Montana Beef to School Supply Chain Relationships: Initial Case Study Findings

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Relevant Montana Statistics

- **Population:** ~1 million  (US Census Bureau)
- **Land Area:** 4\(^{\text{th}}\) largest U.S. state
- **State Cattle Herd:** ~2.5 million  (USDA-NASS)
- **Schools/districts:** 821 / 405  (Montana Office Public Instruction)
  - K-12 students: ~145,000
  - 30% in schools 500 or greater (approximately 7 cities)
  - 42% in schools 250-499
  - 17% in schools 50-249
  - Remainder in schools 1-49 (literally 1!)
Background

- 38% of MT Schools are engaged in farm to school Activities (USDA F2S Census)
- Beef is a natural component of this movement in Montana
- Primarily a cow-calf state; only 20,000 head are slaughtered in state annually (USDA NASS)
- Approximately 20 beef plants have inspection status for schools (MT Dpt. Of Livestock & USDA)
The Project

- USDA Western SARE funded 3 year project
  - Producers and Processors
  - Food Services (K12)
  - Related stakeholders

- Research
  - Case studies
  - Surveys
  - Observational data (e.g., recipes, plate waste)

- Outreach and Extension
  - Workshops
  - Multi-media
Objectives

1. Identify current successful models of B2S efforts;
2. Identify capacity and motivators of beef producers and meat processors to participate;
3. Identify resources to make B2S viable (economically and nutritionally) for schools;
4. Provide strategies to include B2S programming at schools of various sizes.
Case Studies

- Case Studies conducted 2015-2016
- Analysis continues
  - 1 vertically integrated producer/processor
  - 2 independent producers
  - 2 independent processors
  - 6 school districts; 28 total schools (range 2 to 12 schools in district)
Case Study Methodology

- Literature and census/dataset reviews
- Interview instrument developed and reviewed
  - Interviews conducted
  - Transcription services
  - Content analysis/code development/coding
  - Themes analyzed
- Narratives to be released October 24th
  - Celebrating farm to school month!
  - (https://www.facebook.com/beef2school/)
Highlighted Case #1

- **SW Montana: 1044 students, 3 schools (K-12)**
  - 575-600 meals served/day (55% participation rate)
  - Cattle are donated 4-H show animals, purchased by external parties and donated; local ranchers fill-in
  - Processor is 3rd party service provider, providing separated frozen patties
  - Additional local processor collaborates for 64 mile delivery in logged freezer truck
  - Highlighted special local hamburger days
  - “Right now, we are reliant on the donations.”
Highlighted Case #2

- NW Montana: 6327 students, 12 (+4) schools
  - 2500 meals served/day (39% participation)
  - Schools buys from local processor
  - Processor procures local cull cattle and trim for school program, processes, sells, and delivers
  - Primarily burger patties, some special sausage and pork products
  - Food service directors text for weekly fresh delivery
  - B2S supports .5 FTE at processing plant; processor purchased new patty-maker due to school business
Highlighted Case #3

- **NE Montana: 65 K-12 students, one school**
  - 50+/- meals served/day (75+% participation)
  - School buys from local vertically integrated producer/processor
  - Processor delivers 108 miles
  - Primarily premium ground beef; some roasts
  - Part of a comprehensive F2S program including school garden and curricular education
Trends and Themes: Cost

- **School:** local beef is expensive*; budget balanced over quarter or year, not per meal
- **Processor:** little leeway to depart from market; economies of scale on processing day may allow for some volume pricing
- **Producer:** difficult to meet school price; opportunity to market whole animal after premium cuts; opportunity for cull cows

* $3.00 to $4.50/lb
Trends and Themes: Cuts and Use

- Ground beef
- Roasts
- Further processed (sausages, specialty mixes/extenders using vegetables)
- Premium cuts used sparingly
Trends and Themes: Cuts and Use

- Cuts: ground beef and patties and roasts
- Recipes: burgers, beef lentil chili, mac n’ beef, goulash, beef marinara, sloppy joes, Salisbury steak, stroganoff, tacos, etc.
- Extenders: lentils, mushrooms, vegetable puree
- Promotion: signage, word of mouth, menu labeling, educational activities/curricular tie-ins
Trends and Themes: Motivations

- Quality perceptions
- Community pride and engagement
- Short and transparent supply chain
- Nutrition perceptions
- Environmental perceptions
- Food and fiber literacy
Trends and Themes: Community

- Networks: producers and processors
- Benefactors: donations, in-kind and monetary
- Parent and student interest/support
- Local economic productivity/growth
Summary – Challenges and Opportunities

- Interviewed producers and/or processors can ramp-up for more school production
- Cost continues to be a primary barrier
- Montana is rich in state or federally inspected processors
- Schools need storage capacity, appropriate kitchen equipment, and foodservice staff skills
Summary - Recommendations

- Start small!
- Balance USDA Foods (i.e., commodity) and food service supplier beef with local beef
- Highlight local beef for burgers and special days/meals
- Strategically use wholesome nutritious extenders
Future Outputs

- Food Studies Article
- Other Scholarly Articles
- Outreach Materials
- Stakeholder Workshops
- Local consulting and Technical Assistance
- Public SARE Final Report
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Thank you.
Questions?

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