

Farm to Preschool
Program Evaluation: 2009-2010 School Year

Program Objectives

The Farm to Preschool program represents an ongoing effort to promote healthy, fresh food access and improve preschoolers' eating habits in underserved areas. As little research has been conducted to this end in preschool settings, the Farm to Preschool program also seeks to establish effective education and outreach strategies for the children, parents, and child care providers in this demographic. Ultimately the project seeks to identify policies with the potential for scaling up and institutionalizing to promote wide-scale wellness goals for preschoolers and local food sourcing in schools..

Setting:

The first year of the Farm to Preschool intervention was targeted to predominantly Hispanic and African American, low-income communities in Los Angeles and San Diego counties. Pre- and Post-intervention data were collected at a total of 3 control sites (n = 138) as well as 4 intervention sites (n = 316). In addition, data from a total of 328 students' parents were collected.

Preliminary Findings:

Community Demographics:

- 77.6% of students came from non-English speaking households
- 43.3% of the household received food assistance from “one or more”
 - (33.5% food stamps, 15.0% WIC, 4.0% food bank, 0.5% soup kitchen)

Home Food Access:

- 16.1% of households reported not having any of the vegetables covered in the curriculum

Student Outcomes:

- Knowledge of Fruit and Vegetables
 - Pre-intervention, control schools showed an advantage
 - 2.43 times as likely to identify most of the fruits
 - 1.79 times as likely to identify most of the vegetables
 - After the intervention this trend was reversed
 - 3.07 times as likely to identify fruits
 - 2.13 times as likely to identify vegetables
 - The rate of errors was equivalent between groups at pre- and post-
- Food Ratings
 - Intervention students were significantly less likely to indicate liking non-fruits/vegetables (ex: cookies) after the intervention

Farm-to-Preschool Midyear Report
Program Evaluation: 2010-2011 School Year

Background & Setting

In its second year of evaluation, the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute of Occidental College's Farm to Preschool program has made significant gains in its efforts to address the childhood obesity epidemic. Launched in historically underserved communities in Los Angeles and San Diego, the program has sought to serve a population with several unique barriers to healthy eating:

- Income
85% of responding parents participate in WIC; 44% utilize food stamps
- Language
68% of responding parents report an ESL home environment
- Education
38% of parents report having never completed high school or a GED
- Home Diet
Before intervention, 1 in 5 students would eat no vegetables on a typical day

Student Outcomes

Despite the challenges faced in these communities, the farm-to-preschool program has illustrated the potential for intervening at an early age. Indeed, many preschool-aged children eat most of their meals during childcare, and strong relationships that form between childcare providers and preschooler make for an ideal opportunity to challenge trends in childhood obesity.

After experiencing just four months of a nine-month program, students at intervention schools were:

- 1.3 times as likely to be able to correctly identify vegetables
- 1.5 times as likely to identify farm produce as fresher than those on grocery store shelves
- 1.5 times as likely to indicate liking curriculum vegetables
- 1.5 times as likely to try a new, unfamiliar fruit
- 1.7 times as likely to try a new, unfamiliar vegetable

Parent Outcomes

In addition to providing school curriculum, the farm-to-preschool program has also offered a series of educational workshops attended by over 180 parents. To date, participants in the workshops have demonstrated improved knowledge of:

- Farmers' markets
- Healthy eating practices
- Interpreting nutritional labels
- Identifying risk factors of diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol as well as better management of existing conditions