Increasing Gardening in Early Care and Education in Washington State

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BACKGROUND
• Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) promotes child health and well-being
• As part of a national network, Washington State is seeking to scale up farm to ECE efforts across the state
• Gardening is a key component of the Farm to ECE strategy
• Gardening in early care increases access to nutrient-rich foods
• This project focused on building capacity for early learning providers to start and sustain gardens

OBJECTIVES
• Address barriers for early learning providers to start gardens
• Provide resources, trainings, and tools for early learning providers to start and sustain gardens

METHODS
• Researched gardening regulations required by the Washington State Administrative Code (WAC), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Washington State Department of Child, Youth, and Family Services (DCYF)
• Collated rules and regulations into a resource in collaboration with partner agencies
• Synthesized gardening resources and educational materials into a two-hour training
• Compiled gardening in ECE funding opportunities

RESULTS
➢ 3-page resource that clarifies gardening rules and regulations in ECE
➢ 2-hour gardening training for early learning providers to earn STARS credits
➢ Materials for the Farm to ECE website, including funding resources and opportunities for gardening

CONCLUSIONS
• Gardening in ECE facilitates early exposure to growing, cooking, and eating fruits and vegetables
• Garden-based learning should be inclusive of diverse communities and offer multiple modalities of engagement, including anti-racist gardening, trauma-informed, and foraging and growing culturally relevant foods
• This upstream strategy for prevention of nutrition-related disease should continue to be supported, funded, and understood as a preventative effort
• Garden-based learning connects young children to nature, culture, and experiential learning