staff knew their school calendars and food needs, which included needing to avoid choking hazards and needing ready-to-eat produce. By putting farmers and ECE staff's feedback into the foundation of our healthy food campaigns, AFSC was able to create a model that met everyone's needs.



*It was very helpful to have both farmers and Head Start teachers and administrators in the same room.*

# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns (cont.)

## Logistics of a healthy food campaign

Now that the healthy food campaign model is set up, AFSC sets up five main sets of logistics: funding, farm coordination, school coordination, material preparation, and post-campaign evaluation.

**Funding:** To ensure that everything could be provided to the ECEs at no cost, Sayrah met with several potential funders. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded several campaigns. Presbyterian Healthcare Services paid for carrots and assisted with the social media campaign during the October 2019 Great Carrot Crunch Campaign. Subsidizing these campaigns evens the playing field for small organic farms, who are not subsidized by the federal government like many large farms.

**Farm Coordination:** Each spring, AFSC staff meets with farmers in their network to determine which crops will be featured that year for Farm to ECE. At the meeting, it is decided which farmers plan to grow which crop and when it will be harvested.

**School Coordination:** Angelina then reaches out to Head Starts to determine what week within a crops' window of availability will work best for the schools. About a month ahead of the campaign, AFSC invites ECE sites to register on a Google Form. The registration identifies what day of a specified week and what time of day the school needs the delivery of campaign materials. This choice of day was especially helpful for schools that had an early dismissal day or a regular all-student event. Registration is closed about a week and a half before the start so that AFSC staff have time to order the produce and prepare the materials for schools.

**Material Preparation:** If a campaign does not already have printed materials from a previous campaign, Angelina puts together lesson plan materials for the activity guide. AFSC then hires a graphic designer several months ahead to create a logo and format an activity guide, posters, and stickers (see Appendix A).

**Post-Campaign Evaluation:** After each campaign is over, AFSC surveys staff and farmers to hear about how the healthy food campaign went and how they can be improved. The feedback influences how AFSC implements the next campaign. Please see the highlights subsection for examples of this influence.



# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns (cont.)

## Areas to grow

The following ideas are areas of implementation that AFSC has not yet achieved but that would benefit the campaigns:

**Expanding Farm-ECE interactions:** A common request from ECE staff and some farmers was to have field trips to the farms or classroom visits by farmers.

**Social media outreach:** The social media campaign in the Midwest Apple Crunch campaign was very successful, but ours was not since our social media imprint was small. In the second *Great Carrot Crunch* campaign, we partnered with Presbyterian Healthcare Services, and they used their social media platforms to promote it, so we reached more people.

**Spanish-language activity guide:** Several requests were made by teachers so they could accommodate Spanish-speaking children and families.

**Planting seeds:** Some schools requested that we provide seeds so that the children could grow the crop at school or home as well.

## Highlights from our campaigns

### *Great Carrot Crunch Campaigns, May & October 2019 + October 2020*

#### **Snapshots of our carrot campaign:**

- » At one school, children were encouraged to wear orange on 'Crunch Day.'
- » In one class, everyone crunched into their carrots at the same time, and each child who tried one got a large sticker with the Great Carrot Crunch campaign bunny mascot.
- » At a Head Start, the parents got so excited that they made shirts for each child and planted carrot seeds in the school garden.
- » Some farmers got involved in bringing the program to their own children's schools. One such child reported feeling like a "rock star" because his mom grew the carrots for the special day.
- » Fresh carrots are incredibly sweet, and carrot tops were left on so that children could see how the carrots grew. One Albuquerque classroom fed the greens to their pet hamster and that had them hooked on doing the Great Carrot Crunch whenever it was offered.



# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns (cont.)

**Teacher Feedback:** After the first Great Carrot Crunch, teachers gave us feedback through surveys. Almost 100% of ECE staff surveyed said they wanted to participate again. ECE teachers requested more activities, like coloring sheets, that would be age-appropriate for their students. So for the next one we created a carrot coloring page highlighting the letter “C”. Surveys of school staff showed that it is helping them improve nutrition for young children, and they would like to see it continued. In the beginning, we reached out to both preschools and elementary schools. At a school with elementary and middle school students, teachers told us that the middle school students asked to be able to participate after they saw the elementary students with stickers. They were able to be a part of the next one in October 2019.

**Farmer Feedback:** During the initial Great Carrot Crunch Campaign, AFSC supplied farmers with carrot seed in exchange for a written commitment that they would grow carrots for the campaign. We also included new farmers in the second campaign. Some of the farmers gave presentations to the students, which was the most popular part of the campaign. Farmers reported new markets from these schools they had not reached previously.

## **By the numbers:**

**2019:** More than 3,000 students from Pre-K to 8th grade in northern and central New Mexico participated once or twice in the Great Carrot Crunch campaigns in May and October 2019.

**2020:** In October 2020, we held the next Great Carrot Crunch campaign for eight ECEs serving low-income children and one elementary school. Because of COVID-19 travel restrictions, all the schools were in Albuquerque. Participation was lower due to schools coping with the pandemic.



# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns (cont.)

## 2020's New Campaigns: Terrific Turnip Tasting & Cherry Tomato Chomp

Farmers at AFSC's annual Statewide Farmer Gathering and the follow-up Farm to ECE meeting envisioned two new campaigns: *Terrific Turnip Tasting* and the *Cherry Tomato Chomp*. The farmers committed to growing those vegetables for the ECEs, and we again began working on healthy food activities around turnips and tomatoes, hired a graphic designer, and recruited ECEs to participate. A month after the meeting, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and everything was uncertain. The farmers were losing their markets as restaurants closed and farmers' markets were cancelled. They hoped that we could find a way to continue the healthy food campaigns.

As we designed the *Terrific Turnip Tasting*, we worked closely with school staff to adapt the program. Since schools were now virtual, they had changed their meal program to a "grab n' go" system whereby families picked up food curbside. Working with the schools, AFSC piggybacked on school's "grab n' go" pick-ups in May 2020 to safely send students home with a bag of turnips for everyone in the family to try. Implementing all-new COVID-safety guidelines, we packaged the turnips into bags that also included a fun activity guide (see label). Quaker families helped us to assemble these to-go bags with labels. The program was a success, with many noting that when parents model trying new foods and healthy eating habits, kids see and mimic them.

When a farmer with an abundance of cherry tomatoes suggested this crop for a healthy food campaign, both other farmers and ECE staff felt it was a good fit: an abundant crop that was tasty, small, and did not require preparation. However, because schools were still in flux due to the pandemic, fewer schools were able to participate in the *Cherry Tomato Chomp*. We partnered with the Center for Social Sustainable Systems (CESOSS) to provide the K-2 students with their coloring book, *De La Tierra*. Despite the smaller number of schools, one beautiful innovation that came out of the *Cherry Tomato Chomp* was an invitation to create a pop-up preschool garden at one ECE site. See the case study later in the booklet for more information.



*Label for the bags of turnips—turning a challenge into an opportunity for family nutrition fun*

# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns (cont.)



## 2021: Won't you Give Peas a Chance?

In 2021, farmers and ECE staff requested we add another vegetable. We tried sweet peas, which met all of the ECE's food requirements. *Give Peas a Chance* was a big hit with ECEs. This campaign reached over 500 students and staff at 22 Head Starts and Pre-Ks in central and northern New Mexico. ECEs gave us feedback that more hands-on or movement activities would be great.

Chris Chavez of Casa Fresco Farms told us: "It's such a great cause, I'm glad I could be a part of it." Chris is a father of a 3-year-old, and he really believes that getting healthy food to this age group is important.

The Pueblo of Isleta Head Start and Child Care Center also asked that AFSC partner with them and several farmers to create an indigenous food campaign. We're excited to see what will come of this collaboration! We've heard a hope from ECE staff that these healthy food campaigns lead to more robust relationships with local farms and better health outcomes for their students.

# A Closer Look at Healthy Food Campaigns (cont.)



Chris Chavez, Casa Fresco Farm: “It has been an amazing opportunity for our farm to participate in these healthy food campaigns. It brings great joy and honor to be able to provide fresh, locally grown, healthy snacks to these children, and I hope it provides a path to continue to enjoy healthy eating as they grow.”

“We had a girl who was very scared of trying the peas, but once the stickers you gave us came out, she tried it!”—Albuquerque Pre-K Teacher

# Pop Up Garden during COVID19

## CASE STUDY

In 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, a preschool teacher who participated in the *Great Carrot Crunch* asked us for help creating a garden for her students. The school's only playground was concrete surrounded by a wall. Knowing that being outdoors is safest for students and teachers during the pandemic, the teacher longed for green space for her children. She had previously worked at another ECE which had a garden and saw the positive social/emotional impact it had on her students. The students at her school were primarily refugees from Syria, Iraq, Mexico, Tanzania, Afghanistan and Rwanda and showed signs of trauma.

Sayrah recruited a farmer and grandfather to help create two “pop-up” box gardens that could later be wheeled indoors in the winter. They installed the gardens when the students were not in school. Sayrah purchased child size watering cans shaped like elephants, with the spout shaped like the trunk. All of the students had naturally learned to say “look!” in each others’ languages. That was what the teacher heard the first day her students went outside and saw their lovely gardens and got to plant and water for the first time.

Over the course of the year, we got reports from the teacher and a parent about the impact of the garden. The children were eager to eat vegetables they grew in the garden versus vegetables served at lunch. A child refugee from Tanzania remarked: “The food I grow tastes better than the food from the store.” He also said he wants to be a farmer when he grows up. A child from Afghanistan showed remarkable improvement in his social/emotional behaviors after spending time each day in the garden. His teacher had observed he rarely made eye contact or interacted with other children at the start of the school year. Once the pop-up gardens were put in, he was very engaged in it and began interacting with the other children in



*A child from Afghanistan showed remarkable improvement in his social/emotional behaviors after spending time each day in the garden.*

*The children were eager to eat vegetables they grew in the garden versus vegetables served at lunch. A child refugee from Tanzania remarked: “The food I grow tastes better than the food from the store.”*



the garden. His mother noticed that when he came home from school, the first thing he wanted to do was use the watering can to water their own garden. (Since AFSC had only been able to purchase four watering cans for the school, children had to take turns; but at his home the watering can was all his). His mother and teacher both noticed wonderful improvements in his behavior from being in the garden.

Our experiment creating “pop up gardens” was successful in ways we had not anticipated. Edward O. Wilson popularized the biophilia hypothesis, which suggests that “humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life.”

Michigan State University documents the benefits of gardening on young children here: [https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/gardening\\_with\\_young\\_children\\_helps\\_their\\_development](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/gardening_with_young_children_helps_their_development)

# Conclusion

AFSC staff meet each spring with the farmers who have helped us build our Farm to ECE work. When we collectively reimagine our food system, we envision small, local farms supplying nutritious produce to neighborhood schools. Several times a year, we bring that vision to life. Together we show that it this vision is not only possible, but also fun and empowering.

AFSC wrote this guide during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the critical work of farmers and teachers was all the more evident. The pandemic exacerbated longstanding inequities in our food system and our society. Farming and education are both essential work in our communities.

We recognize the great sacrifices that teachers—deemed “essential workers”—have made during the pandemic, risking their own health to care for young children. Women of color make up the majority of early childhood educators, and their pay is very low. According to a 2019 New Mexico In Depth report, 65% of lead teachers and 55% of assistant directors make less than \$30,000 per year. We also know how formative the first few years of a child’s life are, and these women play a crucial role.



Feeding these children with this land demonstrates how we can both strengthen our local “foodshed” and encourage healthy habits in young children who may be at risk of diabetes or obesity. “It’s not the idealism of heroes, it’s being good neighbors,” says Mari Simbaña, clerk of AFSC’s New Mexico Program advisory committee. “It’s about having the same story and building it together.”

Thanks to the New Mexico family farms and front-line early childhood education teachers and staff, we were able to successfully get young children—

predominately low-income children of color—to eat local vegetables and learn about healthy eating. Over the five years of trial and error, we improved and expanded the Farm to ECE programs based on feedback and enthusiasm of the farmers and ECE staff. We learned from other states about their Farm to ECE work and with their support, were able to replicate some of their success in New Mexico.

*Feeding these children with this land demonstrates how we can both strengthen our local “foodshed” and encourage healthy habits in young children who may be at risk of diabetes or obesity.*



AFSC promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. We nurture the seeds of change and the respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions. The New Mexico People of the Land Program’s overall mission is to revitalize small, sustainable farms throughout the state, thereby protecting culture, natural land, water resources, and jobs, while improving the health of New Mexico’s children and their communities.

“Undramatic but consistent engagement is so important and a good feedback loop for all of us,” says David Henkel, who also serves on the AFSC New Mexico Program advisory committee. “Showing up over time ... just showing up is what builds community. It nurtures all of us.”

If you are interested in partnering with us or supporting our work, please contact us at: [newmexico@afsc.org](mailto:newmexico@afsc.org)

Our website: [www.afsc.org/newmexico](http://www.afsc.org/newmexico)      Our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/afscnm](http://www.facebook.com/afscnm)

# Appendices

Appendix A: Logos

Appendix B: Initial ECE Survey, 2017

Appendix C: Great Carrot Crunch Poster

Appendix D: Sample activities from Activity Guides





Daycare Intake Survey

Daycare: \_\_\_\_\_

**How many people do you typically serve at your daycare on a daily basis?**

0-10      10-20      20-30      30-40      40-50      50+

**How often do you purchase produce?**

Daily      2-3 Days a Week      Once a Week      Bi-Monthly      Monthly

**Which vegetables do you typically buy? (Check all that apply)**

\_\_\_ Tomato      \_\_\_ Onion      \_\_\_ Corn      \_\_\_ Squash  
\_\_\_ Squash      \_\_\_ Carrot      \_\_\_ Beans      \_\_\_ Green Chile  
\_\_\_ Broccoli      \_\_\_ Garlic      \_\_\_ Potato      \_\_\_ Radish  
\_\_\_ Cucumber      \_\_\_ Turnip      \_\_\_ Bell Pepper      \_\_\_ Spinach

Other:

**Where do you shop for produce? (Circle all that apply)**

Price Rite      Albertsons      Wal-Mart      El Super      Sprouts

Other:

**How much do you currently spend on vegetables on a weekly basis?**

\$0-20      \$20-30      \$30-40      \$40-50      \$50-60      \$60-70      \$60+

**What kinds of prices would you need to afford fresh, local vegetables?**

\$0-20      \$20-30      \$30-40      \$40-50      \$50-60      \$60-70      \$60+

**Would you be interested in buying vegetables from local farmers?**

Yes      No

**Would you be interested in the opportunity to visit a local farm with your daycare?**

Yes      No

**Other comments:**

OUR CRUNCH DAY



# GREAT CARROT CRUNCH

NEW MEXICO



Art by Elyce Moran

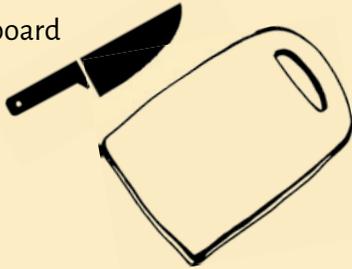
A project of the American Friends Service Committee [www.afsc.org/newmexico](http://www.afsc.org/newmexico) 505.842.7343

# FOOD DETECTIVES



## Equipment Required

knife  
cutting board



## Materials/Supplies

- ✧ 1 whole carrot (any color)
- ✧ magnifying glasses
- ✧ taste-testing samples of carrot (select only one color since you will use many colors for the Taste Testers lesson)
- ✧ taste-testing cups (optional)



## Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce a new food to the children in your classroom. The more times children are exposed to new foods, the more likely they are to eat and enjoy these foods in the future.

## Overview

In this lesson, children will describe what a bell pepper looks like under a magnifying glass. Children will also share if they like how a bell pepper feels, smells and tastes.

## Words to Use

- ✧ feel
- ✧ carrot
- ✧ smell
- ✧ taste
- ✧ smooth seeds
- ✧ orange, yellow, purple

## Introduction

This activity will work well as a circle time activity and at tables, in small groups, for tasting.

## Before the Lesson

Select one whole carrot for children to closely examine with magnifying glasses. Prepare samples of carrot for the children to taste.

Today we are going to be detectives.

### Does anybody know what a detective does?

A detective gathers clues by using his or her eyes, hands, nose, and mouth. We are all going to be food detectives today. We are going to use a magnifying glass, something all good detectives carry, to look closely at a food that many of us have not tried before. After we all take a turn looking at the new food, we get to smell and taste the new food.

# TURNIP NUMBER MATCH

Salad turnips taste sweet and crunch when you bite them. They have a tender skin and no spiciness. They look round and white and feel smooth. They are also called Tokyo or Hakurei turnips because they originally grew in Japan.

Count the turnips in each group and match them to the correct number.

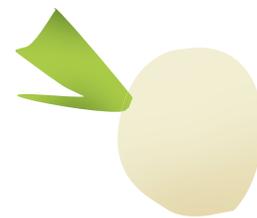
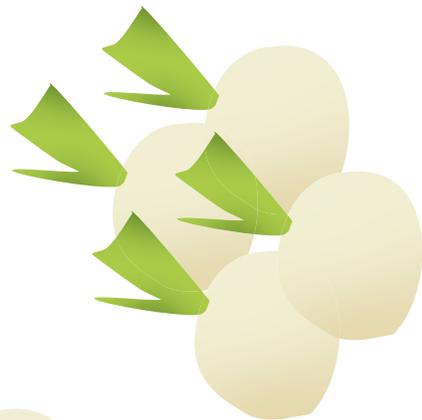
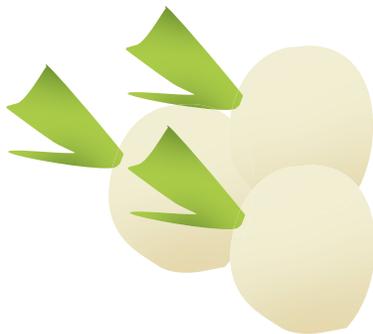
1

2

3

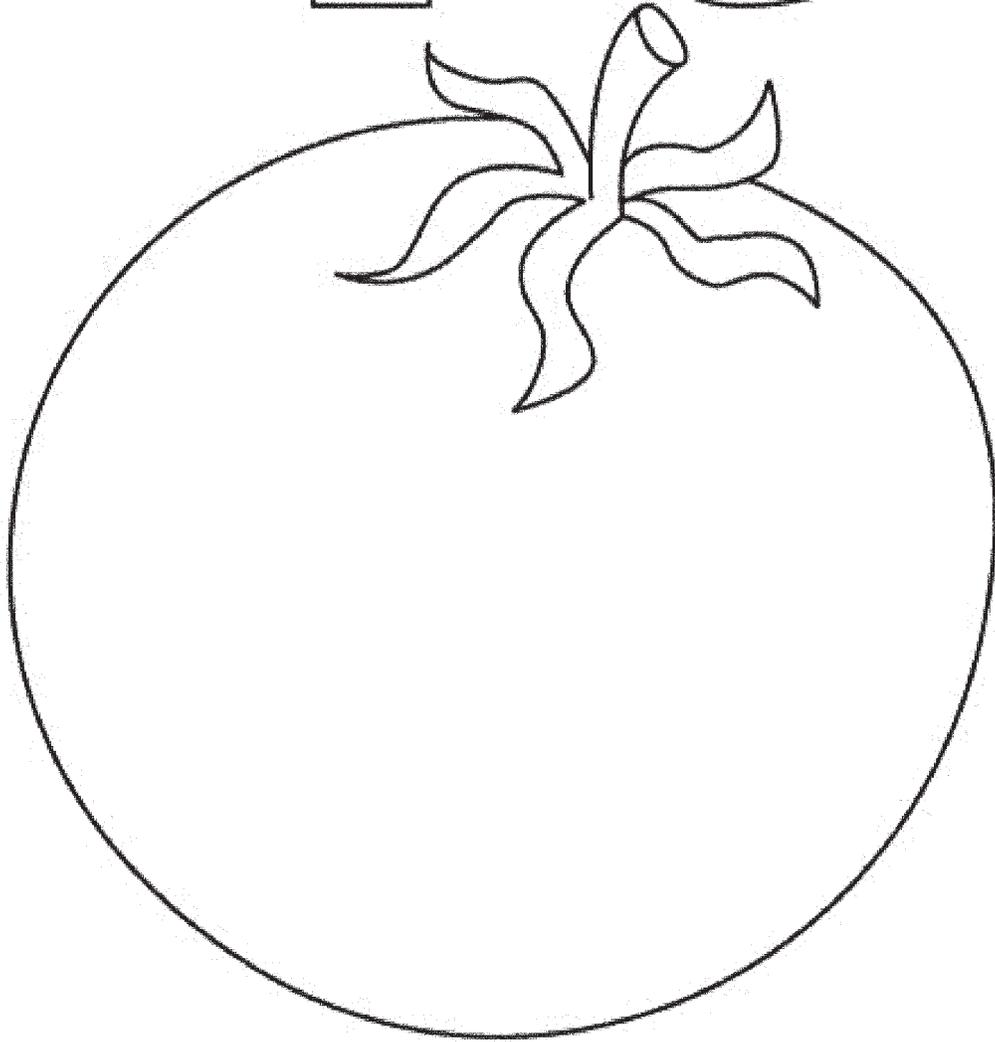
4

5



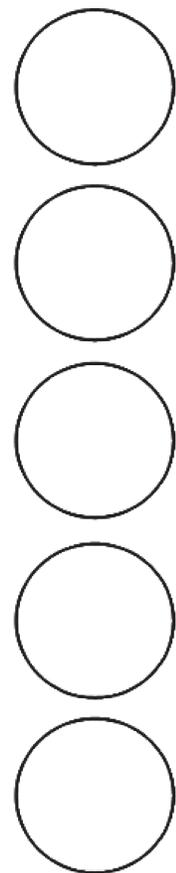
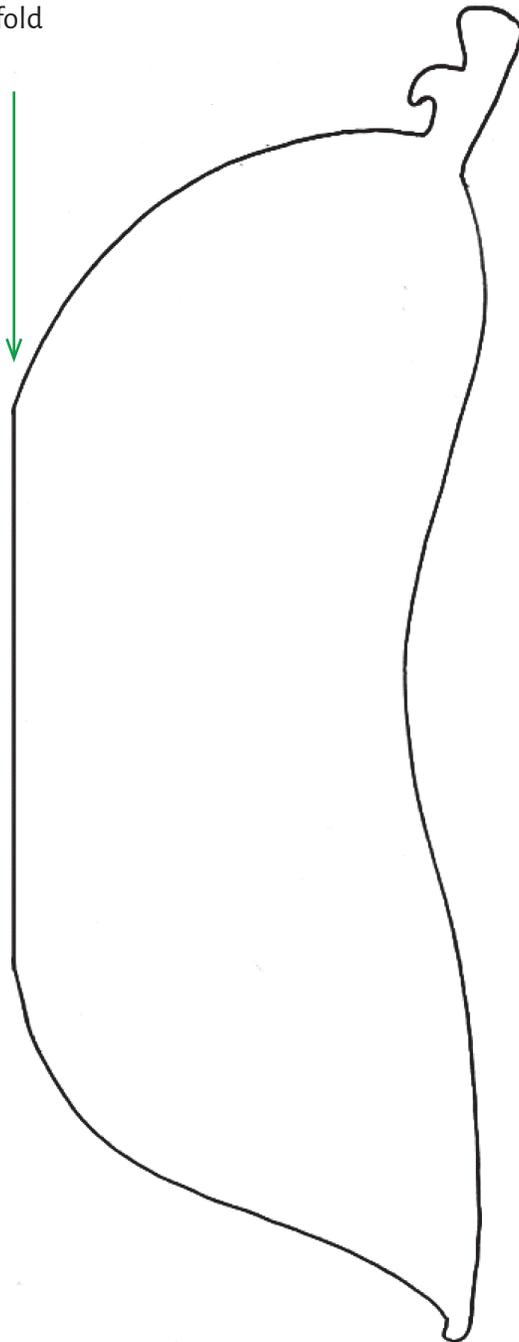
T FOR TOMATO

T t



# PEA POD THREADING ACTIVITY

place line against the fold  
of paper and cut out



## Instructions:

Cut the dotted line to separate the peas from the peapod. Make the peapod by folding the paper at the flat, left side of the peapod. Cut out the curvy edges, so you have two halves of the peapod connected at the fold. Color peapod and peas green. Cut out peas. With the peapod folded, punch holes on the curvy edges. Thread the two sides of the peapod together with yarn or a shoelace and then slot the peas inside.