



Expanding on the Farm to You lessons at home

Oklahoma children are back in school focusing on reading, writing and arithmetic. For the last decade, children also have been learning about where their food comes from and how eating healthy foods is important for their bodies, thanks to a fun, hands-on display called [Farm to You](#).

Developed by the Oklahoma State University [Community Nutrition Education Programs](#) (CNEP), Farm to You helps children learn all about where food comes from, what farmers and ranchers do to get food safely from the farm to grocery stores and farmers markets, and eventually into homes across the state. They also learn how their body uses the different foods they eat, how exercise and proper nutrition help build muscles and bones, as well as things they can do to help keep their brains healthy.

Once children get home, it's important for parents and caregivers to help children continue learning these valuable lessons, said Becky Brown, [OSU Extension](#) project coordinator for Farm to You.

"There are lots of things parents and caregivers can do at home to reinforce the lessons their child learned while taking part in Farm to You activities," Brown said. "Planning is essential for making healthy meals. Families are encouraged to use the USDA's [MyPlate](#) graphic as a guide for selecting foods from all five food groups."

After planning meals, make a shopping list and stick to it. This helps keep families from purchasing too much food that may simply go to waste. The list also helps limit the amount of time spent in the grocery store.

As a way to help reinforce school topics such as science and math, turn the kitchen into a classroom by letting kids help with food preparation.

"This not only gives them a valuable skill they can use later in life, but will give them a greater appreciation for food and a sense of pride when they help create a dish," Brown said. "It also gives them greater motivation for eating a variety of healthful foods. When involving children in the kitchen, make sure to give them tasks that are age-appropriate."

School-age children

- Stir liquid and soft batters
- Rinse and tear up lettuce
- Measure dry ingredients
- Shape hamburgers and meatballs

Ages 6 to 8

- Peel potatoes and carrots
- Grate cheese
- Open cans
- Wash vegetables

Children 8 to 12

- Chop foods
- Sauté and pan-fry
- Steam, boil and bake

Teens

- With appropriate instruction, teens can complete just about any task adults can perform

Although dinner time might fall at the same time as a favorite television program, resist that urge and instead, sit down at the dining room table. Sharing a meal helps create close bonds. It's also a good time to help children learn good manners, respect for others, responsibility and conversation skills.

"Research shows that children who eat with people who care for them tend to have less risk for poor eating habits and substance abuse as they get older. It's important to make meals an enjoyable and anticipated event," Brown said. "Keep in mind meals don't have to be elaborate. Cold sandwiches are just fine as long as everyone is sitting down together."

Try to set a regular mealtime. This can be tricky for busy families juggling between sports practice, music and dance lessons, 4-H meetings and work schedules, but it's important. Turn off the TV and put away cell phones. Expose kids to new foods.

Brown also pointed out the importance of being active. Moving more helps promote a healthy lifestyle for the whole family, plus it gives you more energy and helps you sleep. Strive for children to get at least 60 minutes and adults to get 30 minutes of physical activity every day.

You don't have to run a marathon, but include activities such as creating sidewalk chalk art, running through the garden sprinkler, playing ring-around-the-rosie, flying a kite or playing on the playground. The important thing is being engaged with your children.

Elementary students in first through sixth grades can learn about all these topics and more through the Farm to You exhibit. In response to COVID-19, Brown said they have turned the exhibit into a virtual, interactive experience that students and teachers can enjoy from their classrooms. The Fall 2021 dates are October 5-15. Schools that are interested can contact their [local OSU Extension office](#) and submit a request form on the website (farmtoyou.okstate.edu) by September 22 to participate.