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Farm to preschool program grows healthy food-conscious kids

April 27, 2011 by [sdcnews](#)

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SAN DIEGO—Kids between the ages of two and five years old are learning how to grow their own vegetables and enjoy fresh farm produce thanks to the Farm to Preschool project, a program funded by a \$249,000 Kaiser Permanente grant to influence lifelong eating habits. The program also aims to increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables at San Diego preschools by encouraging preschool operators to purchase from local farms.

On Friday, April 29 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m, the two-year program will conclude with a half-day workshop to teach parents, teachers and local schools how to implement similar programs at their own facilities. There will be cooking demonstrations, community garden tours, farming technique discussions and an example of a farm to preschool program in action. The workshop will be held at North County Community Services at 2860 Thunder Drive in Oceanside.

"We are excited to be a part of this amazing program," said Mary Ann Barnes, senior vice president and executive director of Kaiser Permanente San Diego. "At Kaiser Permanente, we are committed to improving the total health of every San Diegan, and that means providing the tools to lead healthy, active lives early on."

The workshop will demonstrate how to incorporate fresh produce in school menus, develop a Harvest of the Month curriculum and provide a framework for an institutional wellness policy, including the establishment of nutrition standards at the preschool level.

The two-year pilot program, organized through a partnership between Occidental College Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, YMCA Childcare Resource Service, North County Community Services, and the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, facilitated by Community Health Improvement Partners, was introduced to NCCS Thunder CDC in Oceanside where 200 preschoolers learn about local agriculture, explore the multiple benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables, and sample the fruits of California's bountiful harvest. They are also taught how to grow their own vegetables in their own school garden.

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