

Montana's Food and Agriculture: Problems, Solutions

1. A Montana-based food system would provide solutions for Montana's economy, land, and people. A Montana-based food system means that our state's residents eat food produced, processed, and distributed by Montanans.

Imagine a sustainable economic development strategy that benefits farmers, ranchers, and communities.

- Montanans spent over \$3 billion on food in 2003, with roughly 15% of that total spent on Montana-produced food. If we sourced 30% instead of 15% of our food in-state, an additional \$450 million would go directly to our food producers.¹
- Another way to look at it is if each household in Montana spent just \$10 a week on Montana-grown food products, we would re-direct \$186 million dollars each year to local farmers and ranchers.²
- Stable local markets avoid the global market fluctuations beyond community and state control. Local food systems help balance the need for self-reliance with the benefits of external trade.
- To preserve Montana's 60 million agricultural acres, agricultural production must be economically viable. By increasing profitable marketing opportunities, we help make it affordable for our farmers and ranchers to stay on the land.³
- Consumers benefit from the freshness and high-quality of Montana-grown food. Farmers and ranchers producing food for Montana customers can prioritize taste and nutrition instead of durability for shipping or long shelf-life.
- Local farmers, ranchers and food processors are best able to understand and respond to the specific health concerns and needs of Montanans.

Montana-based food systems are a realistic vision.

- In 1950, 70% of the food Montanans ate was grown in Montana.⁴
- Through the 1930's, food processing was our state's number one employer.⁵
- In the spring of 2003, The University of Montana-Missoula responded to student demand by launching the Farm to College Program, purchasing safflower oil, beef, bread, dairy products, and fruits and vegetables from Montana producers. In the past two years, the program bought more than \$500,000 from in the state. In the same period, the University's overall food costs—as a percentage of its food service budget—decreased.⁶

¹ Montana Population Profile. USDA AMS Marketing Service Branch. Retrieved from www.ams.usda.gov/statesummaries/MT/MontanaInBrief.htm.

² Based on 357,296 households. Montana Office of Rural Health. Retrieved from <http://healthinfo.montana.edu/msu/MTstate.html>.

³ Acreage from Montana Agriculture Statistics Service. Retrieved from www.nass.usda.gov/mt/

⁴ Palmer, Warren. 1983. *The Montana Food System: First Lessons in Sustainability*. CornucopiaProject of Rodale Press. Emmaus, Pennsylvania.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Personal interview. Mark LoParco, Director of UM's University Dining Services. June 2005.

- Montana’s farmers markets grew from 5 in 1990 to over 30 today.⁷ We still have a strong agricultural base to work from in Montana. In 2000, agriculture comprised about 36% of Montana’s economy, more than mining, gas and oil combined. That’s 10% greater than both lumber and tourism.⁸
- Across the nation, grassroots and governmental initiatives successfully support community-based food systems. For instance, educational institutions buy locally-produced food through at least 200 Farm to College programs and 400 Farm to School programs in 22 states.⁹
- A national survey found that 70% of respondents would pay more for locally-produced food.¹⁰

2. Montana’s current food and agriculture system isn’t working.

Our farmers, ranchers, and working-lands are in jeopardy.

- A typical food product travels 1500 miles and changes hands 33 times before reaching the consumer. This trade is subject to volatile international markets beyond the control of our communities or state, much less individual farmers, ranchers, or consumers.
- According to the Montana Cattlemen’s Association, Montana is losing about 250 ranches a year.¹¹
- For every dollar spent on a loaf of bread, the typical U.S. wheat farmer now gets just 6 cents.¹²
- American Farmland Trust reports that 5 million acres of important farm and ranch lands in Montana are under pressure from development.¹³
- In July 2004 World Trade Organization negotiations, the U. S. agreed to a 20% cut in farm subsidies by as early as 2006. Affected crops include wheat, barley and corn. Government subsidies—nationwide \$19 billion a year—made up half of Montana’s net farm income for 2003.¹⁴

Montanans suffer from hunger and nutrition-related diseases.

- There was nearly a 200% increase in emergency food provided through the Montana Food Bank Network from 2000 to 2003.¹⁵
- In 2003, Montana had an estimated expenditure of \$175 million due to adult obesity-related medical costs.¹⁶

⁷ *Farmer’s Markets: Enriching Communities Across Montana*. AERO 2003. for number in 1990. USDA data for most recent numbers retrieved from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/States/Montana.htm>.

⁸ MSU Extension Service, “Making Life Even Better” 2004 Annual Report. Retrieved from <http://extn.msu.montana.edu/>.

⁹ Personal interview. June 2005. Marion Kalb. Director of National Farm to School Program Office, Community Food Security Coalition.

¹⁰ Wimberley, Ronald. “The Globalization of Food: How Americans Feel About Food Sources, Who They Trust, Food Security, Genetic Modification, Food Labeling and the Environment.” <http://sa.ncsu.edu/global-food>. Survey involved researchers from 12 universities and 819 randomly selected respondents.

¹¹ *Missoulian* “ Keeping tradition alive a challenge for Montana ranch families” E8 April 27, 2005

¹² Halweil, Brian. *Eat Here: Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York (2004).

¹³ www.farmland.org/rocky_mountain/montana.htm

¹⁴ Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. State Profile Fall 2004 Montana. Retrieved from www.fdic.gov/bank/analytical/stateprofile/index.html.

¹⁵ *The State of Food and Nutrition in Montana 2004*. Montana State Advisory Council on Food and Nutrition.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*