



Impact Report

Educare Lincoln

The Heartland Farm to School and Early Care and Education (ECE) Institute was established to strengthen local food purchasing and education practices within interdisciplinary school teams. Nine ECE teams from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska were competitively selected to participate in the Institute during the 2024-25 school year, engaging in training, technical assistance, and coaching support.

The Institute is modeled after the “3 C’s” approach, pioneered by Vermont FEED, which integrates the Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community into the development of farm to school action plans. Nebraska teams were granted \$3,000 in funds to assist in advancing their Farm to School goals.

Educare Lincoln’s mission is to help young children thrive socially, emotionally, and academically through high-quality early childhood education, and in partnership with their families and the community. They’re located in Lincoln, NE and provide care to nearly one hundred and fifty children ages 6 weeks - 5 years.

Farm to School Goals

- Implement Harvest of the Month educational opportunities
- Incorporate monthly classroom cooking/taste test activities with local food items
- Procure more locally grown foods from local producers
- Increase community partnerships to help expand and support garden

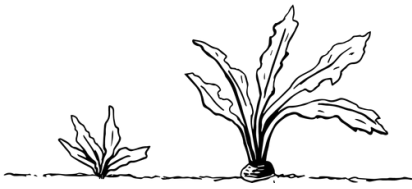


Team Members:
Deb Buck - Family Engagement Specialist
Kristin Wegner - Classroom Teacher
Shari Bitney - Master Gardener

Coach:
Emily Hulse, Nebraska Department of Education

The Heartland Farm to School & ECE Institute is offered in collaboration with Farm to School and ECE partners from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. This initiative is formally led by the Kansas Department of Education, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Nebraska Department of Education.





Accomplishments



Educare Lincoln has been a leader in Farm to ECE for many years. Through participation in the Institute, their team built upon an already strong foundation – expanding opportunities for gardening, nutrition education, and meaningful connections with families and community partners.

One of the most visible improvements was the revitalization of Educare’s garden space. The team expanded the garden with additional raised beds and replaced older ones to create a vibrant learning environment for children of all ages. A special infant garden area was also added, featuring a raised bed with a handrail and safe plants for infants to see, touch, and explore. Located at the front of the building, the garden became a welcoming space where families could pick fresh produce at the end of the day to enjoy at home. Community partnerships helped bring the garden to life. A Nebraska Extension Master Gardener visited weekly to work with classrooms, providing valuable hands-on learning opportunities, while University of Nebraska–Lincoln students from the Strive to Thrive course helped prepare the garden space in the spring.

In the classroom, educators created engaging opportunities for children to explore healthy foods. Some classrooms grew microgreens and enjoyed observing their growth and tasting the harvest. Educare also partnered with Robinette Farms, a local food hub, to source locally grown produce for monthly taste tests and cooking activities featuring foods such as radishes, sweet potatoes, apples, squash, melons, green beans, and kale.

To make these activities easier for teachers, Educare created four mobile classroom “cooking carts” stocked with tools such as air fryers, blenders, steamers, cutting boards, utensils, measuring cups, and spices. Teachers also developed Harvest of the Month curriculum packets with cross-curricular activities, recipes, and book connections to reinforce learning about each featured food.

Family engagement remained a priority throughout the year. Staff shared children’s experiences through newsletters, handouts, bulletin boards, photographs, and events. One highlight was the October 2025 Health Fair during Farm to School Month, where families washed, sliced, and added healthy toppings to fresh local apples – bringing educators, children, and families together to celebrate healthy foods and hands-on learning.

Microgreens	Radish	Which taste better
Andrew-yes	Andrew-No	Microgreens
Maizlyn-yes	Maizlyn-Yes	Radish
Jwan-Yes	Jwan-Yes	Radish
Zai Airra-Yes	Zai Airra-Yes	Radish
Legacy-yes	Legacy-Yes	Radish
Ryver-yes	Ryver-Yes	Both
Daeceen-Yes	Daeceen-Yes	Radish
Jalen-Yes	Jalen-No	Microgreens
Necyla-Yes	Necyla-Yes	Radish
Ah'elandro-Yes	Ah'elandro-Yes	Radish
Valentin-Yes	Valentin-Yes	Radish
Ella-Yes	Ella-Yes	Microgreens
Kiara-Yes	Kiara-No	Microgreens

