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**MT Department of Public Health & Human Services**

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## Farm-to-School Successes Grow Strong Across Montana

Across the Treasure State, Montanans are enjoying more direct access to food from local farms and ranches. From the Western Montana Growers Cooperative in Arlee to Farm-to-Table projects in Glendive, public officials, entrepreneurs, and volunteers are joining together to create a nutritious, local, and sustainable food system. Farm-to-school programs are an important part of these efforts.

“The good news is that every Montana district can be part of the farm-to-school movement,” says Katie Bark, RD (Registered Dietitian) with the Team Nutrition Program, based at MSU in Bozeman. “Serving Montana-grown foods in the cafeteria is just one of the many ways that schools can support local agriculture. Other farm-to-school activities include classroom education and fundraising.”

Through the Office of Public Instruction’s School Nutrition Programs, Montana Team Nutrition offers numerous resources to help connect children to local sources of their food. The free downloadable materials available at <http://opi.mt.gov/schoolfood/FTS.html>, include:

- A beautiful, new **Mmm Mmm Montana** poster, with local products from all food groups, funded in part by Montana Department of Agriculture, [www.montanakids.com/agriculture\\_and\\_business/](http://www.montanakids.com/agriculture_and_business/)
- A variety of cafeteria and classroom activities, such as **Plan a Healthy Montana-Made Snack**
- Materials to support **Montana Farm-to-School Fundraising** projects

“We’ll be adding farm-to-school resources, links, and success stories regularly,” promises Bark. “Team Nutrition just awarded six farm-to-school mini-grants, so we’ll share those experiences as well. For more about local food in schools and colleges, check out the FoodCorp Program developed by Grow Montana Coalition ([www.growmontana.ncat.org/](http://www.growmontana.ncat.org/)), which uses Americorp Vista volunteers.”

According to Bark, there are already many successful farm-to-school projects bearing fruit across Big Sky country. The on-going success stories include:

- **Missoula:** Both University of Montana and Missoula K-12 School District have become national examples of farm-to-school with yearly local purchases of over \$700,000 and \$160,000, respectively.
- **Gallatin Valley:** Two schools and five Montana producers participated in a 2008 pilot fundraising project focused on holiday gift giving, with over \$18,000 in sales and 40% of profits going to schools.
- **Statewide:** Schools from Libby to Fraser are planting ‘edible schoolyards,’ gardens that teach children math, science, and writing skills while encouraging them to eat more vegetables. Greenfield school buys local beef for lunch menus and Forsyth plans to serve a regular Montana-grown lunch.

“All of these examples started small and gradually grew their farm-to-school programs over time,” notes Bark. “Small changes can make a big difference in our local food system.”

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana’s monthly packets can be downloaded for free at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)