



## Inviting Legislators to the Table : A Planning Tool

Inviting legislators to visits school cafeterias, gardens, early care centers, farms and classrooms is a valuable tool for showcasing your great farm to school and farm to early care work. These visits help elected officials understand what you are doing and see the value firsthand. Wisconsin’s legislators make important policy and funding decisions that impact schools and the early care environment, and educating them about the importance of Wisconsin Farm to School and Farm to ECE programs can really help Wisconsin’s students, young eaters, and economy.

### How to Organize A Legislative Visit

#### Select A Good Story To Share

1. Try to identify one or two of the “best” things about your farm to school or farm to ECE program. Structure the visit to highlight your star programming, as possible. Do you buy directly from local farms? Do your students love eating a particular Wisconsin product that you serve? Do you have a teacher who uses a garden consistently and effectively? Is there an ag-educator in your district who grows food with students that gets served in the district? Do you provide interesting field trips? Does your early care center take an annual visit to a local pumpkin patch? Are you participating in the Great Apple Crunch?
2. Is the story you want to share district-wide, or specific to a certain school or early care site?

#### Identify Your Site And Local Partners

1. Hosting an elected official can be a simple event or a big to-do! No matter the size, you’ll need to do some planning and have the right partners in place at your site.
2. At a minimum, you need:
  - a. Someone willing to coordinate the visit – this is you!
  - b. If you are in a school district or a large child care center, you will need a principal or administrator who will authorize the visit and also participate.
  - c. Staff involved in the program you want to highlight – teachers, cafeteria, garden, or field-trip leaders who can help showcase their program
3. Consider also including:
  - a. A local farmer or food processor who sells to the school (if applicable)
  - b. Staff from partner organizations like the county health department, UW Extension, foundations, non-profits organizations, or Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.
  - c. One or two other great spokespeople including students, parents, community volunteers, or teachers.
  - d. If you want a larger group of attendees, you can also invite school board members and/or other local elected officials like city and county leaders.
  - e. Invite local media!
  - f. Your event doesn’t have to be big. What’s most important is that your elected official sees the site and has a positive engagement with farm to school or farm to ECE.



### Select A Date

1. Think about your schedule and the school schedule and identify a range of options
2. Check with the principal or administrator for **her or his** availability first
3. Dates to consider:
  - a. October is Farm to School Month & the [Great Apple Crunch](#) is October 14, 2021
  - b. October 11-14, 2021 is "National School Lunch Week"
  - c. March 7-11, 2022 is "National School Breakfast Week"
  - d. March 13-19, 2022 is "National CACFP Week"
  - e. July will host "Summer Meals Week" and the Cucumber Crunch
  - f. Late spring and early fall provide excellent garden visits with great visuals
  - g. Greenhouses, hydroponic and aquaponic growing systems make for great visits in the winter
  - h. Early care centers have the benefit of being open year-round, and make for a great summer visit site
4. Does the ECE center, farm to school program, cafeteria, school or district have any great events on the calendar that would be great for a visit?
5. Is there a Harvest of the Month taste test, farmer visit, or lunch day to plan around?
6. Avoid election and primary dates. Nobody will want to schedule visits right before or right after a busy election period.

### Develop A Visit Schedule

1. Base a visit around the school schedule and your expected group size
2. Take into account any special events taking place during your visit
3. Aim for a maximum of 60-90 minutes total
4. Be sure to include time for introductions, chit chat, photographs, and questions
5. Stay flexible in case schedules change at the last minute

### Find & Invite Your Legislators

1. Find your legislator online at <https://legis.wisconsin.gov>. Type in your address under "Who are my Legislators?" and then click on the button that says "Find Your Legislator".
2. Contact your legislators' office and invite them to visit your early care center or school site. You can extend the invitation through a phone call or an email. A staffer in the Legislator's office will most likely be on the other end of the line!
3. Start the conversation by introducing yourself and sharing your idea about inviting the elected official to visit your school, farm or site to learn about or celebrate farm to school. Be specific about the special projects you want to highlight.
4. Here are some helpful questions to use when talking to the legislative staffer:
  - a. How long can the visit be?
  - b. Does the legislator have a specific interest area?
  - c. Have they been to this school before? Do they know the principal?
  - d. Ask specific questions to help plan the visit including:
    - i. "Would you like to get dirty in the garden, or just observe?" or
    - ii. "Would you like to sit at a lunch table with kids or with adults?"



5. Continue the conversation with the staff person until all the details are figured out. This may take some time.

### **Preparing For The Visit**

1. Invite local media outlets like TV, newspaper, and radio. Call your local networks directly, or write a press release
2. If the school has a student paper, invite students to cover the visit as well!
3. Invite your local partners
4. Finalize final details for the event including the event schedule, menu, special supplies and roles for participants.
5. Print any signs or decorations to use. See the [Farm to School Month website](#) for ideas.
6. Communicate clearly with the legislator's staff including: confirm date, time, place, & duration of the visit with the legislator's staff, and tell them who will be there, including media. Tell them where to park when they arrive.
7. Be clear about "photo release forms" for students or children at the school or ECE site
8. Print any handouts or educational materials you plan to share and put them in a folder. This may include:
  - a. Contact information for all participants
  - b. Information about the school
  - c. Information about Wisconsin Farm to School and Farm to ECE
  - d. The [Benefits of Farm to School Fact Sheet](#)

### **After The Visit**

1. Be sure to send a thank-you card, with any follow-up materials and a picture from the visit
2. Share your story with Wisconsin Farm to School and Farm to ECE partners, let us know how it went!