

# Montana Beef to School Programs: Case Study Reviews and Updates



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# Relevant Montana Statistics

- **Population: ~ 1 million** (US Census Bureau)
- **Land Area: 4<sup>th</sup> largest U.S. state**
- **State Cattle Herd: ~2.5 million** (USDA-NASS, 2021)
- **Schools/districts: ~826 / 402** (Montana OPI, 2021)
  - K-12 students: ~145,634
  - 32% in schools 500 or greater (approximately 7 cities)
  - 38% in schools 250-499
  - 26% in schools 50-249
  - Remainder in schools <50 (literally 1!)



# Background

- Beef is a natural component of the farm to school movement in Montana
- Primarily a cow-calf state; only 20,000 head are slaughtered in state annually (USDA NASS)
- Approximately 20+ plants have inspection status qualified for schools
- There are also other pathways
  - Mr. Hamel can explain



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# The Original Project

- **USDA Western SARE 3-year project**
  - Producers and Processors
  - Food Services (K12)
  - Related stakeholders
- **Research**
  - Case studies and Surveys
  - Observational data (e.g., recipes, plate waste)
- **Outreach and Extension**
  - Workshops
  - Multi-media

# Highlighted District: Dillon Schools

- **Donation Model**
- **SW Montana: 1044 students, 3 schools (K-12)**
  - 575-600 meals served/day (55% participation rate)
  - Cattle are 4-H show animals, purchased by external parties and donated
  - Local ranchers fill-in need throughout year



# Highlighted District: Dillon Schools

## ■ Ranchland Packing and Silo Meats

- Processor is 3<sup>rd</sup> party service provider, (separated frozen patties)
- Additional local processor collaborates for 64 mile delivery in logged freezer truck

## ■ School Food Service

- Highlighted special local hamburger days
- “Right now, we are reliant on the donations.”

-Food Service Director



# Highlighted District: Dillon Schools

- **Where are they now?**
  - Unknown/on-hold
  - Long-time food service director recently retired
  - Currently seeking updated information

# Highlighted District: Hinsdale School

- **Negotiated Fair-price Model**
- **NE Montana: 65 K-12 students, one school**
  - 50+/- meals served/day (~75% participation)
  - School buys from local vertically integrated company
    - Farming
    - Ranching
    - Feeding
    - Processing



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# Highlighted District: Hinsdale School

- **Bear Paw Meats and B2S Integration**
  - Processor delivers 108 miles
  - Primarily premium ground beef; some roasts
  - B2S part of comprehensive F2S program, including school garden and curricular education



# Highlighted District: Hinsdale School and More!

- **Where are they now?**
  - Hinsdale relationship remains strong!
  - BPM added 2-3 small districts since 2016
  - BPM processing for and with North Central Montana Stockgrowers Beef to School Program
    - Adding new schools
    - Thanks to generous member ranchers!
  - BPM reports steady growth with goals of collaborating with reluctant schools
  - Focus high quality finished beef and high-quality burger cows



# Highlighted Districts: Flathead Region

- **Primarily Kalispell Schools**
- **NW Montana: 6327 students, 12 (+4) schools\***
  - 2500 meals served/day (39% participation)
  - Schools buy from LVP for select meals
  - LVP purchases local cull cattle, and extra trim for school program
  - Processes, sells, and delivers
  - Primarily burger patties, some special sausage, and also pork products



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\*as of fall 2016

# Highlighted Districts: Flathead Region

- **Unique communication and outcomes**
  - Food service directors text LVP for weekly fresh delivery
  - B2S supports approximately a quarter of a position at LVP
  - LVP purchased new patty-maker due to school business



# Highlighted Districts: Flathead Region

- **Where are they now?**
  - LVP remains very active, and was seeing ~10% growth/year prior to CV19
  - Participated in take-away meals and other services during COVID
  - Back-on-track with returns to regular school



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# Highlighted Districts: Flathead Region

- Where are they now continued...
  - Supply (cattle) remains strong; good relationships with producers for cull cows
  - Feeling the labor crunch, so focusing on high-quality service to existing partners
  - Not currently marketing or doing outreach
  - Field trips and presentations on hold
  - Animal welfare remains a pillar of the program for all partners.
    - Short drive, quality feed and fresh water on site, low-stress cattle, great meat...



# 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 rates; 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 (2017)**



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# Trends and Themes: Cuts and Use

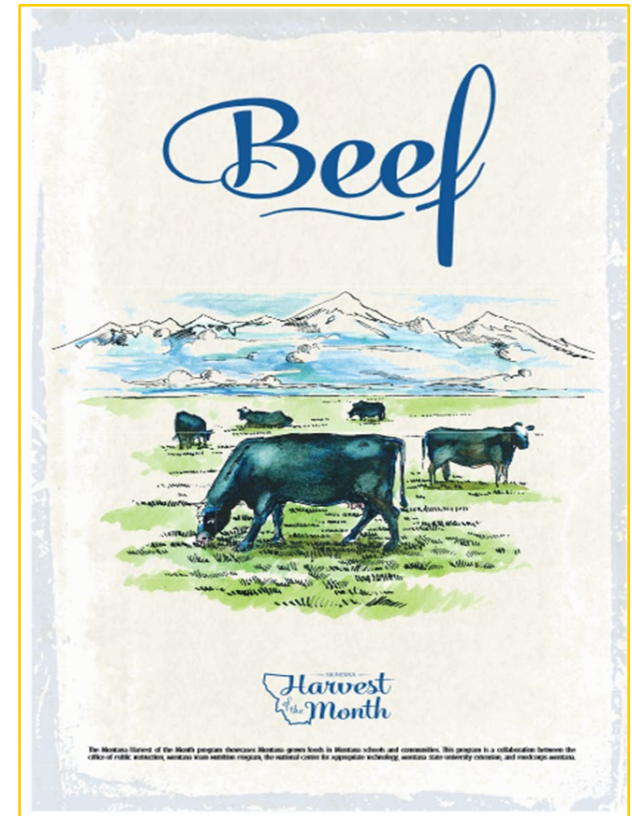
- **Cuts:** ground beef and patties and roasts
- **Recipes:** burgers, beef lentil chili, mac n' beef, goulash, beef marinara, sloppy joes, Salisbury steak, stroganoff, tacos, etc.
- **Wholesome Extenders:**
  - Lentils
  - Mushrooms
  - Vegetable puree





# Promotion

- **Signage:** in school cafeterias and hallway bulletin boards
- **Menu labeling:** “branding” on menus
- **Word of mouth**
- **Educational activities & curricular tie-ins**



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# Trends and Themes: Motivations

- **Community pride and engagement**
- **Short and transparent supply chain**
- **Food and fiber literacy**
- **Perceived benefits**
  - Quality perceptions
  - Nutrition perceptions
  - Environmental perceptions
  - Animal welfare perceptions



# Trends and Themes: Local Links

- **Networks: producers and processors, schools**
- **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
- Interviewed MSU county agents believe more producers would/could participate on supply-side
- Estimated that ~200 head are currently in Montana B2S per year



# Summary – Challenges and Opportunities

- **If beef was 1/3 of protein in school lunches:**
  - About 900 head would satisfy MT B2S/year
  - Less than 5% of total head currently slaughtered in-state/year
  - About .004% of calves marketed/year;
    - We know there are many culls in B2S supply chain



# Summary – Challenges and Opportunities

- **Some schools need:**
  - storage capacity
  - appropriate kitchen equipment
  - foodservice staff skills
- **Convenience issues:**
  - patties (related: patty makers, but no IQF in state)
  - competition with heat and serve dishes
  - labor intense dishes, i.e. meatballs



# Summary – Challenges and Opportunities

- **Cost continues to be a primary barrier**
  - negotiation for premium ground beef
  - donation model
  - cull cattle savings
  - extender strategies
- **Existing Contracts?**
  - K-12 Schools
  - University System



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# Summary - Recommendations

- **Start small!**
- **Build relationships**
- **Work with non-profits and parent groups**
- **Balance USDA Foods (i.e. commodity) and food service supplier beef with local beef**
- **Highlight local beef for burgers and special days/meals**





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- College of Education, Health and Human Development
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- College of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Station, and MSU Extension
- Office of Public Instruction, and Food Services
- **Montana Producers and Processors!**



# Thank you. Questions?



## ■ Website:

- [www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool](http://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool)
- Resources Link: Beef to School

## ■ Contact:

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