3RD GOVERNOR'S SUMMIT
On Montana Food & Agriculture
2026

WHAT WE HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

18 MONTHS OF LISTENING POINT TO A CLEAR OPPORTUNITY

In preparation for the 2026 Governor's Summit on Local Food & Agriculture, happening in Helena, October 23-24, 2026, Montanans shared what is working, what gets in the way, and what it will take to get more Montana-grown food onto Montana plates.

13 REGIONAL MEETINGS • STATEWIDE SURVEY • HUNDREDS OF VOICES

MONTANA HAS THE PIECES. WE NEED TO CONNECT THEM.

Montana is not starting from scratch. Across the state, communities identified an extraordinary collection of producers, processors, distributors, buyers, Tribal governments and programs, researchers, Extension agencies, economic-development organizations, nonprofits, schools, healthcare systems, agencies, businesses, infrastructure, expertise, and relationships already working to strengthen Montana's food system.

Our greatest opportunity is to better align these existing assets so they can function as a coordinated statewide food system while filling the strategic gaps that remain.

WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY?

The individual challenges are familiar: **processing • storage • distribution • market access • procurement • workforce • research • marketing • regulation**

But together, they reveal something bigger: people and organizations with complementary capabilities are often working with **different information, strategies, timelines, incentives and definitions of success.** Too often the work is happening in parallel, with unintentional siloing. This makes the assets difficult to see, navigate, combine, and mobilize.

A STRONG FOOD SYSTEM NEEDS THREE KINDS OF INFRASTRUCTURE:

PHYSICAL	COORDINATION	RELATIONSHIP
• Processing • Storage • Aggregation • Equipment • Transportation	• Shared Planning • Data & Market Intelligence • Buyer-Seller Connections • Technical Assistance • Coordination	• Trust • Partnerships • Shared Leadership • Problem-Solving Networks • Repeated Interactions

All three need to work together. Physical assets can sit underused without coordination; coordination cannot change behavior without trusted relationships; and relationships alone cannot move meaningful volumes without workable facilities and markets.

SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE SUMMIT?

Our task is not to create another list of needs.

It is to connect what already exists, identify strategic gaps, and align people and resources around **complete product pathways** that actually move Montana food from producer to buyer.

That means looking at **production → processing → storage → distribution → buyer requirements → contracts → price → demand → end use** as one connected system, not as separate problems. It also means looking at throughput in key market channels: direct-to-consumer, retailer/restaurants, and institutions.

And because Montana's regions face different market realities, **statewide direction must be paired with regional strategies.**

THE OPPORTUNITY IN FRONT OF US:

Recognize what Montana has built.
Connect it more deliberately.
Invest strategically where real gaps remain.
Move together from shared priorities to measurable action.

THE SUMMIT IS WHERE WE BEGIN.

REGISTER HERE

3rd Governor's Summit on Montana Food & Agriculture. **OCT 23-24, 2026**. **Helena**.