

FARM TO FOOD BANK: PROVIDING MONTANA GROWN FOOD TO MONTANA FAMILIES

Food banks and food pantries across the state play an important role in supporting local food systems. Montana should join a growing number of states in strengthening local food systems, reducing hunger in the long term, and improving the health of our communities by creating a Montana Farm to Food Bank program.

Montana's food banks and pantries distribute millions of pounds of food to Montana households each year. According to a 2022 Montana Food Bank Network survey, fewer than half of Montana food banks or pantries receive food from local growers, and most is donated. Currently, fewer than 20 can afford to purchase local food. Nearly every local food bank or food pantry is interested in providing more local food to their customers but lack the funding and relationships with local growers to make it happen.

CREATE A MONTANA FARM TO FOOD BANK PROGRAM

A "Montana Farm to Food Bank Program" would benefit communities, farmers, ranchers, and growers across the state. A state program would bring together public, private, and nonprofit organizations to create a new market for local producers, support local economies, feed friends and neighbors, and get fresh products to communities.

“THIS IS AN UNTAPPED MARKET. IF FOOD PANTRIES HAD FUNDING TO BUY MORE LOCAL PRODUCE, WE WOULD BE GAME TO SELL THEM THAT PRODUCE AND GROW SPECIFIC CROPS FOR THAT MARKET.”

-KALY HESS, CO-OWNER AND OPERATOR,
HARLEQUIN PRODUCE



BENEFITS OF A MONTANA FARM TO FOOD BANK PROGRAM

1. BUILD COMMUNITY

by cultivating relationships between local food pantries and their area growers, farmers, and ranchers.

2. SUPPORT SMALL FARMERS, RANCHERS, AND GROWERS

by giving them a new market to sell their products and strengthening local food systems.

3. NOURISH NEIGHBORS

by increasing access to fresh vegetables, meat, and other local food products.

4. BOOST LOCAL ECONOMIES

by keeping more money in town to support local businesses.

5. STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

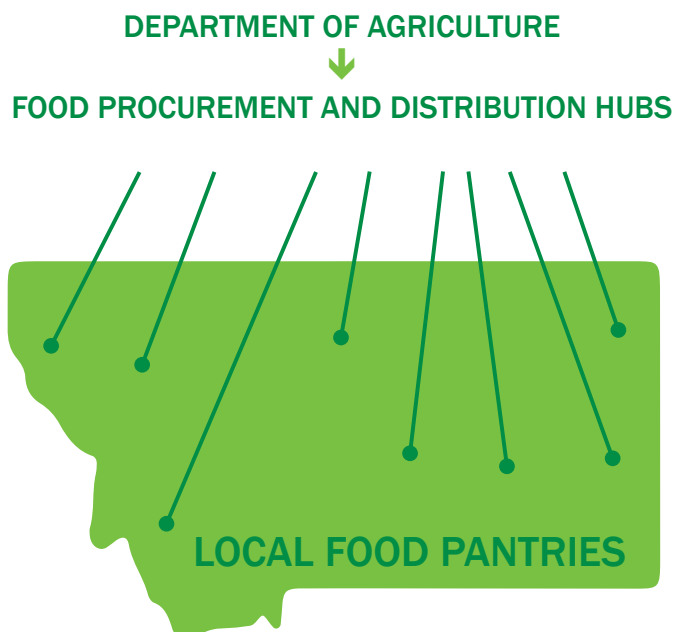
by providing local fresh food at food pantries so families have more money to pay for rent and gas.

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HOW IT CAN WORK

A Montana Farm to Food Bank Program is an opportunity for the State of Montana to expand markets for small producers, increase access to Montana grown and raised foods, and strengthen our local food system.

The Montana Department of Agriculture is well-positioned to create a Farm to Food Bank grant program by working closely with partners across the state. The Department can streamline the program by working with a nonprofit organization to administer the program. This nonprofit would work closely with food pantries and food banks across Montana, providing grant funding and support to cultivate relationships and increase the purchase of local foods. Through partnerships with local food “hubs,” the funding will be infused directly into Montana communities, supporting the purchase of Montana grown and raised foods for distribution through food pantries. These hubs can include larger regional food banks, co-ops, and food distribution centers with the capacity to purchase local food, store food products, and distribute to smaller pantries. This structure supports direct relationships between farmers and organizations, strengthening local markets for Montana farmers and ranchers. It also relieves smaller, lower-resourced food pantries of the burden of seeking out local producers, executing purchasing agreements, figuring out transportation, and storing products.



I LIKE TO THINK THAT WITHIN FIVE YEARS WE WILL
HAVE MORE VIBRANT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
THE PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY AND OUR LOCAL
FARMERS AND RANCHERS AND GROWERS.

– DONNA MOLLICA, ARLEE CDC