

Support HB 642 | Farm to School Grant Act

About Farm to School Grant Act

The Farm to School Pilot Grant program, to be administered by Montana Office of Public Instruction, provides schools with a funding incentive to purchase Montana grown or raised foods for school nutrition programs and assesses the impact of this incentive program.



- The competitive grant program will be created and pilot tested for two years, supporting local purchasing and food and agriculture education efforts in Montana schools. The funding is intended to support schools increasing purchases of Montana grown and raised foods for use in school meals, food and agriculture education, and promotion of Montana products.
- \$100,000 is requested for each of two years. At least 90% of the funding will be awarded to schools, and up to the remaining 10% may be used for administrative and evaluative expenses to ensure successful implementation and monitoring of the pilot program.
- Schools will be selected based on multiple criteria including free and reduced rate, current level of implementation of farm to school, geography, size of school, and other factors.
- The pilot program will be evaluated for reach, economic impact, and long-term sustainability.

[Read the bill text online at leg.mt.gov](http://leg.mt.gov)

Why the Farm to School Grant Act?

The Farm to School Grant has the potential to:

- **Spur economic growth.** Montana schools serve 19 million meals per year, providing an excellent opportunity for farmers, ranchers, and food businesses to sell their products to schools and thus to have a steady market opportunity. Each dollar spent on local foods creates up to \$2.16 in additional local economic activity.
- **Enhance kids' health.** This bill would provide needed funding to K-12 schools to purchase, promote, and educate about Montana grown and raised foods. Research indicates farm to school programs can increase children's consumption of healthy foods, especially fruits and vegetables. Farm to school programs improve school meal quality. 1 in 6 Montana children struggle with hunger and need high-quality, healthy foods in school.
- **Promote Montana agriculture.** Improve Montanans' knowledge and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition, and environment. This can lead to increased access of healthy, local foods and improved food security.

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

"...I have really appreciated that people [local producers] are willing to work with and I'm just not comfortable asking them to lower their prices. I understand the need to make a living... margins are slim, it's a tough gig and you're at the mercy of the weather sometimes, so I do understand the dilemma of not offering schools a lower rate."

"Unfortunately, higher purchasing costs always translates to the consumer...I had to raise lunch prices several times in the last few years and I don't want to raise it more because I don't want to lose kids."

-Quotes from Montana School Food Service Managers from the 2020 report: "Local Food for Local Kids" available in the resources on page 2.

Montana schools are creatively implementing farm to school projects. However, funding for purchasing local foods continues to be a significant challenge given schools' limited budgets. On average, schools spend \$1.00-\$1.25 per meal on food purchases. School food service directors cite lack of funds as a recurring challenge to expanding their local food purchases. This a missed opportunity to promote Montana agriculture and support the state's economy.

What is Farm to School?

Farm to school enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by enhancing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education sites. Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as education opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons and farm field trips.

Farm to school implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following core elements:

- **Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or classroom
- **Education:** Students participate in agriculture, food, health, or nutrition education activities
- **School gardens:** Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening

CORE ELEMENTS OF FARM to SCHOOL



Farm to School in Montana

According to the USDA Farm to School Census, 41% of Montana schools wanted to increase purchases of local food. Despite a strong foundation and growth in farm to school, lack of funding remains a barrier to providing all Montana children access to these effective programs.

51.7%

Montana Schools participated in farm to school in 2019-2020

48.7%

Prepared Local Products in School Meals

22.9%

Served local products in classrooms

22.6%

Lead farm to school educational activities

19.8%

Created and tended school gardens

Montana Harvest of the Month (www.montana.edu/mtharvestofthemonth) showcases Montana grown foods in schools and communities and is one way schools are implementing farm to school. Participating schools and afterschool programs promote a different food each month by: serving it in a meal or snack, offering taste tests, and conducting educational lessons and activities. In the 2019-2020 school year:

- **123** schools and afterschool programs **76** early care & education sites (ECE) participated
- Participating K-12 & ECE sites spent **\$432,200** on local foods purchased
- K-12 & ECE sites purchased from **144** producers/vendors
- **25,062** children reached at K-12 & ECE sites

Resources

An Introduction to Farm to School: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S1NyxQVh0Y

Local Food For Local Kids: A Montana Procurement Report: <http://bit.ly/3cSDW65>

Montana Farm to School website: www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool

Montana Farm to School Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/montanafarmtoschool

National Farm to School Network, Benefits of Farm to School fact sheet:

www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf

Contact

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