



Montana Farm to School Successes



Summer Farm to School Fun

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School's out for the summer--hurray! Now who is going to take care of those beautiful school gardens while kids are at home and teachers are on a well-deserved vacation? This is an often-asked question when considering starting a school garden. Gallatin Valley Farm to School (GVF2S), a non-profit organization based in Bozeman, Montana, has plenty of ideas for keeping gardens growing strong during the summer, as well as combating summer learning loss in students. With Montana's short growing season, it is great to learn ideas from GVF2S about ways to keep farm to school activities going all year.

"My children walked away with a better understanding of how food from the garden gets to their plates. They learned some fabulous, and **HEALTHY**, recipes for making snacks and meals from the garden, and they felt empowered to continue preparing healthy food after the camp."

-Seed to Snack parent

The mission of GVF2S is to cultivate healthy kids, vibrant farms, and strong communities by connecting schools and local producers in the Gallatin Valley. Since school is out of session when farms and gardens are producing the bulk of their fresh produce, one way that GVF2S keeps kids eating delicious local food all year

round is through summer camps held at some of Bozeman's school gardens. GVF2S has hosted "Seed to Snack" summer camps since 2013 for students entering 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade. The Seed to Snack camp was started by Erin Jackson, a FoodCorps service member, who now serves as the Education Director for GVF2S, and enrollment has doubled since the first summer. Another success is the addition of a "Garden Explorer" session for students entering 1st and 2nd grade. Students who attend these camps discover where food comes from through hands-on gardening, cooking and science activities. Jackson describes the days as filled with "planting, harvesting, cooking and eating, exploring critters in the garden, doing garden crafts, playing games, and investigating pollinators and plants using science skills." Jackson sees the camps as filling a need in the community by ensuring that the school gardens are being taken care of during the summer. Another benefit is that some



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Montana Farm to School Story

campers who attend help harvest veggies that they planted during the school year with their class, which helps foster a sense of ownership and pride in their school garden. Other students may attend camp at a school that they don't go to during the year, but they still get all the benefits of gardening and the satisfaction of preparing their snacks from the daily harvest.

To reach as many kids as possible, GVF2S offers scholarships for campers who need financial assistance. While registration costs assist with expenses for the camp, GVF2S also relies on grants and public support to cover costs of the camp and provide scholarships, ensuring that all students have a chance to connect with the natural world and explore where the food comes from, regardless of income.

Another creative way GVF2S engages kids in farm to school during the summer is by leading gardening and cooking activities at existing camps. This is a great idea to raise revenue and reach more students, some of whom are enrolled in a summer program all summer and may not have the option of attending Seed to Snack. GVF2S staff have also led workshops on cooking and nutrition at the Bozeman Public Library and guided students from the summer program at a Montessori school on a farm field trip. Kids in attendance are exposed to the concepts of local food and get to enjoy a seasonal local snack, purchased from a local farm. This approach of bringing garden activities



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and local food to an existing audience is something GVF2S hopes to expand in coming summers. It has taken some time to promote Seed to Snack in the community, as there are many summer camp options, so Jackson suggests starting small with just one session to gauge interest or starting out by tapping into existing camps and programs.

Another strategy for reaching kids with farm to school activities in the summer is through partnering with Summer Feeding sites. GVF2S recruits interns from Montana State University to lead activities at the Summer Feeding sites for the kids. Kids have made butter, ground wheat, and planted a bucket garden to take home.

Whether putting on your own camp, bringing farm to school lessons to existing camps, leading activities at a Summer Feeding site, or coming up with your own ideas, summer offers many opportunities to keep kids learning in fun, hands-on ways. What better time to showcase Montana foods than during the peak of the growing season!

Learn more about Gallatin Valley Farm to School's summer camps and other programs at www.gvfarmtoschool.org.

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