Child care is fundamental to household economics, and therefore farm economics. Farmers with children must continuously negotiate access to affordable child care as the needs of their children and families change. Planning for these adjustments is part of whole-farm business planning, yet rarely taken into account in farm business support. Even with financial assistance, Vermont families may spend almost 30% of their annual income on child care. Vermont estimates the basic wage needed for two adults with two children (ages 4 and 6) to live alone and support their children is $31.75 per hour (or $66,036 annually), often far above a farmer’s or farmworker’s hourly wage. Child care is also the best way to keep farm children safe. Addressing farm families’ and farm workers’ need for child care is necessary to support long-term, thriving, and equitable food systems in Vermont. There is further need to examine how national and state child care policies intersect with farm family well-being and farm economic development.

### Current Conditions

The time when farm families have young children is particularly vulnerable for a farm operation, and access to child care can help parents maintain the farm during this period. In Vermont, 71.5% of children ages five and under are in families where all available parents are in the labor force. Despite this, almost two thirds of infants and nearly one third of toddlers and preschoolers do not have access to licensed care programs.

Child care choices for farm families are influenced by values, farm productivity, cost of care, and distance to care centers and relatives. Family care is the preferred child care arrangement for farm families due to affordability and flexibility around non-traditional schedules. Low and fluctuating profit margins make it difficult for farm families to afford off-farm care. Household stressors play a significant role in amplifying overall stress levels on farms. How child care is practiced affects relationships, inequitable division of labor, and day-to-day operations. First-generation and women farmers face the most significant challenges in accessing affordable child care.

There is tension between the belief that farming helps children gain life skills and a reluctance to use one's children as labor. Farm parents’ time is split between the farm and their children, and allocations towards one come at the expense of the other. Farm parents must regularly weigh the safety risks and benefits of keeping their children on the farm. In the U.S., approximately 33 children are seriously injured in agriculture-related incidents every day, and approximately every three days a child dies. About 60% of agriculture-related injuries are sustained by non-working children.
Farm to Plate is Vermont’s food system plan being implemented statewide to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sector and improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) facilitates, supports, and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers, and the environment.

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