

# Children's Cabinet

June 23, 2025

# Agenda

- Welcome & Announcements & vote on minutes
- SNAP Presentation – DHS
- WIC Update
- HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Living Program) Presentation - RIDOH
- Public Comment
- Adjournment



SUMMER NUTRITION PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

# SUN Bucks: Rhode Island's Summer Nutrition Programs for Kids



# What is SUN Bucks?

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- **SUN Bucks is a grocery benefits program to help families buy food during the summer when schools are closed.**
- **Families get \$120 for each eligible school-age child.**
- **Children who get these benefits can still participate in other summer meal programs.**





**Children need  
consistent access  
to nutritious food  
to grow, learn,  
and thrive**



# Summer should be a time for fun, not hunger

Food insecurity rises during the summer, when the **approximately 30 million children and teens** who participate in school lunch and breakfast programs lose access to these nutritious meals





# Traditional Meal Sites Model doesn't reach *all* children

Only 1 in 6 children who eat free or reduced-price school lunch participate in group summer meals





**SUN Bucks,**  
traditional summer  
meal programs in  
**Rhode Island, are**  
**vital**

# Launched in 2024: Rhode Island's grocery benefits program





# We know it works!

Demonstration projects showed summer grocery benefits reduced child hunger by **33%**



# How does SUN Bucks work?

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- In RI, SUN Bucks benefits are loaded onto an EBT card and mailed to your home; added to an existing household EBT card.
- SUN Bucks benefits can be used to buy food like fruits, vegetables, meat, whole grains, and dairy at grocery stores, farmers markets, and other places that accept SNAP EBT benefits.
- SUN Bucks is a convenient way to help children get the nutrition they need when schools are closed.





# Who is eligible for SUN Bucks?

- School-aged children whose households participate in other nutrition assistance programs
- Children who attend a school that offers the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program, and their household income meets the requirements for free or reduced-price school meals



# SUN Bucks Data

## 2025:

SNAP Benefits* -	\$3,880,920	Individuals 32,341	Households 18,526
Non-SNAP Benefits* -	\$7,530,000	Individuals 62,750	Households 62,750

\*Data as of June 17, 2025

## 2024:

SNAP Benefits -	\$3,800,280	Individuals 31,669	Households 18,204
Non-SNAP Benefits -	\$9,034,800	Individuals 75,284	Households 75,289



# Who is eligible for SUN Bucks?

Your child may be eligible for SUN Bucks if any one of the following criteria apply during the school year:

- A child in your household is receiving SNAP, Rhode Island Works, or Medicaid benefits (if your household income is at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) and your child is between ages 6 – 18.
- Your child is a foster child, homeless child, a migrant child, a Head Start child or a runaway child.
- Your child attends a school participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) and meets the eligibility requirements for free and reduced-price school meals as determined through an NSLP/SBP application
- Your child attends a special provision school and meets the requirements to receive free or reduced-price meal as determined through an NSLP/SBP application..
- You submit an online or paper SUN Bucks application, your child attends a NSLP/SBP school, and your household income is at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.





**How do families  
apply for SUN  
Bucks in Rhode  
Island?**

# Enrolling in SUN Bucks

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School-age children (ages 6 – 18) receiving SNAP, RI Works, or Medicaid (if income eligible) or living in a household where a child is receiving these benefits are enrolled in SUN Bucks automatically.

Additionally, families that submitted a school meal benefit application or an alternate income form to their schools and were determined income-eligible for free or reduced priced school meals are enrolled in SUN Bucks automatically.

All other families that believe they meet the income criteria for free or reduced-price school meals and their children attend a school participating in the NSLP/SBP, can complete a SUN Bucks application to determine if they are eligible for the benefits.



# Online SUN Bucks Application

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The SUN Bucks application is available online for anyone who believes they meet the eligibility criteria but will not receive the benefits through the automated process.

To apply, households can submit a paper application available on the DHS website or [apply online](#).

SUN Bucks Application period for the 2024-2025 school year is open and will close at the start of the next school year. However, submitted applications will not be reviewed until the current school year ends. SUN Bucks are only issued during the summer months.





# Working together to close the summer hunger gap





**Together,  
we can help  
more children  
thrive in the  
summertime  
and beyond**





# Thank you

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Jenna Simeone, SNAP Administrator  
Rhode Island Department of Human Services

*For additional questions, contact:  
Jenna Simeone: [Jenna.Simeone@dhs.ri.gov](mailto:Jenna.Simeone@dhs.ri.gov)*



# Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)



WIC is a short-term public health program that helps to safeguard the health of pregnant and postpartum participants, infants and children younger than five years old who are at nutritional risk.

## 5 Pillars of WIC Services:

1. Access to Healthy Foods
2. Nutrition Education
3. Breastfeeding Support
4. Health Screenings
5. Health-Related Social Service Referrals



# WIC in Rhode Island



Each applicant receives individual, client-centered counseling, access to a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, and an individualized food prescription based on need.

- WIC currently has a monthly enrolled rate of 19,494 participants statewide
- 53% of infants born in Rhode Island are currently enrolled in WIC
- 19 WIC locations
- Eligible WIC participants receive \$25 to buy local fresh produce at participating Farmers Markets

# WIC Outcomes



- Increased immunization rates
- Improved birth outcomes
- Enhanced nutritional well-being of mothers and young children
- Increased school readiness



# WIC Shopper App



Rhode Island WIC is now using the WIC Shopper App, a free and ad-free app that can provide participants with:

- Locations of WIC vendors, including listing those closest to you
- Locations of WIC offices
- The WIC food guide, showing all WIC-approved foods
- A bar code scanning tool, which allows you to check whether a food item is on the approved product list.
- Other tools, such as easy and healthy recipes you can make with WIC foods and a tool to request the addition of specific food items to our WIC approved list.

# Innovations to Reduce Barriers to Services



- An online survey to check eligibility will be rolled out before July 1, 2025. This will allow participants to reach out electronically and receive an appointment.
- Pilot project that supports trained Community Health Workers to enroll pregnant people and infants in WIC on a preliminary basis, scheduling a follow-up appointment at a clinic within 30 days.
- Grant funds supported an agency to purchase a van equipped as a WIC clinic. This makes it easy for those applying to the program to access services.



# Healthy Eating and Active Living Program

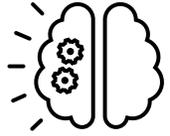
Early Childcare and  
Education

Randi Belhumeur, MS RDN LDN CDOE

Sarah Blau, MPH

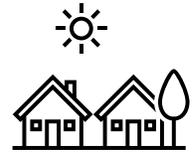


# Healthy Eating & Active Living Program



## Vision

Nourishing food and active living are culturally appealing, accessible, and affordable to all Rhode Islanders.



## Mission

To advance health equity for healthy eating and active living by collaboratively working with partners to improve policy, system, and environmental changes.

## Priorities



Access to affordable nourishing food



Access to safe spaces for play and physical activity



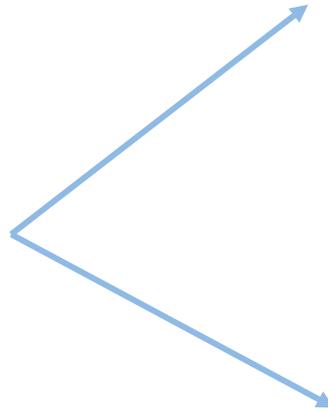
Infant, children, and youth — nutrition and physical activity



Expansion of statewide system coordination

# What is SPAN?

- Centers of Disease Control and Prevention – State Physical Activity and Nutrition grant 2023-2028(?)
- 17 state awardees
- Promotion of healthy eating and active living



## *Five Primary Strategies:*

1. Promotion of Food Service Guidelines
2. Expansion of Fruit and Vegetable Voucher Incentive Program and Produce PRx
3. Safe and Accessible Physical Activity
4. Continuity of care in breastfeeding support
5. **Early childcare and education**

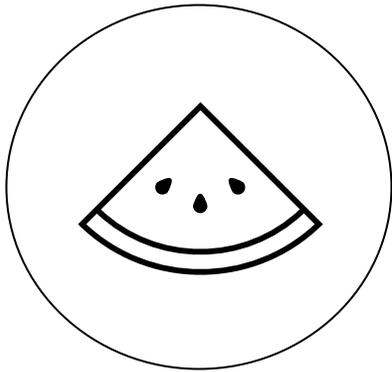
# Early Childcare and Education (ECE)

## CDC Spectrum of Opportunities

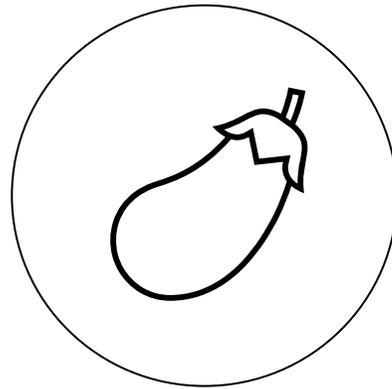
1. Partnerships
2. Equity
3. Activities



# Among RI children 1–5 years of age in 2021



More than 1/3 did not eat a daily fruit during the preceding week

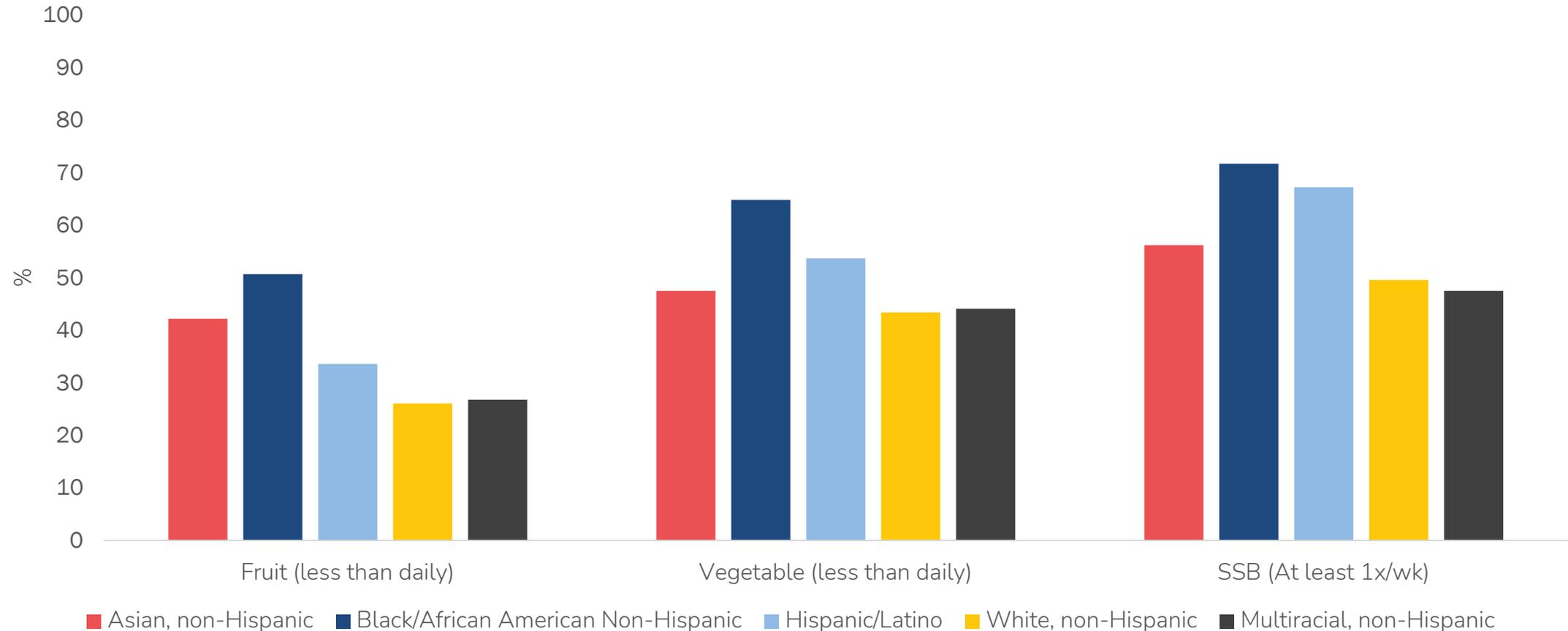


More than 1/2 did not eat a daily vegetable during the preceding week



More than 1/2 drank soda at least once during the preceding week

# Disparities in Diet Quality Also Start Early in Life

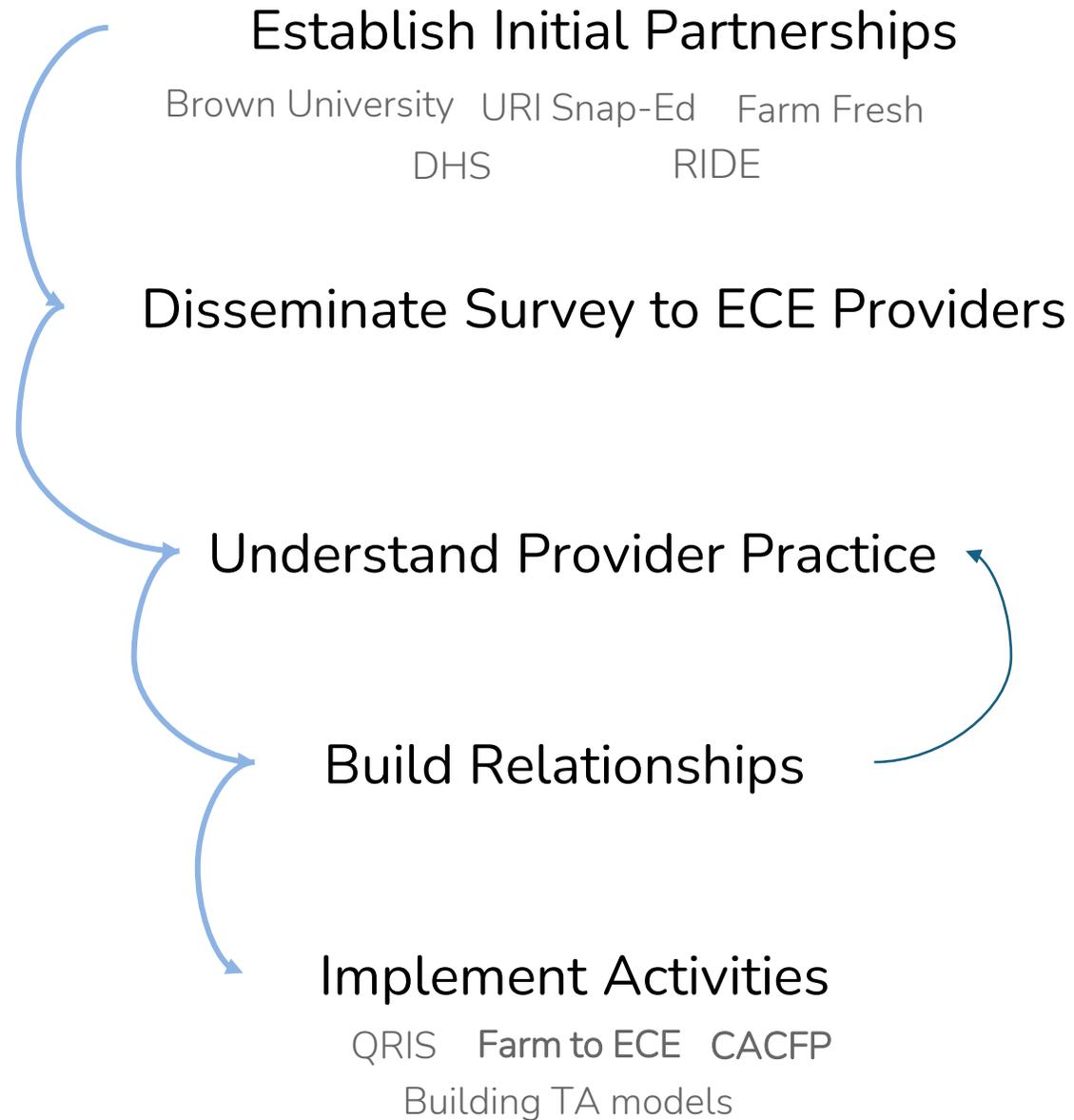


# Nutrition & Developmental Health

- 🍏 Early childhood (birth-5 years) is a period of rapid growth and development.
- 🍏 Access to adequate nutrition (macro and micronutrients) is critical to support cognitive and physical development in early childhood.
  - 🍏 Limited or inadequate nutrient access in early childhood could impede brain growth and cognitive abilities (e.g., motor development, memory, attention)



# RI Landscape: Assessment Process



# Child and Adult Care Food Program Story Map

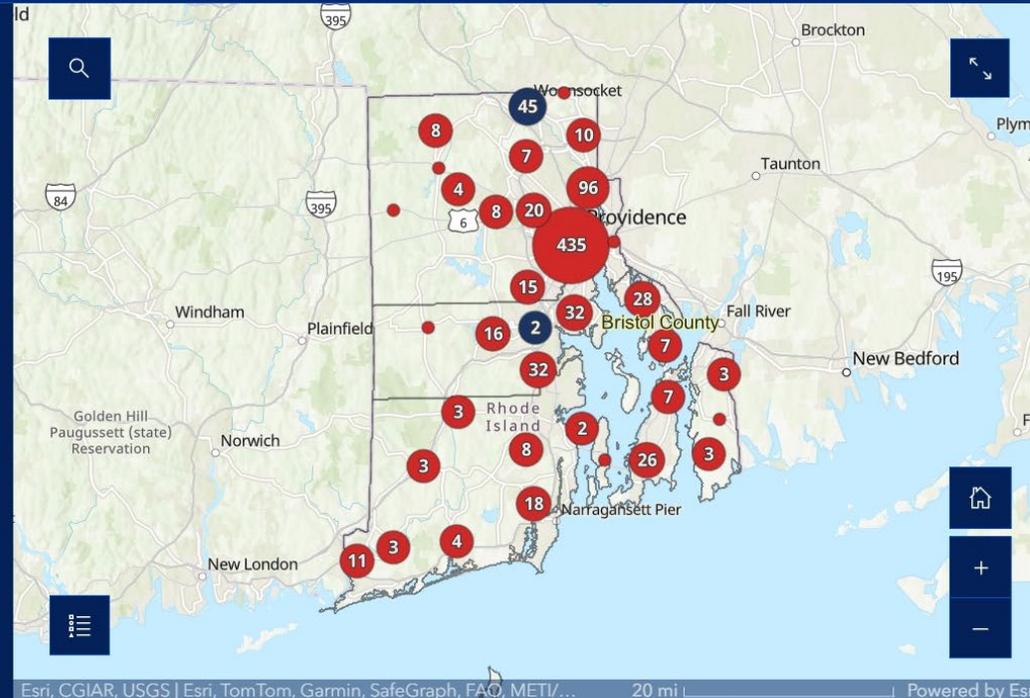


CACFP Participation in Rhode Island



Introduction CACFP Participation Food Deserts Areas for Potential CACFP Expa... Food Insecurity and Poverty: A... Child Opportuni →

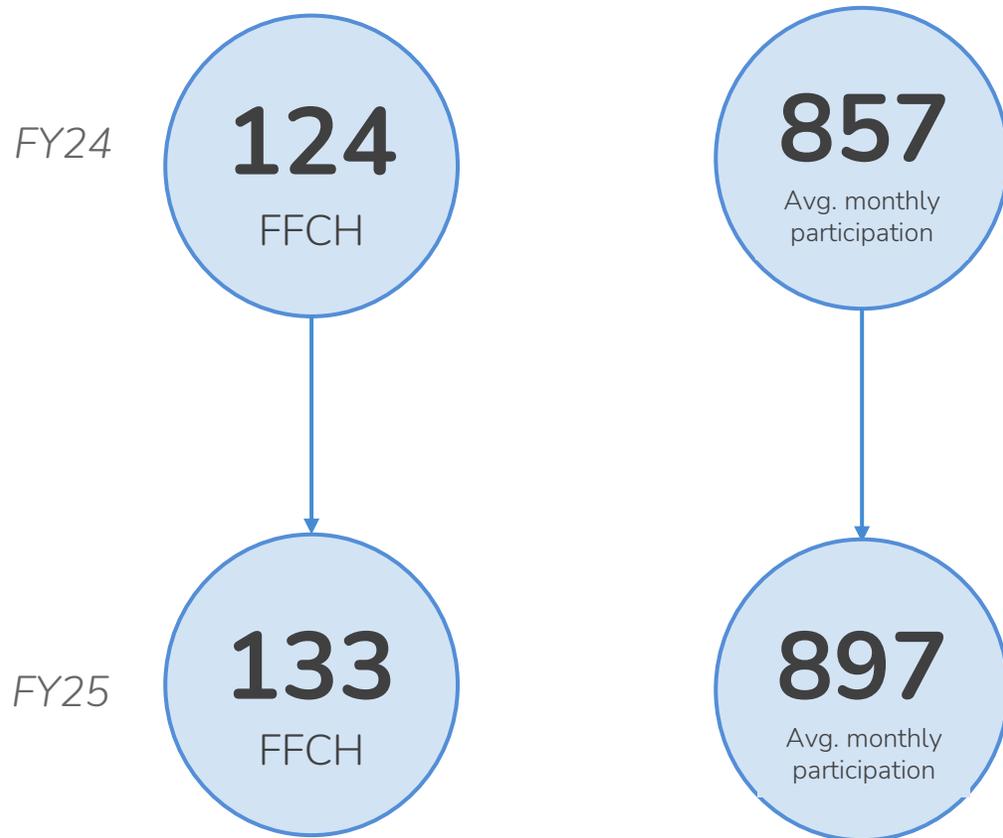
While a true national CACFP participation rate is unknown, [Andreyeva et al. \(2024\)](#) found that 36.5 percent of centers nationwide participate in CACFP (p. 20), while we find that Rhode Island's center CACFP participation rate is at 28.7 percent (131 / 457). The overall rate of 31.1 percent is lower than that of neighboring states [Maine \(45.9% in 2022\)](#) or [Vermont \(35.4% in 2024\)](#).



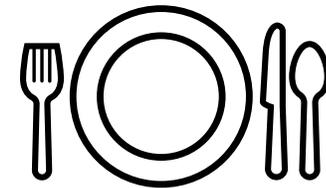
# Sponsor Risk: Children's Friend

To participate in CACFP, Family Child Care Homes must work with a public or private non-profit sponsoring organization

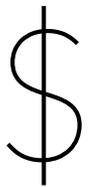
Number of homes sponsored and average number of monthly participants in federal FY24 and federal FY25



FY24 number of meals served, and reimbursement issued

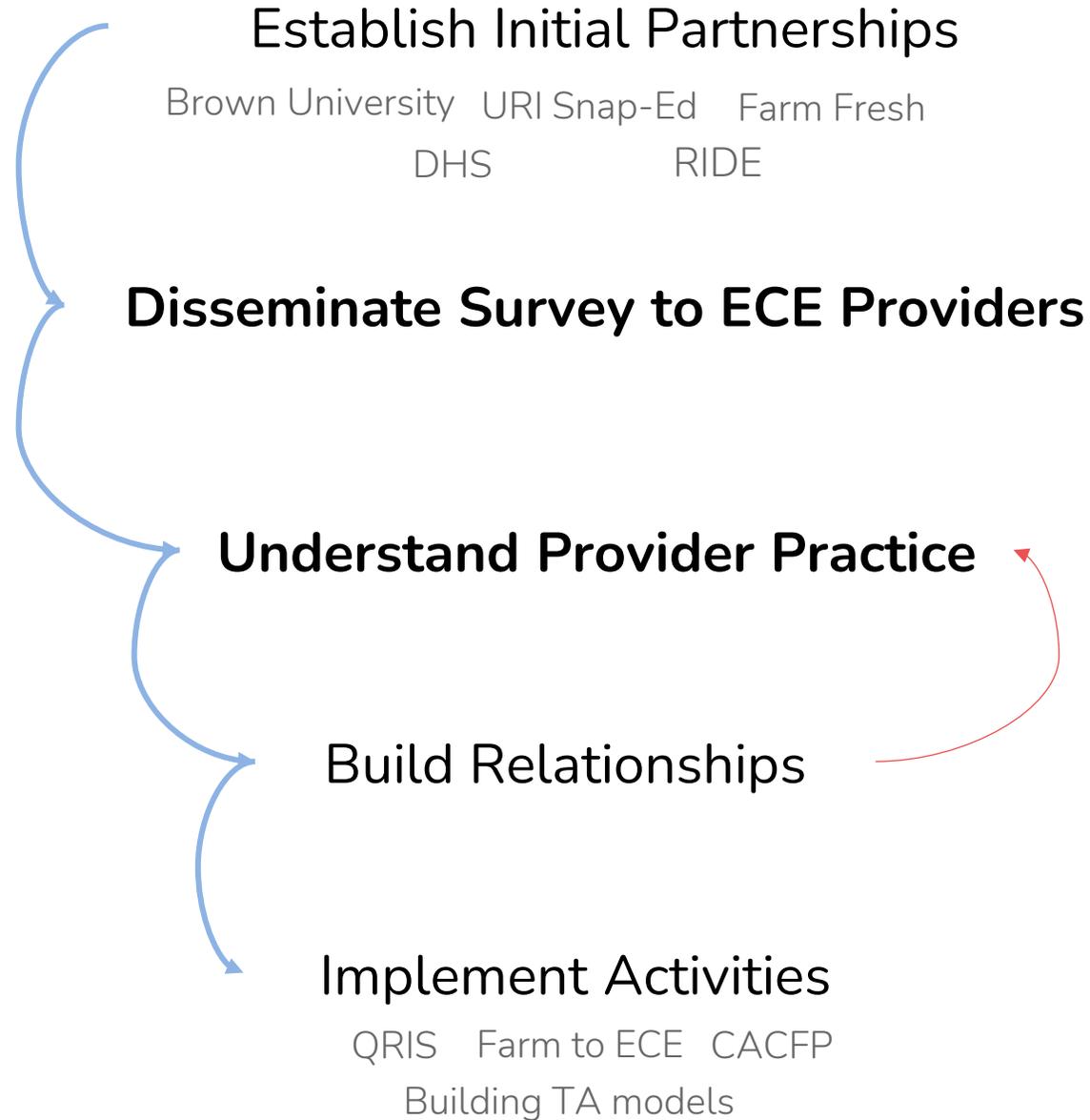


**544,912**  
meals served



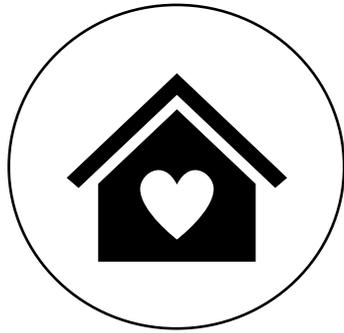
**\$1,015,631.00**  
in reimbursement to FCCH  
educators

# RI Landscape: Assessment Process

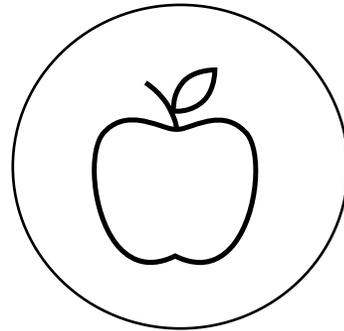


# RI ECE Activities: Survey

- 🍏 Caring for our Children Standards
- 🍏 Four primary focus areas



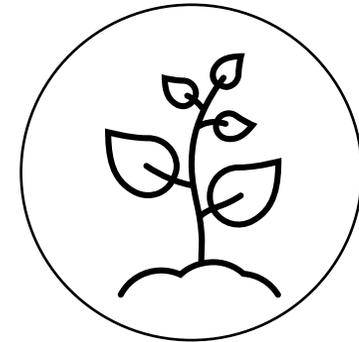
CACFP  
Participation



Nutrition



Physical  
Activity

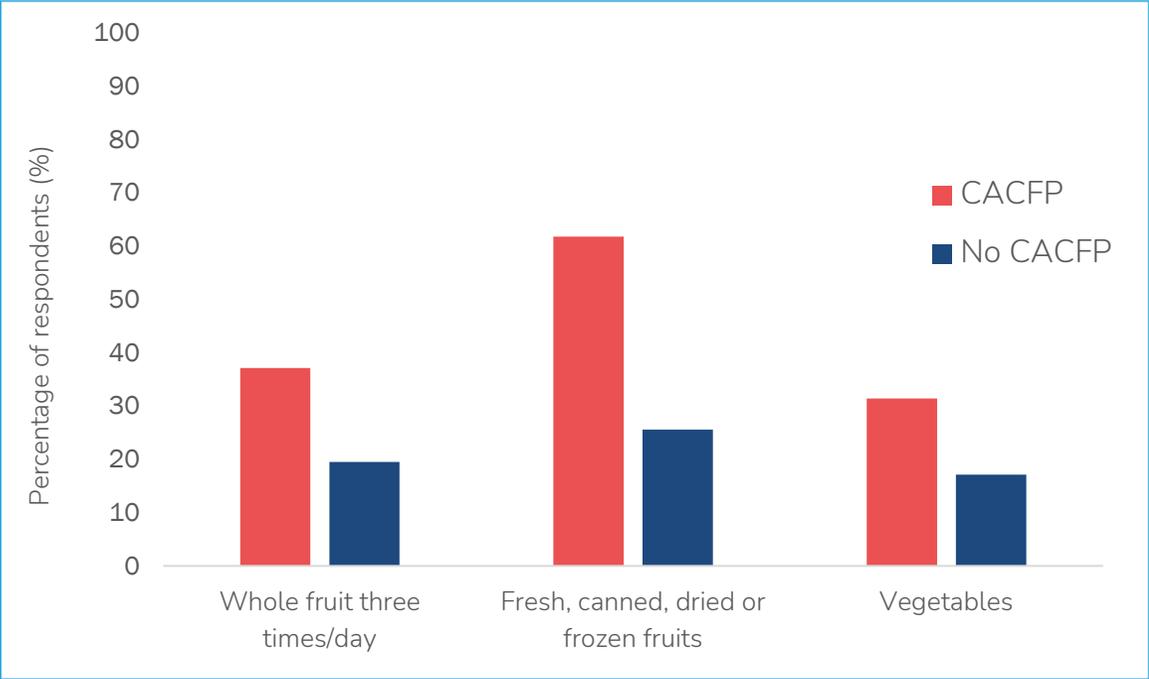


Farm to ECE

# Survey Findings: CACFP

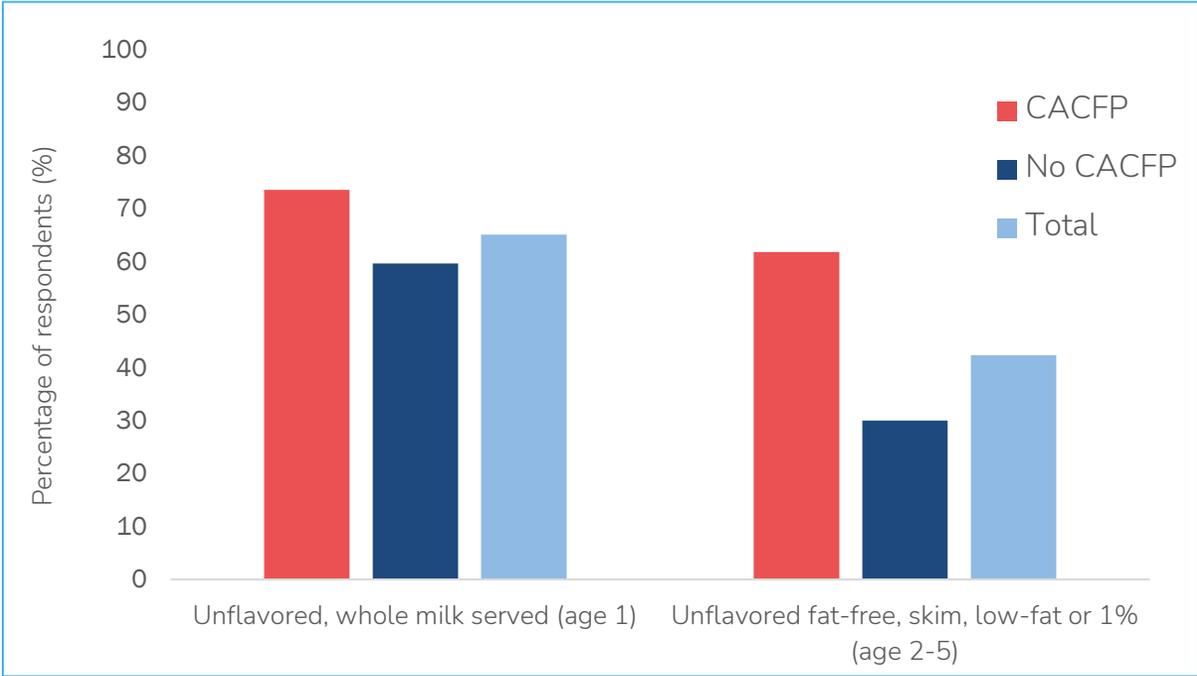
N=119

## CACFP – Fruits and Vegetables



**Figure 1.** Percentage of providers that serve F&V by CACFP participation status

## CACFP – Fluid Milk



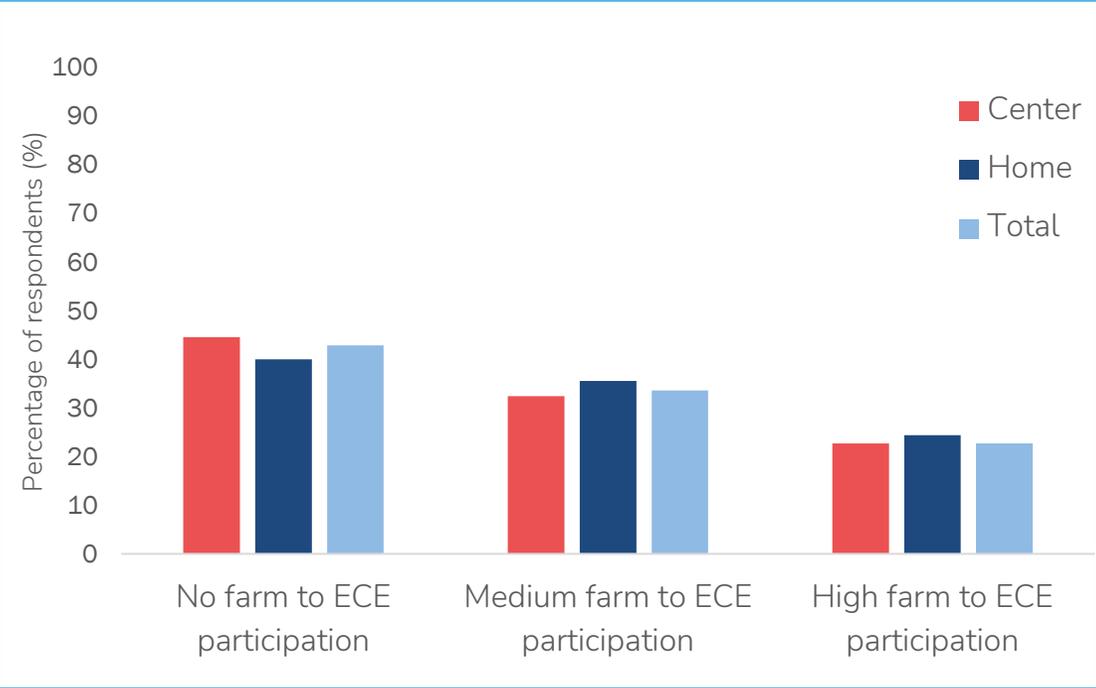
**Figure 2.** Percentage of providers that serve unflavored whole milk and low-fat milk by CACFP participation status



# Survey Findings: Farm 2 ECE

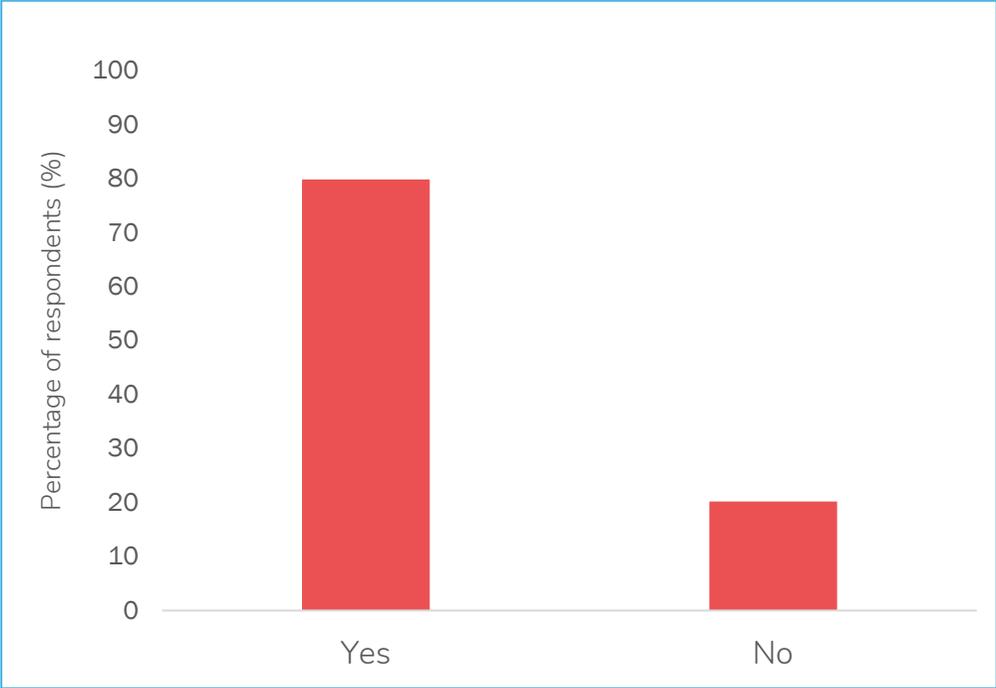
Gardening, local food purchasing, education

## Farm 2 ECE – Participation



**Figure 3.** Percentage of providers interested in expanding Farm 2 ECE Activities

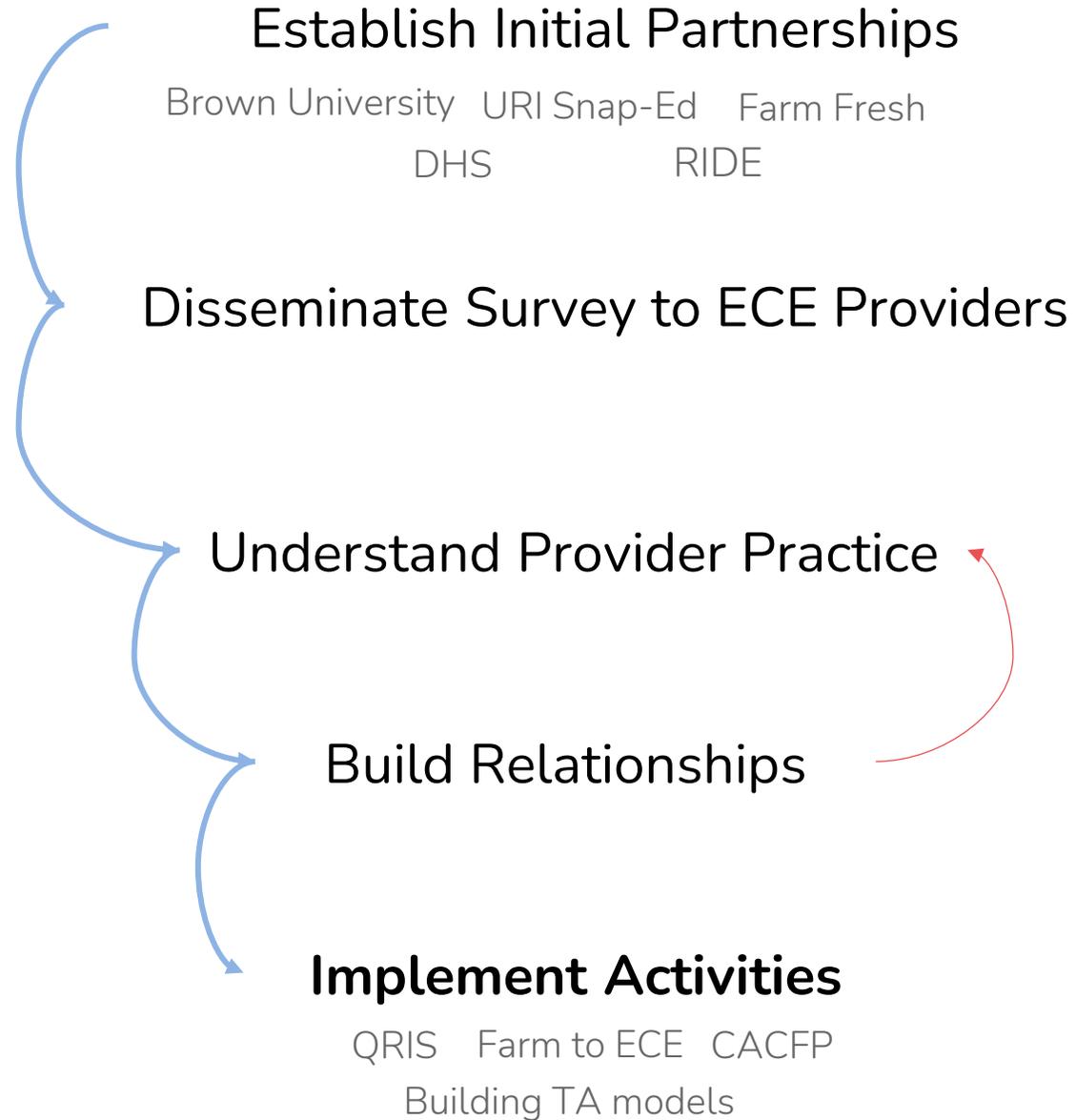
## Farm 2 ECE



**Figure 4.** Percentage of providers interested in expanding Farm 2 ECE Activities



# RI Landscape: Assessment Process



# Little Harvest Produce Box

Identify funding source to address cost barriers related to local purchasing and select area for pilot programs

Use Prevention Block Grant funds to launch produce delivery program – Little Harvest Produce Box Program - in six Rhode Island cities

Partners: University of Rhode Island Snap-Ed, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, South Side Community Land Trust, Brown University School of Public Health



# Outreach and Enrollment



## Join the Little Harvest Produce Box Program For Child Care in Central Falls and Pawtucket!

Is your child care site ready to receive boxes of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables this season? The Little Harvest Produce Box program brings nutritious fruits and vegetables straight to you to help support healthy children and families.

### Program Highlights:

- **Free box of produce** delivered every other week, May through September
- **Educational materials** included to help add fresh produce to meals and teach children about healthy eating
- Earn **\$65 in classroom materials**
- **Optional Add-on: Go NAPSACC** is a trusted online tool that helps child care programs go the extra mile to support children's healthy eating and physical activity. An additional incentive will be available for programs that take part in Go NAPSACC.



To learn more or to SIGN UP,



[https://brown.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9KB1wZFEfC4Lvls](https://brown.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9KB1wZFEfC4Lvls)

Sign up by April 15th to make sure to reserve your spot!



## ¡Únase al programa Little Harvest Produce Box para el cuidado infantil en Central Falls y Pawtucket!

¿Su guardería está preparada para recibir frutas y verduras frescas que han sido cultivadas localmente esta temporada? El programa Little Harvest Produce Box le lleva frutas y verduras nutritivas directamente a su cuidado infantil para ayudar a mantener la salud de los niños y familias en su cuidado.

### Acerca del Programa

- **Caja gratuita de productos agrícolas** entregada cada dos semanas, de mayo a septiembre
- **Se incluyen materiales educativos** para ayudar a agregar productos frescos a las comidas y enseñar a los niños sobre alimentación saludable
- Gane **\$65 en materiales para el aula**
- **Complemento opcional: Go NAPSACC** es una herramienta en línea confiable que ayuda a los programas de cuidado infantil a hacer un esfuerzo adicional para promover la alimentación saludable y la actividad física de los niños. Habrá un incentivo adicional disponible para los programas que participen en Go NAPSACC.



Para obtener más información o INSCRIBIRSE,



[https://brown.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9KB1wZFEfC4Lvls](https://brown.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9KB1wZFEfC4Lvls)

¡Regístrese antes del 15 de abril para reservar su lugar!



# Educational Materials



## Mushrooms

### Little Harvest Tasty and Active Adventures

#### Guess

Put a mushroom in a bag or box to create a "mystery box". The child cannot look into the box, and instead has to explore the mushrooms by feel. Have each child touch the mystery item and then guess what they think it is, before revealing the "mystery" item to them.

#### Reflect

##### Say:

- Mushrooms are fungi! They can't make their own food, so they eat old, dead things in the soil, and sometimes they pop up in the woods or your backyard.

##### Ask:

- Have you ever seen a mushroom before?
- What did it look like?
- Do you think mushrooms can grow in RI?
- Have you found mushrooms out in nature?
- If you have eaten a mushroom, what did you think?

#### Move

- If possible, go outside on a mushroom hunt.
- Stretch like a mushroom! Have students start in child's pose, then 'unfurl' to a seated kneeling position, with hands on lap. As the mushroom grows, students slowly stand up, with their backs curved, their faces looking towards the ground, and their arms reaching out wide to create a mushroom 'dome.'
  - Have them guess which part of their body is the mushroom cap and which is the stem.



Remind children to add a mark or sticker to the white/brown section on the rainbow if they tried the mushroom!



#### Read

- Mighty Mushroom & Friends book from Mushroom in Schools
- The Magnificent Mushroom by Meredith Jo Hansen Favero

#### Explore

Before tasting, have students investigate the mushrooms. Ask the students to explore what they smell like, look like, and feel like!

#### Try

Start by gently rinsing mushrooms under cool running water. Cut into slices and hand out to students with ranch or another favorite dip.

Questions to ask as they are tasting:

- Is it soft, chewy or crunchy?
- Is it hot or cold?
- Is it smooth or bumpy?
- Is it sweet, sour, bitter or salty?

Scan QR code for more resources for week 1:



*This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*



## Champiñones

### Aventuras Sabrosas y Activas de Little Harvest

#### Adivinar

Ponga un champiñón en una bolsa o caja para crear una "caja de descubrimiento". El niño no mira en la caja, pero mejor explora el champiñón por tocarlo. Permita a cada niño tocar el producto misterioso y adivinar lo que es, luego muéstreles el producto "misterioso".

#### Reflexionar

##### Decir:

- ¡Los champiñones son hongos! No pueden hacer su propia comida, así que comen cosas viejas y muertas en la tierra, y a veces aparecen en el bosque o en su patio.

##### Preguntar:

- ¿Has visto un champiñón antes? ¿Cómo era?
- ¿Crees que los champiñones pueden crecer en RI?
- ¿Has encontrado un champiñón en la naturaleza?
- Si comiste un champiñón una vez, ¿qué te pareció?

#### Mover

- Si es posible, salga afuera para una búsqueda de champiñones.
- ¡Estire como un champiñón! Los niños empiezan con cabeza al suelo, luego 'abren' a sentarse en las rodillas, con manos en regazo. Mientras el champiñón crece, los niños se ponen de pie lentamente, espalda curvado, mirando al suelo, estirando los brazos para crear la forma del "domo" de un champiñón.
  - Pregunte a los niños qué parte de su cuerpo es la tapa del champiñón y qué parte es el tallo.



Recuerde a los niños a marcar o pegar un sticker en la parte blanco/marrón en el arcoíris después de probar el champiñón.



#### Leer

- Mighty Mushroom & Friends - libro desde Mushroom in Schools
- The Magnificent Mushroom de Meredith Jo Hansen Favero

#### Explorar

Antes de probar, invite a los estudiantes a investigar los champiñones. Invíteles a explorar el olor, la apariencia y la sensación de tocarlo.

#### Probar

Primero, lave ligeramente los champiñones con agua fresco. Córtelos en rebanadas y repártalos a los niños con ranch o otro dip preferido.

#### Preguntas para usar en la prueba:

- ¿Es blando, masticable o crujiente?
- ¿Es caliente o frío?
- ¿Es liso o grueso?
- ¿Es dulce, ácido, amargo o salado?

Escanee el código QR para más recursos para la semana 1:



*Este material fue financiado por el Programa de Asistencia Nutricional Suplementaria (SNAP) del USDA. Esta institución es un proveedor de igualdad de oportunidades.*

# Program Impact



- Boxes delivered to date: 483
- Early care sites served: 30

# Next Steps

## Stay Connected to the Healthy Eating & Active Living Program

- Coming soon: full ECE survey report
- Sign-up for our monthly newsletter: Rhode Island Food Access Bulletin
- Join our Monthly Food Access Office Hours Call
- Join our Farm to ECE Community of Practice
- Connect with us if you know of a prospective CACFP sponsor
- Email us directly: [sarah.blau@health.ri.gov](mailto:sarah.blau@health.ri.gov)



# Public Comment

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**RHODE  
ISLAND**