



Celebrate [National Farm to School Month](#) and local food by crunching into any Montana-grown or raised food throughout October! Montana Crunch Off is a state-wide event for students, teachers, farmers, community members, and local food enthusiasts to collectively bite into any locally grown or raised food. All Montanans are invited to join the annual Crunch Off! Montana is participating in the Mountain Plains Crunch Off along with Colorado, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming!

Why crunch? This collective crunch encourages healthy eating while supporting Farm to School and “buy local” initiatives throughout the state. Crunch Off is a great way to introduce kids to fresh, local produce and foods in a fun way!

Share your story by tagging a photo or video with **#MTCrunchOff** on Facebook and Instagram.

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Steps to Get Started



Register! If you would like to host a Crunch event, register your event here: <https://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/mt-crunch-off.html>. You must register to be counted!



Create a Crunch Team! Find a group of individuals who are excited about local food and Farm to School. Consider including students, teachers, school nutrition staff, administrators, PTA members, and community members to help you plan and promote your event.



Decide what you will crunch and where you will get it from!

Refer to the list of crunch suggestions below or visit the [MT Crunch Off webpage](#). The state-specific resources can help you source local foods provided upon registration, or reach out to Haley Scott, haley.scott1@montana.edu.



Create your Crunch plan! You may choose to have a school or organization-wide crunch in a large assembly, individual classrooms, during breakfast or lunch, with individuals at different locations all at the same time, or at some other time and place.



Promote your Crunch event! Share your event on social media, print media, school announcements, newsletters, etc. A template press release is available on page 11 for your use. Be sure to use #MTCrunchOff when posting on social media.

Crunch Suggestions

Fruits

- Apples
- Cherries
- Pears

Vegetables

- Carrots
- Beets
- Cabbage
- Broccoli
- Peppers
- Green beans
- Cucumbers
- Winter squash



Montana-grown/raised foods

- Beef jerky
- Roasted chickpeas or lentils
- Pickles
- Grain-based foods

Not on the list? That's okay! Any locally grown or raised food that is safe and appropriate for your event can be a Crunch food.

Find Montana Food

One of the first steps in coordinating your Montana Crunch Off event is to explore options for getting locally grown or raised foods. No matter where you're crunching, check with your distributors and shop around local grocery stores or farmers' markets to purchase local foods.

- **Start with Abundant Montana**
Use the Find Food & Farms map to locate Montana farms, ranches, farmers markets, food businesses, and other local food sources.
- **Check what's in season**
[Montana Seasonal Food Chart.](#)
- **Ask your distributor**
Your school food distributor may already carry Montana products.
- **Ask your local farmers and ranchers**
Contact producers directly to find out what's available in October.
- **Look for Montana apples**
Visit www.mtapples.org/

Schools and Institutions

Make sure to connect with the food service director or head cook at your school to see if they are interested in being involved and can help order local foods for the big crunch!

Crunch during a school meal: Work with your school nutrition program to incorporate the local food into a reimbursable school meal when it meets applicable meal pattern and crediting requirements.

For **procurement information**, including **food safety information** and regulations:

- [How to Buy Montana Food for Your School](#)
- [Farm to Cafeteria Manual for Montana](#)
- [Garden to Cafeteria Toolkit](#)

Crunch Off at School

Increase Involvement

The more involvement in Crunch Off, the better! Recruiting volunteers can increase participation while simplifying the Crunch Off countdown. Families and other helpers can pick up food items at a central location in the school, deliver to classrooms, and assist with classroom activities. The school nutrition staff can also be a valuable resource for ordering, receiving, storing, washing, and passing out crunchable foods.

Organizing an Assembly

Rally support and increase excitement for Crunch Off by holding an all-school assembly. How loud can your collective crunch get?!

Crunch in the Cafeteria

Incorporating the crunch food into a school meal or snack and crunching in the cafeteria during the designated mealtime is an easy way to reach students and cover the cost. Make it more than a component of the meal by decorating the cafeteria, having prizes for crunching, taking photos, etc. Be sure to find ways to allow students who bring meals from home to be included in the fun.

Tip! Consider cutting crunch items into halves or slices so everyone can try the food without it going to waste.

Crunch Off Leaders

Appoint Montana Crunch Off champions. An elected student from each classroom can pick up Crunch food from the school office or cafeteria for their classroom and help lead Crunch Off activities. A student club or sports team could take the lead in promoting the event and coordinating the distribution of food. Older students can act as Crunch Off mentors or buddies and deliver crunch items and help lead activities with younger students.



Take Photos and Videos

Don't forget to appoint a parent, teacher, or student to act as a photographer and capture all the action of Crunch Off! Share on social media using #MTCrunchOff.

Classroom Connections

Crunching into local food is just one part of the Crunch Off experience. Activities in the classroom will help connect the event to current subject matter.

- Use and adapt the Montana Crunch Off Fun Sheet (page 10) for your classroom.

The [Montana Harvest of the Month videos](#) are available publicly and are a great way to provide fun facts and a connection to Montana agriculture. [Find more resources on the Montana Harvest of the Month website.](#)

Grades K-3

For younger elementary students, crunchy produce can be incorporated into writing, reading, math, science, and art activities. Consider these lesson ideas:

- [Exploring Apples: How They Grow, Taste, Nutrition Facts, Activities, and More!](#)
- [Apple Taste Test for Young Children](#)
- [Writing About Fruits and Vegetables](#)
- [Pumpkin Exploration: Introducing Pumpkins and How They Grow](#)
- [USA Pulses](#)
- [Lentil Song](#)

Grades 4-6

For older elementary students, challenge students to observe, problem-solve, and experiment. Students can perform basic science experiments and practice making connections to the fruits, vegetables, and foods grown locally and regionally in their lives.

Consider these lesson ideas:

- [Farm to School Month Celebration Toolkit](#)

Find current Farm to School Month resources, classroom activities, promotional materials, and celebration



Bozeman Elementary students bite into Swanson's Mountain View Orchards apples.

ideas at the National Farm to School Network.

- [Eating in Season Lesson Plan](#)
- [Ag in the Classroom Lesson Plans for Grades 4-6](#)
- [STEM-Based](#)
- Teach students about bison, the Blackfeet, and Buffalo Jump Park with the [OPI MT First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park Lesson](#)

Middle School and High School

Middle and high school students can explore their local food system and calculate how far their food has traveled to their plate. The following links can assist with lesson planning:

- [Food Miles Lesson](#)
- [Teaching the Food System from Farm to Fork](#)
- [Ag in the Classroom Lesson Plans for Grades 6-8](#)
- [Beef Jerky Food and Fun](#)

Connect With Community

Montana Crunch Off is an opportunity to reach beyond the school walls and connect with the entire community.

- Schedule a visit to a local farm so students can see what it takes to produce food. If transportation is a challenge, invite a producer into the classroom to share their experiences, eat lunch with students, or help hand out the crunch foods.
- Ask a local dietitian or doctor to share the benefits and importance of eating fruits, vegetables, and local food products. Nutrition or health professionals can share why and how produce fits into a healthy, balanced diet. Local college students involved in nutrition or agriculture programs can also be guest speakers or lead activities.
- Invite community leaders to celebrate Montana Crunch Off. Contact your local chamber of commerce to connect with local business owners or invite members of the school board to your Crunch Off event. Let local newspaper and television reporters know about your event by sending a press release and inviting them to come join in the fun. Who will be your “crunch celebrity?”

Littlest Crunchers

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE) Activities

For young children, try using activities that help students identify new fruits and vegetables. Students associate vegetables and fruits with visual imagery, feel, smell, and taste. Connecting fruits and vegetables to fun activities is a great way to engage students and support development. Check out these resources and activities:

Activity ideas:

Taste & Talk

Have children explore a local food using their five senses.

Crunchy Color Hunt

Find local foods in different colors.

Farm-to-Table Story Time

Invite a local farmer, rancher, or food producer to read a book or talk about where food comes from.

Sprout a Beet

A simple and inexpensive activity to experience how good grows.

Activity links:

- [Colorful plate spinners](#)
- [Taste and tales](#)
- [Preschool plan it](#)
- [Farm to early care and education interest areas](#)
- [Growing Minds list of ECE lesson plans](#)



Students and teachers at Moore School crunched into local apples in 2020.

Books

- *What Grows in My Garden: Apples Grow on Trees*. Rooney, Anne. QEB Publishing, 2012.
- *Apples A to Z*. McNamara, Margaret. Scholastic, 2012.
- *Rah, Rah, Radishes*. Sayre, April. Simon and Schuster, 2011.
- *Two Old Potatoes and Me*. Coy, John. Random House Children's Books, 2013.

Taste Testers

Gather and cut up samples of two or three different local foods, such as apples, chickpeas, carrots, and grain products, and let the children, adults, and volunteers share experiences between the foods. Try blindfolding to challenge their senses or have them close their eyes.

Do they feel different? Do they smell different? Is one sweeter, crunchier, or more sour than the other? Which is their favorite?

Story Time

Try reading [The Very Hungry Caterpillar Visits Montana](#), a book written by Eric Carle and adapted for Montana, with your students! Have a local farmer, businessperson, or guest speaker come in to read to the students.



Sprout a Beet!

Supplies

- Beet (with root and stems)
- Bowls or saucers
- Soil
- Water

Directions

- Cut the root and stems of the beet so a 1/2 inch remains of each.
- Press the remaining crown of the beet, root facing down into the soil with the stems up, into damp soil in a saucer or container.
- Place the bowl or container in a window with good light and water, and have the students observe the growth of the leaves over time.

Resource from [VT Harvest of the Month](#)

Make a Bigger Crunch

- **Cook!**
 - **Guide a cooking lesson using local and regionally grown or raised food ingredients**
- **Teach!**
 - Teach about local or regionally grown/raised foods!
- **Field Trip!**
 - Take a trip to a local ranch or farm!
- **Activities!**
 - **Have activities to engage participation**

Activities!

- Color your favorite Crunchy vegetable on the [Montana Crunch Off Fun Sheet!](#)
- Try this Montana Crunch Off [crossword puzzle](#) and [answer sheet](#).
- October Agriculture Education Pages from Montana Farmers Union.

Recipes

Here are some ideas on how to celebrate Montana Crunch Off in the kitchen with tasty snacks!

Silly Apple Bites

Have fun while making these happy treats!

Serves 8 (1/4 cup portions)

Ingredients:

- apples, each quartered

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- Sunflower butter or other nut butter Sunflower seeds *Optional*:
- 2-3 strawberries, sliced
- 1-2 raisins per apple bite

Preparation

1. Cut the middle out of each quarter of the apple to create a mouth.
2. Coat the inside of the cut gap with a filling of nut butter.
3. Place 4 sunflower seeds on the top of the 'mouth' for the teeth. If you are not using strawberry tongues, add more to the bottom of the 'mouth'.

Optional:

4. Place 1 sliced strawberry inside the mouth for a tongue.
5. Use nut butter to paste on two raisins for eyes.

Source: Fork and Beans

Roasted Munching Chickpeas

A great crunchy snack packed with protein.

Developed by: MSU Extension Nutrition Education

Program

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1 ¼ cups dry chickpeas
- 1 tsp olive oil
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp cumin
- ¼ tsp paprika
- ¼ tsp garlic powder

Preparation



1. To cook chickpeas ahead of time: using a colander, rinse dry chickpeas with running water. Add chickpeas to a medium-large bowl and add 3 ½ cups of water. Cover bowl and leave chickpeas to soak for about 16 hours. After soaking, drain off chickpea water and add chickpeas to a large pot along with 3 1/2 cups of water. Bring to a boil on the stovetop and reduce to a strong simmer for 1 1/2 – 2 hours. Taste test a couple chickpeas to check if they are done. Chickpeas should no longer be mealy, but not yet mushy either.
2. Drain the chickpeas, shaking off as much water as possible.
3. Preheat oven to 375°F.
4. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and pour the chickpeas onto the sheet, making sure they are spread out.
5. Pat dry with a paper towel.
6. Bake for 30 minutes total. Halfway through baking time, shake the pan so the chickpeas turn over.

The peas should sound like rocks rolling when they are well-roasted.

7. Mix dry seasonings into a large bowl.
8. As soon as the chickpeas are done baking, pour into a large bowl, and add olive oil.
9. Shake the bowl so all the chickpeas are coated with oil.
10. Pour chickpeas into the bowl with the seasonings.
11. Shake the bowl so all the chickpeas are coated with seasonings.
12. Serve immediately at room temperature, or store in a covered container.

Source: Montana Harvest of the Month

Community Celebrations

Montana Crunch Off isn't just for students and schools, everyone can participate! Across Montana, individuals, healthcare facilities, colleges, workplaces, businesses, community groups, and more will be celebrating healthy, local food with a synchronized crunch.

- To get involved, use the modifiable Crunch Off flyer to spread the word.
- Post the flyer at your workplace or community center.
- Email it to coworkers or other potential participants.

- Announce Crunch Off at a work meeting or gathering.
- Share Crunch Off information on your website, social media pages, and or e-newsletter. Once you have an event scheduled, be sure to share the information with your local media (see press release template below), and also with us! [Register your crunch](#) by October 31st and send us photos and video of your crunching crew.

Promoting Your Event

Promote your event and Montana Crunch Off throughout Montana! Use the following sample press release/announcement below to invite others to join in your celebration. Consider inviting your local representative, an elected official, a sports team, service clubs, or other individuals to join in your celebration. [Find a sample press release here.](#)

Crunch Byte Photo Release Form

Help us gather crunch bytes (videos, photos, etc.) to share on social media and in future Montana Crunch Off resources by sending your crunch bytes to Haley Scott, haley.scott1@montana.edu, and by filling out the Montana Team Nutrition [Photo Release Form](#).

For More Information

Jay Stagg:

Montana Team Nutrition
Co-Director and Farm to
School Coordinator

Phone: (406)-994-5996

Email:

jay.stagg@montana.edu

Haley Scott:

Montana Team Nutrition

Phone: (406)-994-5641

Email:

haley.scott1@montana.edu

- Learn more about Farm to School in Montana at www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool
- Resources and ideas about National Farm to School Month in October: www.farmtoschoolmonth.org