

CHILD CARE MINI-GUIDE



As children develop dietary patterns and food preferences during the first few years of life, it is crucial that healthy eating habits are established to support optimal growth and development. Child care is an ideal setting to provide children with opportunities to practice food skills and to develop tastes for a variety of healthy foods. Across Minnesota, child care providers are making impactful changes to increase the availability and consumption of healthy meals, snacks and beverages among children. There are a number of ways to provide a supportive environment where children can learn healthy eating habits.

SPOTLIGHT: FARM TO HEAD START

The link between farms and food is established early for children in the Head Start program in St. Paul. Modeled after a farm to child care pilot program developed by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), the program connects children between the ages of 3 and 5 with fresh local foods, while supporting area farmers.

Head Start of Ramsey and Washington Counties collaborates with the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) and IATP to get fresh produce and assist in curriculum design. Head Start's foodservice caterer works closely with the dietary supervisor and HAFA farmers to incorporate seasonal produce into menu items and snacks. Many of the Head Start families belong to the same Hmong community as farmers in St. Paul, creating a mutually supportive partnership.

Children are introduced to a new HAFA-grown food item in their menu every two weeks. Classroom activities strengthen the farm connection, such as taste testing and cooking projects, reading books about nutrition, gardening to enforce healthy eating habits, and visiting the 155-acre HAFA farm just 30 minutes from St. Paul. These activities give children exposure to new foods in the classroom before they taste it. Additionally, parents

are provided with supportive tools to reinforce the Farm to Head Start concepts at home, including a suggested reading list, recipes and cooking activities, and links to community resources.

The Farm to Head Start program is unique, strengthening community bonds with local producers in a sustainable, culturally responsive manner. Farmers and Head Start staff are instrumental in developing culturally responsive educational materials.

The partnership between the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties Head Start, IATP and HAFA, with support from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, allows for resource sharing and discussion around successful implementation with providers.

To access the full Farm to Childcare curriculum from IATP: www.iatp.org/files/2014_07_16_F2CC_Curriculum_f.pdf



**Minnesota
FOOD CHARTER**
For Our Healthy Future



STRATEGY

Serve family style

STRATEGY

Enroll in the child & adult care food program

The following steps, based on strategies found in the Minnesota Food Charter, provide ideas and resources for taking action in child care settings in your community.

ACTION STEP

Serve family-style meals to encourage children to try unfamiliar foods and practice healthy eating skills. Model healthy eating behaviors during meals by sitting with children and eating the same healthy foods and beverages.

RESOURCE: *This short learning activity illustrates the benefits of serving family-style meals in child care settings.*
www.doe.k12.de.us/ddoe/files/pdf/FamilyStyleMealService.pdf

ACTION STEP

Provide support and resources for breastfeeding mothers, including comfortable spaces to breastfeed, and develop guidelines to facilitate handling and feeding of breast milk to infants.

RESOURCE: *The Minnesota Department of Health offers resources and a breastfeeding friendly certification program.*
www.health.state.mn.us/breastfeeding

ACTION STEP

Enroll in The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to receive support for providing nutritious meals, beverages and snacks.

RESOURCE: *CACFP for Family Child Care*
www.education.state.mn.us/MDE/SchSup/FNS/CACFPFam/index.html

ACTION STEP

Offer nutrition education and garden programming as part of early childhood programs to offer children an opportunity to learn about food.

RESOURCE: *Find a farmers market or farmer in your area.*
www.minnesotagrown.com/

RESOURCE: *Participate in farm-to-child care trainings in your area.*
d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/renewingthecountryside/pages/128/attachments/original/1406301911/Workshop_Flier_for_Web.pdf?1406301911



ACTION STEP

Participate regularly in approved trainings that focus on nutrition, cooking, food safety, meal planning, and introduction of new foods to children.

RESOURCE: Browse online training courses covering a variety of topics designed specifically for child care providers through ChildCareAware of Minnesota.

www.eagertolearn.org/CourseSchedule/Index

ACTION STEP

Provide educational opportunities for child care providers to learn how to negotiate for healthier food and beverage contracts from caterers, vendors, and food services to increase healthier food choices.

RESOURCE: Learn how some Midwest child care providers have created healthier food environments through their food service.

usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/health/wellness/story/2012-08-10/nutrition-day-care/56949024/1

ACTION STEP

Form partnerships with local growers to increase the amount and variety of fresh fruits and vegetables available at meals and snacks through cooperative buying or participating in community supported agriculture (CSA).

RESOURCE: The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Minnesota Grown website has a comprehensive list of farmers markets and CSAs.

www3.mda.state.mn.us/mngrown/home.aspx

ACTION STEP

Implement menu changes and adopt healthy food policies to limit unhealthy choices and improve the availability of healthy foods and beverages at meals, snacks and celebrations.

RESOURCE: This manual offers useful information and tools to implement healthy food policies. health.mo.gov/living/wellness/nutrition/eatsmartguidelines/pdf/Model_Policies.pdf

STRATEGY

Participate
in
training

STRATEGY

Partner
with local
growers

STRATEGY

Adopt
healthy food
policies

WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA FOOD CHARTER?

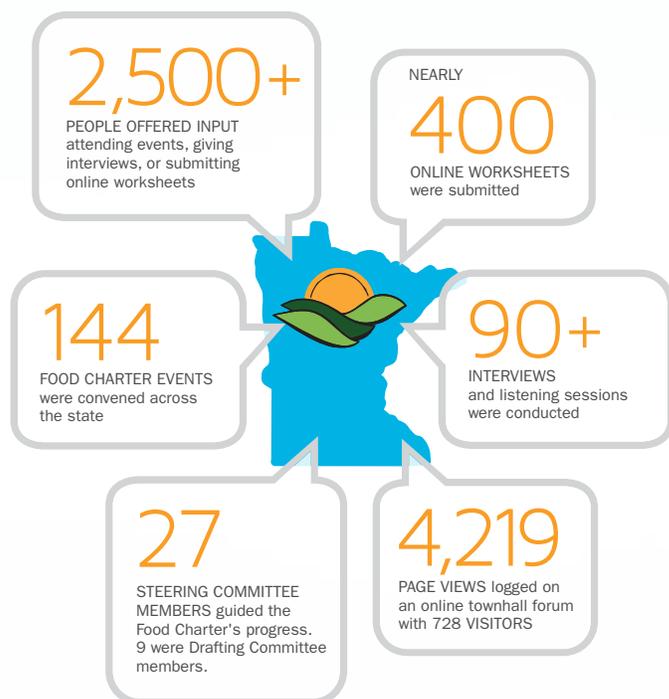
The Food Charter is a guide to planning, decision-making, and collaboration for agencies, organizations, policy-makers, and public and private entities across the state.

Developed through a broad based public process, the Minnesota Food Charter offers a shared blueprint for how all Minnesotans can have reliable access to nutritious, affordable, safe food in the places they work, learn, live, and play. In turn, this access will reduce the risk and cost of obesity and diet-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, conserve state resources, and boost economic prosperity.

In recent decades, diet-related health issues—such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease—have surged, presenting costly, long-term challenges to Minnesota’s economy. Changes in the way Minnesotans eat—particularly high calorie, unhealthy foods and beverages—contribute to growing healthcare costs and lower worker productivity.

This is not sustainable.

As a state, we must work together to improve our health and support a vibrant economy. To find out more about the recommendations outlined in the Minnesota Food Charter, visit www.mnfoodcharter.com



“It is the quality of the food and the time together that matters.”

Minnesota Food Charter focus group participant.



mnfoodcharter.com

The Minnesota Food Charter is supported by funding from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, and the Statewide Health Improvement Program at the Minnesota Department of Health, with leadership support from the Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute at the University of Minnesota.