





# WELCOME!

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*Please put on a sticker on to indicate your role:*

-  Red- Food Service
-  Blue- Producer, food aggregator, processor, distributor
-  Yellow- Educator or school admin
-  Green- Service provider (non-profit, consultant, etc.)



# **Local Food for Local Kids**

**Solutions for Successful Local Food Procurement**



## Background of the Study

- Collaboration between Mission West Community Development Partners and National Center for Appropriate Technologies (NCAT)
- Funded by a USDA- Rural Cooperative Development Grant



NATIONAL CENTER  
FOR APPROPRIATE  
TECHNOLOGY



MISSION WEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS





## METHODS

- 18 food service directors were contacted for interviews.
- In-depth interviews held with 9 food service managers from 9 school districts in Montana, representing 16% of Montana's K12 students.
- District had a diverse range of sizes, ranging from 4 to 65 kitchen staff.
- All districts relied on USDA Foods (commodity purchasing), and all districts reported purchasing from US Foods.
- Most reported purchasing at least some food locally either directly from producers or from an aggregator/distributor.



## Why study K12 Local Food Procurement?

- Local food is fresh and nutritious & provides educational opportunities.
- Despite having a strong agricultural economy and a well-developed F2S program, but K12 schools still remain a largely untapped market for small-scale local producers.
- F2S programs help schools buy more local!
- *But*, reported decline in purchases since 2014.

# \$12.8 million

Estimated local food buying power if all of Montana's school districts were able to spend 23% of their budget locally (2015 UMT study)





When it comes to K12 Local Food Procurement,

**What's working?**

*And what's not?*



# What's working well with local food procurement?

Local food is valued.

- Local food purchasing supports the local economy.
  - *"I think the local farmers are doing really good, I'd like to try and support them as best I can."*
- Local food purchasing supports health, wellness, and community development.
  - *"We know where it [food] is coming from, and it gives kids an ownership of the food...If we say, "Hey, this comes from Montana," it gives kids ownership over their food and what's in their lunch, which is really cool."*
- Local food is fresh and of high quality.
  - *"Prices are high, but this a local food. [The] investment is worth the quality of the product."*





## What's working well with local food procurement?

Strong relationships can be built with local producers and vendors.

*"We have gotten to know them [local farmer], they know to call me when they are coming to town, so I can place my order. They have made it really easy on me and they have also worked with us on price so that we can continue to afford them."*



## What's working well with local food procurement?

Harvest of the Month and other Farm to School programming, such as school gardens, make incorporating local food into school menus easier.

*"Anything when we're doing Harvest of the Month...works really well for us."*

*"In our gardens we grow a lot of kale, chard, lettuce greens, squash, beets, potatoes, onions, basil, a lot of herbs...The quantity and volume of growing spaces that we have here on site at our schools is an additional resource."*



## What's working well with local food procurement?

A strong team of food service staff are a key aspect of successful food purchasing programs.

*"We got staff who were willing to change, to do more of the scratch cooking and processing necessary for us to make this change. My head cook now is willing to try new things to make the food as fresh and healthy as possible."*



# What are the challenges with local food procurement?

Cost, Seasonality & Quantity, Delivery & Access

Cost includes price of the products, processing costs, and affordability of menu items.

*“Cost is my biggest challenge, if I had unlimited budget, I would buy all local.”*

*“I would say preparing is one of the biggest [challenges]...when you get cleaned ready to go carrots from Sysco or US foods, versus a giant tub of carrots that still have dirt on them that you have to wash and clean and prep and scrape and cut, it takes a lot of time away from what is already a tight schedule of getting meals produced every day.”*



## What are the challenges with local food procurement?

Sometimes, local producers are unable to work with the schools due to cost...

*“The problems I have had with local foods is that a lot of vendors aren’t really willing to work with schools. Historically, they can go to restaurants and get much higher price per pound, and I get it, they are trying to make money...We can’t mark food up just because it is local. We can only ask the same price so we actually lose a lot of money when we menu local items. “*



# What are the challenges with local food procurement?

## *Seasonality & Quantity*

Seasonality and quantity to meet demand were two other common themes that surfaced during the food service interviews.

*“We need someone to grow as much as we need, volume is really critical for us. We had some local growers who talked about putting in greenhouses to extend the season, but that didn’t happen. We need growers who can put money into greenhouses, but those are not cheap...”*

*“...we live in Montana, so the growing season is what it is. Lettuces would be amazing but there is no way that there would be enough with the way the schools go through it, there is just no way.”*



# What are the challenges with local food procurement?

## *Delivery and Access*

Delivery and access to local producer markets was also cited as a barrier, especially for food service managers in more rural areas of Montana

*“We try to do as much local food as we can, but it is really hard for us because of our location so we don’t get it delivered to us, like Western Montana Growers Co-op, if we order from them, we have to go pick it up from Helena mostly, once in a while Butte, but mostly, Helena.”*



# High Level Solutions

## Farm to School Bill

- Introduced in the 2021 legislative session
- Sought to create a grant program within OPI to help schools purchase more local foods
- Heard in the House Education Committee, ultimately tabled
- Interested in learning more visit [www.growmt.org](http://www.growmt.org) or email [maurah@ncat.org](mailto:maurah@ncat.org)





# Ideas and Resources

- Montana Farm to School
  - [www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/](http://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/)
- Farm to Cafeteria Manual
  - Available on the Montana Farm to School website
- Montana Harvest of the Month
  - Information available on the Montana Farm to School website
- Abundant Montana
  - [abundantmontana.com](http://abundantmontana.com)
- Montana Food and Agriculture Development Centers
  - <https://agr.mt.gov/Food-and-Ag-Development-Centers>

# SOLUTION ROOM

**In your small groups:**

- 1. Use paper and marker to write down a challenge you've faced or seen in purchasing local food/selling local food to schools.**
- 2. Walk around the table and write down a potential solution to each challenge.**
- 3. When everyone is done, discuss the potential ideas with your small group.**

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## Questions to consider/discuss:

1. What are your top three challenges to local food procurement/selling to schools?
2. What are your experiences with the top three challenges to local food procurement found in the study (cost, seasonality/quantity, and deliver/access?)
3. What are some solutions to these challenges?
4. Are you considering implementing any of the solutions listed on the table?

# Shareout

1. Share a challenge and creative solution from your table?
2. Did you gain new ideas to take home with you after the conference?



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**Thank you!**

**Get in touch:**