

F2SProducerTraining22_Video_WickensRanch.mov

Eric Wickens [00:00:17] My name is Eric Wickens and my wife Emma and I, along with my parents, own and operate the ranch here in central Montana. Farm School is important for many reasons. As a local beef supplier. Ground beef is a it's a really important thing to find a home for. We have restaurants, we have direct to consumer buying up steaks and roasts and these different cuts, kind of the big two big hole. The big need that we need to fill is the ground beef. And the schools look to be a great option. I went through the farm school program. I was initially interested in the program because it's just another facet to our business that I wanted to explore. We're very rural, so it's about 20 miles to the nearest town. We are an agriculturally based economy in Montana, and there's just a real disconnect between where the food comes from and in this younger generation. And it's not their fault. It's our fault for not making the connection for them and presenting it to them in the schools. And so food is just a really wonderful way to to make that connection, say like, okay, this is what you're eating. This is where it came from. These are the people that raise it. This is why it matters.

Emma Wickens [00:02:00] My name is Emma Wickens and I love being able to raise my family out here and just be in a part of the animal connection, I think is the biggest impact that they'll walk away from in their life. The kids came home and they did mention that the beef was really good at school, that they had eaten, and that did come from local producers. So they can definitely tell the difference.

Wickens child [00:02:33] There's I mean, lots of different burgers you can get with that, have lots of different things and nothing like add ons and stuff that you really just don't need in a burger. That's just why I love being able to like, know what I'm eating from Dad's meat and what's in it, which I value a lot.

Emma Wickens [00:02:57] When schools are not in a program with local producers, what tends to be fed is a lot of processed meat. So a farm to school program is definitely putting healthier, you know, protein products into our children for sure.

Marion [00:03:18] My name is Marion. I'm ten years old and I'm in fourth grade. I think nutrition's like very important to your body so you can't grow.

Eric Wickens [00:03:30] We got into the schools a couple of different ways. The first way was just personally knowing a cook at a school. The other connection we made was from a farmers market farmer's markets. I guess that's one benefit of just kind of being out there so that people can find you, because if you're not out there, people don't know that you exist. And so just being present, you know, you just never know when those connections are going to be made. There's a nonprofit called Abundant Montana. They specialize in local food connection. They put out a local directory that's full of every local producer who sells any kind of egg product. So it's a great resource.

Emma Wickens [00:04:26] When we're bringing in local produced foods, you're supporting your local economy, which supports your school. So local is always better economically. You know, without a doubt.