



## Webinar Wednesday Series: Montana Farm to School Successes - Buying and Serving Local Foods

# Video Transcript

### Original Recording Date:

February 5, 2020

### Video Available At:

<https://youtu.be/YIsrRuKW5uE>

**Aubree Roth:** Well hello everyone, I'm going to go ahead and get started. Welcome to the Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Program's Webinar Wednesday. I'd like to thank Camille and the rest of the OPI team for hosting this webinar. Today's topic is the Montana Farm to School successes - buying and serving local foods. This is the first webinar in a three-part series that highlights farm to school successes from around our state. The next two webinars will be held on March 4th and April 8th, so I hope you will join us for those as well. I'm Aubree Roth and I'll be leading the webinar today. I'm the Montana Farm to School coordinator for the Montana Team Nutrition program. Montana Team Nutrition works in close collaboration with Office of Public Instruction's school nutrition programs to provide training and guidance to schools, and we're housed at Montana State University. I'm excited to be joined by Ginger Buchanan, Edward Christensen, and Dave Prather. These inspiring individuals will share their farm to School stories and perspectives. This webinar provides snapshots of Montana Farm to School successes to provide you with inspiration and resources to start or grow your farm school program. During this webinar, I will discuss the farm to school basics, Ginger, Edward, and Dave will share their successes and challenges buying and serving local foods, and we'll wrap up by discussing resources, opportunities, and then of course, answer your questions.

So let's get started! Farm to school is an umbrella term for a movement to connect children to their food to improve their health, support farmers, ranchers, and food businesses, and strengthen communities through the three core elements shown here. Procurement: local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste test. Education: students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food health or nutrition, and school gardens. Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening. Farm to school programs generally work best when each of the three core elements are represented, as you will see throughout the webinar. There are many ways to implement

farm to school. Farm to school is not a program you sign up to do, you can build it to meet your school's interests and resources, so let's take a look at each of these core elements.

First, procurement, which includes buying and serving local foods in school and after-school meals and snacks, and is the focus of this webinar. Schools are sourcing local foods across all five food groups, from apples to beef and beyond. This includes buying from local farmers and ranchers, receiving donations, and using food grown in school gardens. Growing and raising food with students is a great way to engage them in the process and get them excited about unfamiliar foods. School gardens vary in size, type, and purpose. Gardens could be in-ground gardens or raised beds for educational purposes, like these in Missoula. Located on the High Line, Hinsdale School boasts an incredible school garden with a passive solar greenhouse and root cellar, both of which students helped build. The cafeteria uses the garden produce in the school meals. Your garden could even be unconventional, like Gallatin Valley Farm to Schools' Bob the Greenhouse Bus that provides mobile school garden education throughout the Gallatin Valley. Other schools have greenhouses, grow towers, aquaponic systems, and many others. Definitely the broadest of the three core elements, the education piece, spans food nutrition and agriculture based education. Farm to school education can take place anywhere. Here, Gallatin Valley Farm to School provides in-classroom lessons at a Bozeman elementary school. The GROWW Program at Ennis School has been cooking up a Harvest of the Month storm. Recently the students made heart-shaped beet ravioli. This education piece can also include farm field trips, bringing producers into the classroom, and more. Farm to school is well rooted in Montana. 57.1% of Montana schools are participating in at least one of the three core elements, this includes over 48% serving local foods in their school meals, 22% are conducting nutrition, ag., and food based education, and 19% are creating and tending school gardens. There are many benefits to farm to school programs, as you'll see throughout this presentation and for the sake of time, I'll encourage you to read the Farm to School benefits fact sheet, which the link is shown on the bottom of this slide to better understand the benefits of these programs. I'm going to give you a quick primer on resources and regulations regarding buying and serving local foods. Just like any food or supplies you're buying with your cash reimbursement, you need to follow proper procurement procedures for buying local foods. I'm not going to cover those in this webinar, as there are other trainings specific to procurement.

I am going to go through each of the regulations specific to the products shown here as a lightning quiz so for each question. Answer the question to yourself and see if you can get the correct answer. It'll go fast, so get ready so for the first question.

Meat that is processed in Montana and sold to a school or SFA in Montana must be A) state inspected, B) federally inspected, or C) either. The correct answer is C, so congratulations if you got that! Montana schools can use either state or federally slaughtered and processed meat. So next question, eggs must be A) grade B or higher, B) certified free-range, or C) there are no licensing or requirements for eggs. Egg-cellent job if you answered A! Eggs must be graded b or higher from a licensed facility. For dairy, milk must be A) certified organic, B) pasteurized in a licensed facility, or C) there are no licensing or requirements. And of course, B is our answer here! So cow-gratulations if you got that right! Milk must be pasteurized in a licensed facility. To sell raw, unprocessed vegetables or fruit to a school, a farmer must have the following A) GAAP certification which is good agricultural practice, B) fruit and vegetable license, or C) it depends. The answer is C. Depending on what crops they grow and their farm size, some producers may need to follow certain regulations within the Food Safety Modernization Act, or FSMA. It's really up to the producer to contact Montana Department of Agriculture to see if they are exempt or not. The Department of Ag will also help them with best practices and other information regarding regulations and food safety, so if you're a school nutrition professional, you do not need to know which farms need to follow which FSMA regulations, however, school nutrition professionals should contact

their county sanitarian for guidance about recommended or required testing, like soil or water testing. Here is our last question. To sell processed products including baked goods, jam, squash puree, or other things to a school, a Montana business must have A) wholesale food establishment license, B) GAAP certification, or C) liability insurance with ten million dollars in coverage. So if you processed this question correctly, you chose A! The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services oversees licenses for Montana food manufacturers. A general rule of thumb is to talk to your county sanitarian, also known as your health inspector, before using school garden produce or buying locally. You can ask for a producer's on-farm food safety plan or if they do have it, then they're GAAP certified or not. Keep records just as you would with any purchase so that there's traceability in case of an issue. I know that was really quick, but there are plenty of resources to help you.

The Montana farm to cafeteria guide, which is shown here on the right, goes through regulations and recommendations for buying local foods. The USDA local procurement guide will help demystify the procurement process, which applies to all purchases, not just local ones. And then the Montana beef to school procurement templates will help you easily navigate the procurement process when seeking local beef. There are many ways of finding local food but I've listed a few suggestions on this slide. Farmers' markets - when they're in season and when they're out of season, their market managers are a great way to find out who is producing in your area. You're not likely going to buy at the farmers' market, but you can find out who's in the area and what they're selling. We recommend to use the farm to cafeteria producer database, and hope that you will ask any of the producers you're currently working with to add themselves to this map, so more schools can find them and it becomes an even more helpful resource. Look for local products in your current distribution channels, including DOD Fresh. This fall there were delicious Montana apples on the DOD Fresh catalog. Most importantly, talk to people in your area to see what is available. Talk to other school staff, talk to restaurants, friends, etc., use the Lunch Line listserv, if you happen to be on that, to find out what has worked for other schools. The Montana beef to school coalition has a number of great resources from the research we have done around the state, including our case study report that features six Montana school districts and processors or ranchers. As I mentioned earlier, we also have beef to school procurement templates that will help you through the process of buying local beef. We also have a frequently asked questions page that will get you on your way to serving local beef. The Whole Kids Foundation Garden to Cafeteria Toolkit is very helpful if you're wanting to serve garden produce in school meals, helps with those food safety components, and the processes.

And once you're serving local foods, be sure that it is clear on your menus and in your cafeteria. One way that you can promote your efforts is with the Montana Harvest of the Month posters and materials. Montana Harvest of the Month is one way you can implement farm to school, as it provides an easy-to-follow framework and ready-to-use materials, as well as helpful guides and resources. The Montana Harvest of the Month program features a different Montana grown or raised food each month. Shown here is our calendar for this school year. We strive to add new foods each year and change the calendar to keep it fresh. The program is open to K-12 schools and after-school programs, summer food service programs, early care and education sites, healthcare facilities, grocery stores, and food pantries. It is free to register and participating sites will form a team upon registering, showcase the Harvest of the Month Food in that month in a school meal or snack, an educational activity, and the taste test. Sites will promote the program using the materials provided and lastly, the sites will participate in evaluation. Just as a note, sites source their own local foods for the meals, taste tests, and educational activities. Participating sites receive a set of printed materials and access to electronic resources, including the posters and there's an example shown here. We have three handouts: cafeteria, classroom, and home, for each Harvest of the Month food, that includes fun facts, cooking tips, nutrition information, when

relevant gardening, and agricultural facts. The Cafeteria Bites handout also includes school food service recipes that are that have the crediting information. We also have a slew of other materials like menu templates, recipe cards, guides, and so much more. Included in this list are short farm to plate videos for each Harvest of the Month food. We've released six videos so far, and more are on the way. They are available publicly, even for those who are not part of Harvest of the Month currently. New sites can register for free on the Harvest of the Month website, shown here, at any time during the school year. So now that you have a good foundation of what Farm to School is and the resources that you can use, let's explore three people who are making Farm to School happen in their communities.

I'd now like to welcome Ginger Buchanan, who's the food service director for Huntley Project schools and one of the new Montana Farm to School coaches. Take it away, Ginger!

**Ginger Buchanan:** Hey everybody, like Aubree said, my name is Ginger Buchanan. I'm one of the new Farm to School coaches and I'm over the southeastern region I'm most also on my second year as Huntley Projects food service director I absolutely love my job because I'm able to make our food from scratch. One thing that really helped me in the beginning is my administration sent me to Montana Team Nutrition's Cook Fresh Institute in Bozeman. There I learned the ins and outs of school nutrition and techniques for cooking in large volumes. We were encouraged to cook from scratch instead of out of the box and heat and serve. One of the things that has been a huge hit here at Huntley Project is our infused water that we put out every day. Infused water was available to us during the Cook Fresh Classes. That's where I got the idea from, and I was able to implement these ideas here at Huntley Project School. The kids really appreciate all the little details, because they know we really do care for them. I'm also part of Harvest of the Month. With Harvest of the Month, it supports farm-to-school. It's a great kick-start for farm to school because it acts as a guide. I use the menu templates and at the beginning of each month, we take that item into the classrooms to give samples and educate the kids on how it's grown, what it does for your body, and what it looks like, and they get to taste it. When we did kale in September, I made ranch kale chips and the fourth grade class we went to loved them and wanted more. It's been a huge success, we are also a part of the fresh fruit and vegetable program, we just started that last month. It's also been a great success with the little kids because we teach them about healthy fruits and vegetables and we make it fun by adding a craft at the end. They eat it, not the craft, just the food we take in. I really try hard and source as much as I can locally I don't like to just shop Sysco and U.S. Foods.

I have proven numbers that show by sourcing locally, we have been able to cut our cost. I buy our beef local, our milk local, our bread and flour local, and a lot of our lettuce we actually buy local. Another way I've been able to save money is by using DOD Fresh for fresh fruits and fresh vegetables. By using DOD Fresh, I'm able to save money to use elsewhere in the kitchen. With the milk, this is a pretty exciting one, I was able to totally get rid of carton milk and transition over to milk machines. By doing that, I was able to save over \$8,500 a year and the students can drink more and it tastes better than out of a carton, they taste the cardboard. I found the milk dispensers in the surplus inventory at MSU in Bozeman and they donated them to us. We use our greenhouse here at the school to raise fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, herbs, and radishes. Some great resources and some things I recommend looking into to get started serving local - contact your regional farm-to-school coach, one is me the other's Faith Oakland, and of course you can also contact Aubree. We can help you with locating local sources. Some other great resources I use is Montana Lunch Line. That's an email network for food service directors all over the state, where you can get advice and ask questions. The Facebook page School Meals That Rock, I've gotten some really good ideas from there. One of those is our chicken wing bar, but it's from school lunch rooms all around the country. The Cook Fresh Institute, which I mentioned earlier, that's a wonderful place to get ideas from the Montana School Nutrition Association Conference in June and of course, Webinar Wednesday. So that's all I've got, thanks everybody.

**Aubree Roth:** Thank you so much, Ginger. If you have any questions for Ginger or for any of our presenters throughout the presentation, please type them into the chat box as they come to you. So next up, we have Edward Christensen, the kale chip king, to talk about a different aspect of farm to school, beef to school at Missoula County Public Schools. Welcome Ed!

**Edward Christensen:** Hey, good afternoon everybody! I appreciate you having me here, as you know my name is Edward Christensen, my title is assistant supervisor of food and nutrition services from Missoula County Public Schools, and this is my 17th year in this position. As farm to school is kind of a very, very big topic, our district has been active in farm to school in some capacity since about 2006, I believe, and we've been evolving all over since then, into new capacities. This year was the very first year that something really really cool happened, is that one of our high schools has an Ag. Center, and a couple years ago we put out a levy for reconstruction in our district. We have 18 buildings in our district and we serve about 6,000 meals a day district-wide out of a satellite operation, meaning that my office is within the central kitchen, we prepare most of the food here, we store most of our supplies here, and then I have three transport vehicles that take meals out to 12 k-8s and then three high schools are kind of stand-alone. The ag. program raises a bunch of animals and as part of this levy, they wanted to build a meat processing facility, so Tom Andrews is not here today, he's the guy behind that, a couple years ago came and said "hey do you guys buy beef?" and I said "yeah we buy beef," but in our model, buying it conventionally locally was cost prohibitive, so we were always kind of at odds with that and another challenge that we had is that in my facility, we only have rotating ovens and steam jacketed kettles so my building isn't really licensed with the Missoula Missoula County Health Department to be processing raw beef in any quantity, and for any production that we would do involving beef it's usually about 400 pounds per production, so something would have to change. So after he came over and talked about buying beef and talked a little bit about potentially investing in a processing facility in district where actual MCPS High School students are going to be involved in the raising of these animals and in, you know, a very humane way, you know, essentially put them down and processing them and all that. It's a super great story, really cool facility. Like, man this is a dream come true. So my boss and I started thinking about "well if we could buy raw beef from ourselves, essentially, literally two miles down the road, how are we going to cook it?" and we came up with a solution of remodeling one of the kitchens, you know, with the whole district's doing a whole bunch of remodels and what if we put in a tilt skillet and a walk-in cooler so that we could essentially process the beef in district at kind of another satellite location, so we did that, that got approved and went in, and last summer I made my first purchase of ground beef, which is about five hundred pounds and we took it over to a satellite operation and processed it in this tilt skillet and put out our first in-house schoolhouse meats lunch, which was a walking taco, and it was really cool.

Right now I'm sitting on about another 1,200 pounds and in my freezer we're getting ready to process that next Monday and uh and get it into lunch. Now, we'll never be able to have just local beef in any of our lunches, but when we combine it with USDA commodity ground beef or beef crumbles, we can at least, you know, apply a locally-sourced item in, you know, nearly almost all of our beef productions, which is really really cool. Other farm-to-school steps we've had since 2006, we kind of started the whole process of of farm to school with the idea that maybe we could do like a Montana meal day and while I think that's really cool, it doesn't seem really sustainable just to have one day where you feature local stuff. So my philosophy with with farm to school is always finding the items that you can buy in bulk and then use them while they're available, like apples is a really, really great opportunity for us and it was super cool that Pam Frew got those on the DOD list. One thing I would love is to find some way, someone, some politician, some activists somewhere plant the idea that possibly instead of having all this entitlement, maybe we could apply entitlement towards more local food so they can cash in lieu. I know it's a pipe dream, but I think it's a conversation worth having with anyone involved and I can't

imagine anyone on whatever political side of the aisle you lean wouldn't support using those federal dollars in our local communities. I think that'd be super, super cool but that's pretty much the greatest new thing that we have coming out of Missoula, Montana, and we're excited to explore more local beef in more ways, and possibly other meats as well. I know they sell retail out here that are USDA inspected and state inspected and the place is spotless, it's really really cool it's like I never imagined that farm to school would be really turned into a school farm, essentially, where you literally have a farm with animals in your school district and these animals that are raised, one cool thing you think about, how green everything is. Some of these animals will never ever experience a truck. They live on-site and so everything that they know and live and smell is their whole life there and they're treated super great and it's just really cool, you know, so easy on the environment and you can't get more local than beef two miles down your road, if you can I mean maybe we'll try to find that out too, but yeah, that's that's pretty much what I got.

**Aubree Roth:** Awesome thank you so much, and it's really awesome to have such a nationally innovative model right here in Montana. And I definitely echo that challenge to other people, to see if they can beat Missoula County Public Schools' two miles of local beef to their school it's pretty impressive, so thank you. Next, we're going to shift perspectives from the cafeteria to the farm and distribution truck, so I'm delighted to welcome Dave Prather from Western Montana Growers Co-op, take it away Dave!

**Dave Prather:** Thanks Aubree, and thanks to Ginger and Ed, those are two really inspiring projects there. So as Aubree mentioned, my name is Dave Prather I'm with Western Montana Growers Cooperative. We're a farmer owned co-op that provides marketing, sells produce - a range of products including fresh fruits and vegetables. The co-op uses the economy of scale so that we are able to serve customers and most of the major towns in Montana and into northern Idaho and eastern Washington. For almost that entire time, however, schools are still our smallest customer segment, as it's a difficult market for smaller producers to enter into. I'm going to go over some of the challenges that we have based in selling to schools and demonstrate some of it around them and try to offer some tips for you all as you work with your local producers. The slides here are various photos, kind of highlighting some of our work with farm to school but they're not really in a particular order. The first challenge has been the one probably most often cited as pricing. Aside from the fact that school food budgets are alarmingly low, the pricing challenge is that we're working with small and medium-sized farmers who simply aren't on the same scale as the California or Mexican growers are. Secondly, for our growers in particular, the focus is mostly on certified organic grown lose, which add to the cost of production. One of the biggest area of success with farm to school is utilizing the fresh fruit and vegetable snack program. The budgets tend to be a bit more flexible for fruit and vegetable programs, so that haven't gone through the bidding process. Of course, number two, a great product for schools. These are items that don't look perfect for a store shelf but they're perfectly delicious to cut up and eat and cost about two thirds the price. Limitations of many of the schools to process fresh produce in discernible size, we have had a long-standing partnership with the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center and Ronan, for those that don't know, and then you see as it's known as as an arm of Lake County Community Development Center.

So to continue, MMFEC, they also provide co-packing services and also have developed their own line of commercial products, they're geared toward institutional sales for co-packing. This means we can get an order from a school saying they need carrot coins or some other processed product for, you know, X amount of students, and then we can source carrots from growers using number two products if they're available and then MMFEC can process the items to specification and we can then get the products picked up and delivered out to the schools. The processing does, of course, add to the products' cost but we try to minimize the impact on schools by simply passing that cost through, rather than including it into the cost of the overall margin that we would normally charge. The biggest limitation on the co-

packing is that the MMFEC really needs to run about 600 pounds of product through at once to make it cost-effective for them to pay their staff for the setup and cleanup required, so that means if we don't have enough orders in a given week, we either are not able to get product processed or the processing costs go up dramatically, but it does provide a great option for a pre-processed product. We've also worked with them to provide co-packing on frozen produce that we have available year-round. The best sellers that schools use are our cubed butternut squash, pie pumpkin puree, and pitted flat head cherries. Additionally, MMFEC has their own line of value-added products, as I mentioned some example of those are the frozen beef lentil crumble, beef mushroom meatballs, and Montana tomato sauce, which includes squash and carrots for nutritional benefits.

The next challenge for us is marketing and relationship building, this one has consistently been one of the most difficult to overcome. The small business units' main mission is to support the farm businesses of our members, we have to focus our limited staff bandwidth areas where we can make the biggest impact for our growers and because of the many challenges with farm to school, we're often forced into spending more of our time with other customers rather than continuing to work as much on farm to school as we would like, partially because of this and factors outside of our control. We've actually seen our total sales by dollar value to schools fall by about half from 2015. One of the parts of this challenge is the distributors like us and small producers aren't institutionalized, for lack of a better word, in the most schools' procurement plans, which means we're often left to recreate the wheel whenever staff turnover occurs and this can be really challenging when we lose food service directors or staff members that were especially motivated to bring in local food. We have to kind of start the conversation from scratch time again. Thankfully, there's a couple programs that really help us here, both FoodCorps and Harvest of the Month, Aubree and Ginger both spoke about Harvest of the Month, so I'll just say that from a producer standpoint, the simple exposure that this program provides for the many great products that are grown here in Montana, it's just so incredibly important it makes it really apparent to everyone that here's some great options you can use for Farm to School here's how to use them and we know that they're available during these times because we've done all the research so we're really thankful for that program and with FoodCorps, I feel pretty strongly if they weren't there we wouldn't really have a farm to school program at all, if wasn't for the work that's been done by FoodCorps over the years. We all know that there's desire from both producers and school staff to make farm to school work or else none of us would probably be here today and FoodCorps members can sometimes just provide that extra bit of spark and staff time to help make those connections between producers and schools. I mentioned about our total sales dropping off but the really good side of that is that our actual the total number of schools we've worked with in the last five years has increased threefold, so it provides a lot of promise for possibly more in the future. And for our part, we're hoping to revive our efforts on farm to school front this year, just create more staff time and make it available to do that work up front. I think many of the problems can be addressed by spending more time on individual schools to hear what their needs and challenges are.

The last challenge I'll mention is just delivery logistics in our beautiful, yet enormous state. Because of the rural location of many schools, it can be pretty difficult or impossible to get deliveries made to all of you. Our solution with many schools have been for us to get a delivery made to a grocery store, or some other locations as close to them as we can get, and then a food service director or staff member would make the drive to pick up. I realize that's not a long-term solution for anyone, but for Harvest of the Month orders or special events, it does at least provide an option for more out-of-the-way places and we're super thankful for everyone willing to go the extra mile when we're not able to and then lastly, just to throw out a few little tips that are things that we would want school to know when talking to producers. One is if you're not sure where to buy local food from, all three covered that pretty thoroughly, but talking to restaurants and stores, figure out who they're purchasing from is a great way to start, and this if

they say they're not buying locally you should ask them why. Two is be clear what your challenges and hesitations are at your own schools or organization. You know, one of the biggest gripes I have with our customers is when they have a problem that they don't tell us about. I freely admit that we are very far from perfect and have lots of problems, but we can only address those that we know about so this type of thing goes for new customer relationships as well if either side goes into it with a "can't do" attitude, then anything is challenging as farm to school is going to fail. So third thing is just be open about pricing, again, we come back to that pretty often on our end, but if a producer's price seems too high, let them know what you're currently paying or better yet, what you'd be willing to pay or able to pay for bringing in a local product. But, you know, overall I think the most important thing here is to keep the conversations going, don't take no for an answer, when you have issues you need to overcome, I think a lot of them can be worked out between various producers and in schools, and be keeping an open mind for operating outside your normal flow. It's pretty helpful in this regard, so I think that's all I have, sorry for the technology hiccups there.

**Aubree Roth:** Thank you so much, Dave, and thank you for being super fast about addressing the sound issue. It sounded okay at some points but we didn't want it to get any worse so wonderful, thanks for sharing those tips and recommendations in your experiences!

So again for our attendees, if you have any questions for our presenters, enter them into the chat box and we'll address them at the end.

Although creativity will get you really far, as you can see through these examples and other farm-to-school examples there's no need to reinvent the wheel. There are many quality farm-to-school resources available, as you saw in my first segment. I'll share a few more in this next section, but encourage you to check out the Montana Farm to School website for additional resources as this is really just the tip of the iceberg. The Montana Farm to School Leadership Team works through partnerships across the state to build Farm to School initiatives that help kids eat healthy, connect kids with agriculture and nutrition through education, support Montana farmers and food producers, foster economic vitality, and strengthen communities. Our six working groups are now open to the public, so if you're interested in engaging in statewide level conversations, please contact me and you can see those working groups listed on the left there, and as Dave said, bringing an additional staff or volunteers can be helpful. FoodCorps service members are hosted by schools to implement Farm to School and are provided training through the FoodCorps program you can also consider a VISTA intern, paid staff like a contractor, volunteers, or partnerships with local organizations. For those looking for extra help getting your farm to school initiatives started or with expanding your current efforts, we have two coaches as Ginger mentioned earlier. Ginger and Faith are currently covering northeast and southeast Montana, and if you're interested in their help please give them a shout or contact me. We're also excited to welcome Sarah Penix to the team as the Montana Farm to School VISTA, she started in January and is focused on addressing and improving farm to school communications, training and resources, and partnerships. She's been moderating the questions for this webinar so thank you, Sarah.

This webinar is just the start of great events this year that will help you get inspired and armed with excellent resources. We have two additional Montana Farm to School success webinars as part of the OPI Webinar Wednesday Series, each featuring three different farm to school stories, as we did today. So again, the next one is March 4th at 2 p.m. and that's focusing on the education core element and then April 8th is focusing on the school gardens. We're also hosting two Montana Farm to School Regional Showcases. These one-day events will feature tours, training, and networking so you can experience farm to school programs in person and connect with others. The first will be held March 18<sup>th</sup> in Fairview, Montana, and the second will be held on May 6th in Hardin. More details and registration to come soon,



so check our Facebook page. We also hope you join us for the next statewide Montana Farm to School Summit on September 23rd and 24th in Helena, Montana. This conference is held every other year and moves locations, so don't miss out! Registration is to open soon and scholarships will be available. If you want to see how farm to school is being implemented across the country, book your flight to Albuquerque for the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference in April. Early bird registration just opened! Did you know that you can win up to \$500 for your school nutrition program? You can enter a photo of a Montana school meal in one of three categories shown here - local food, breakfast foods, or indigenous foods - for a chance to win one of six prizes. The deadline to enter your photos is February 28<sup>th</sup>, so get snapping those pics! Can't wait to see them. October is National Farm to School Month and is a perfect time to celebrate or launch your Farm to School program, and it's never too early to start planning your Montana Crunch Time Event, which is a fun way of celebrating National Farm to School Month.

Remember to share your farm to school stories! You can share photos, lessons, stories, and recipes using the "share your story" form on the Montana Farm to School and Montana Harvest the Month websites, or you can email me anytime. We would love to feature your story in an upcoming training or on the web. Use social media or local news media to get the word out and be sure to use #MTHarvestoftheMonth or #MTfarmtoschool on social media posts so that we will see them. You can also tag the Montana Farm to School Facebook account or the Instagram account. We hope you join that conversation and share the great things you're doing because people love to read about it! So with that, I will now answer your questions for any of our presenters, and I'll give you a minute to type those in to the webinar chat box because I have a question for each of our presenters, which is: what is one challenge that you faced in your farm to school work and how did you overcome that? I know there are many different challenges that each of you mentioned, but if you want to highlight one challenge and how you overcame that. Let's first start with Ginger.

**Ginger Buchanan:** At first I think the very first challenge I had was finding local beef, and I overcame that by just, you know, going and stopping in at some different places in my area until I found Project Meats. They sell local beef there and I was able to make a deal with them and now we get all our beef locally, but at first that was a tough one because I wanted to do as much as I could to serve local so that was one challenge I had and was able to overcome it.

**Aubree Roth:** Awesome, let's go next to Edward!

**Edward Christensen:** Alright, as you say there are a ton of challenges that can potentially come up, one of our challenges is volume. We're a bigger district and you know what we do one school we need to be able to do at the district level so being able to accommodate that kind of volume can be challenging, you know, there's also a ton of other kinds of challenges like, you know, we have a school farm right here at the central kitchen, I think you've toured it before, and we had 16 above-ground beds. You might have heard that I'm a national kale day ambassador and so kale is big, one of my favorite things to do to make kale chips, and so we grow a lot of kale and we've grown a lot of zucchini, enough to, you know, shred zucchini for the whole school year, you know, and to have that like not locally sourced, but doing it on our own from our gardens and stuff. And we have a great partnership with Garden City Harvest out here that we've had for many, many years, as it started when I was a FoodCorps site supervisor for four years and we essentially created a job to kind of graduate out of FoodCorps, but then have that position available because my strength is in operations, not in growing food, so I needed that piece to help us get stuff from out of our garden into our production of stuff, but volume would probably be the biggest challenge. So finding an item like apples are really really simple, there's a lot of producers of apples, we buy a tremendous quantity at a time, so if I can reach out to an orchard and say "hey I'm looking to get, you know, not one case, not two cases, but maybe 25 cases," they can drop 25 cases at one time, you

definitely see an advantage in pricing when you when you buy in bulk like that, so wherever we can find those kinds of things that just make sense and are really, really easy, we love to do that. And like I said, we have a couple of orchards down the Bitterroot that really helped us out with that but yeah, definitely I think volume is one of the big ones.

**Aubree Roth:** Thank you, and Dave!

**Dave Prather:** For us, probably mentioned it already in the talk, but where to start was our biggest challenge with a lot of schools, you know, we are just trying to make the contact with the various purchasers and that's where FoodCorps was enormous in just getting us off the ground and lots of, especially smaller schools, where we could, you know, have meetings, go to conferences, etc., and create at least enough awareness within the FoodCorps staff could help direct us or direct food service directors so we could meet up and begin a conversation but yeah, just getting off the ground to begin with was hard enough.

**Aubree Roth:** Wonderful, thank you for that. I'll just thank our attendees for your time today in this webinar and thank you so much to Ginger, Edward, and Dave for sharing your experiences and your wealth of knowledge. If you want more farm to school stories and resources, I encourage you all to follow the Montana Farm to School Facebook and Instagram accounts. We have funding, events, and all kinds of information on there.

Just as a reminder, these slides and the recorded webinar will be available on the Montana Farm to School website and in maps, and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions following the webinar. Have a great day and thank you!



The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana communities. This program is a collaboration between Montana Farm to School, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Team Nutrition Program,

the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the DPHHS.