



## Building a Community

Viva Farms' partners are critical to the success of the program by providing other components that help round out and support their comprehensive farm to ECE work. The Skagit [WSU Extension](#) provides recipes and food and nutrition education using the [Harvest for Healthy Kids curriculum](#), a free farm to ECE curriculum that highlights one produce item per month. The [Washington State Department of Health](#) provides educational materials that align with Harvest for Healthy Kids. These educational materials are freely available to those implementing Harvest for Healthy Kids through the [Our Work page](#) of the Farm to ECE Community of Practice website.

In addition, [United General](#) helped to establish gardens in the Latina-owned childcare programs. Programs could choose to receive either a 4x4 garden box with soil, seeds, gardening information and lesson plans or a garden book collection, both valued at one hundred dollars. Programs were given a choice due to family childcare homes' differing capacity, space, and other considerations.

All the programs involved also received a [garden-focused Vroom collection](#) full of easy, brain-building activities for children that can be integrated into the day-to-day activities of both providers and parents. These activities are also available in [Spanish](#). United General's work is supported by the Local Strategies for Physical Activity and Nutrition (LSPAN) grant, a Center for Disease Control (CDC) grant that funds state and local agencies to improve nutrition and physical activity.

For Steve, one of the best things about branching out into farm to ECE is its ability to both build new partnerships and strengthen established ones.



"[Many of] these relationships...supported one another before this, and after the grant is over those relationships, and the community built out of those relationships, will continue to expand. That can't be understated. We're all in our silos, so we don't always get to know what opportunities are out there," explained Steve.

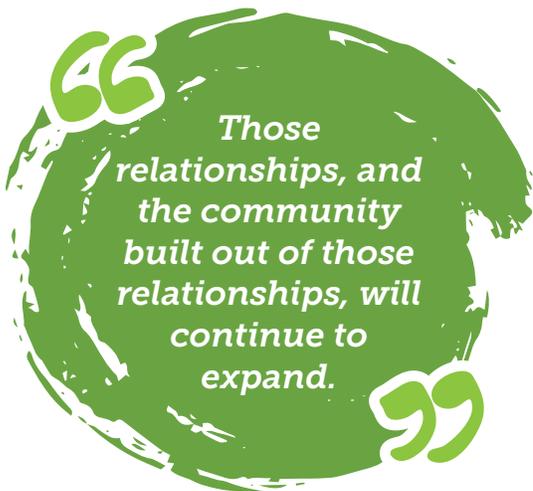
One of the reasons Viva Farms' collaborations have been so successful is because of the passion each partner brings to the team.

"I was blessed to be put on this project, it's so exciting when your job and your personal value system intersect," explained Susan Goss, Program Coordinator for United General. "I wanted to give every childcare site a 4x4 garden box and organic soil, but we didn't have the funds for it. When we talked to Chris [Mornick], the LSPAN grant administrator for the Department of Health, it turned out there were additional funds available. Without that connection this wouldn't have been possible."

Susan wanted to provide gardening supplies to get children excited and invested. "As soon as you mention kids to me, I want to get them outdoors. It just seems so natural a conclusion."

Susan was right. The children were so excited about their garden boxes that they wanted to begin watering them before they had even planted the seeds.

Children weren't the only ones excited by the new garden boxes. "One childcare provider was so inspired by our support that she built a community vegetable garden in her courtyard for parents to interact with for when they enter and leave the facility," Delenee said.



## Bringing Cultural Learning to the Table

Viva Farms' farm to ECE work is rooted in their vision of a just local food system. They work towards this larger goal by focusing on food equity and cultural representation.

"Statistically, one in five families in the region access the food bank system, and our farm to ECE work targets high need communities. So, our mission is not only to raise this next generation of organic farmers, but we want our organic produce to be accessible for all people. Farm to ECE helps us reach communities with the least access," Steve explained.

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Many of the children they work with are the children of farmers. Viva Farms thought that it was important to highlight the work that these farmers do.

"A teacher told me 'I want them to be proud of what their parents do, that food is an essential part of community and society, and farmers and farmworkers should be respected and uplifted and represented in a positive light.'"

To continue highlighting farmers, Viva also plans to have them visit classrooms in the Fall.

"Our Latino farmers speak Spanish and Mextec, and many children we work with speak that at home. When farmers can come speak to them in their own language, that will be very powerful."

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To further increase representation, Steve has been working on gathering books focusing on BIPOC children and farmers and plans to bring them to the classroom in the Fall.

## Curriculum with Cultural Significance

These values are also translated into the curriculum. In the Fall, Viva and their partners are focusing their work on corn, beans, and squash, otherwise known as "The Three Sisters". 6000 years ago, in Oaxaca and Central Mexico, the indigenous population planted the three crops together, growing symbiotically to deter weeds and pests, enrich the soil, and support each other. This new curriculum brings pride and relevance to this ancient sustainable farming method.

Along with teaching the history behind this method, Viva Farms helped plant this trio in their early learning center gardens. When ready to harvest, they will use the crops to make masa, tortillas, posole, and other culturally relevant foods.

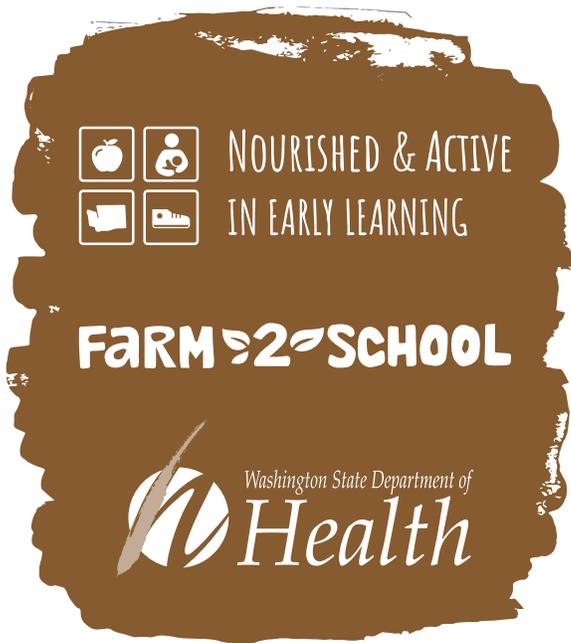
Although this method was developed centuries ago, Steve explained to the children the genius of the three sisters and its relevance today.

"This system was developed in arid, dry climates. The type of corn was selected over generations to be able to withstand heat by growing a long, deep tap root before growing its top. Our record-breaking summer heat caused many crops in Washington to struggle, while our corn, beans, and squash thrived."

Farm to ECE has opened many doors for Viva Farms, and they hope to continue with their work in the future. This school year they're looking forward to in-person classes, where Viva Farms and their partners will be better able to share the magic and heritage of food by implementing cooking classes, farmer visits and a stronger curriculum.

Steve plans to continue building the program in an effort to "pass the torch" to the next generation.

"The time we are in now, in so much urgency around the environment, social justice, and healthy food, we need to make this a better world for all."



## Want to Learn More?

- Contact Viva Farms at [steve@vivafarms.org](mailto:steve@vivafarms.org)
- Learn more about implementing farm to ECE in your center by taking our online [Farm to ECE provider training](#) for 2 STARS credits
- [Washington State Farm to ECE Network](#) - Join the network to connect with farm to ECE partners throughout the state
- [Funding Farm to School](#) - National Farm to School Network's Fact Sheet to learn more about funding your farm to ECE program
- [The Washington Food & Farm Finder](#) can help you find local farms and food hubs in your area

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