

## **EcoTrust Preschool Project**

The preschool years represent a critical time in life for developing lifelong eating habits yet, only one percent of preschool-age children meet all of the dietary recommendations. Farm to school programs have the potential of making a long-lasting, profound impact on the health of preschoolers and decreasing their risk of obesity and other obesity-related chronic diseases. How? Farm to school and complementary food and garden-based education in childcare facilities influence children's knowledge of and preferences for foods, their fruit and vegetable consumption, and the amount and types of calories they consume. Positive food experiences early in life can help ensure that students arrive in kindergarten not only ready to learn, but also eager to eat up the increasingly available "local lunches" we are working to establish at the elementary school level. In short, farm to school and garden programs in childcare settings represent a viable solution to the obesity epidemic and a tremendous opportunity to improve child wellness.

Ecotrust has partnered with the Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC), a state grantee for the federal Migrant Seasonal Head Start program, to take the first steps toward creating a model farm to childcare program in Oregon. We believe Head Start is an ideal target institution for establishing farm to childcare programs, not only because of the vulnerable population it serves, but also because Head Start is a visible industry leader amongst childcare facilities with multiple models of program delivery.

Ecotrust will work with OCDC to create a pilot farm to school program within the pre-K environment. Specifically, this pilot project will serve to:

- Build relationships between Head Start and local food producers;
- Explore opportunities for local product development to meet Head Start meal program needs;
- Increase Head Start procurement of locally grown and processed foods;
- Promote food- and garden-based education to reinforce locally grown foods served as part of the USDA meal program;
- Engage the community in implementing garden-enhanced educational programs;
- Increase children and caregivers' exposure to and modeling of healthy lifestyle behaviors, including fruit and vegetable consumption;
- Increase children and caregivers' access to locally produced fruits and vegetables.

This pilot project will inform a replicable model for expanding this work and stimulate new markets for regional farmers and/or food processors. Ecotrust believes that the farm to school movement in K-12 public schools is now sufficiently institutionalized, with a momentum of its own, therefore making it the ideal time to utilize this momentum to focus attention on pre-school aged children."