



Taste Test Toolkit

Guides

Adapted From: Vermont Harvest of the Month (<http://www.vermontharvestofthemonth.org/>)

Why do taste tests?

Students are often reluctant to try new foods. Taste tests introduce new menu items in a way that raises awareness about healthy food choices, involves the school community, and builds a culture of trying new foods. Research has shown that children (and adults!) need to try new foods multiple times (up to twelve times or more) before deciding that they like them. Taste tests of the Montana Harvest of the Month (HOM) products give children an opportunity to try locally produced and in-season foods each month. For example, they may not like kale as kindergarteners, but providing regular opportunities for students to try it in various forms (kale chips, salads, smoothies, etc.) throughout their school years can lead to a whole new generation of kale lovers! **All participating HOM schools, afterschool programs, early care and education sites, and summer food service programs must conduct at least one taste test each month.**

Dig Deeper

Get more information, register, or download resources:

Lizzie Gill

Montana Local Foods Specialist

lizzieg@ncat.org | (406) 494-8672

mtharvestofthemonth.org

When and Where

When: Taste tests work best when implemented on a regular schedule. We suggest a monthly school-wide taste test highlighting the current HOM product (see scheduling documents in the appendix for more information).

Where: Taste tests can be run successfully in either the classroom or the cafeteria. Each school or afterschool program has its own unique circumstances, schedules, and infrastructure, so be sure to take this into consideration when deciding where to implement your taste tests.

- Classroom Benefits
 - Educators can integrate lessons from the HOM "Classroom Bites" handouts.
 - Data is collected in a more controlled environment.
 - Ambassador classrooms can serve as leaders within the school (see below for an explanation of ambassador classrooms).
 - Taste tests can be prepared by cafeteria staff or within each classroom (depending on the recipe and availability of cooking equipment or carts).
- Cafeteria Benefits
 - Cafeteria staff or other school staff can integrate lessons from the HOM "Cafeteria Bites" handouts.
 - Data is collected in a central location.

- No classroom or instruction time is required.

How do I run a successful taste test?

Below are some helpful tips for conducting successful taste tests at your school:

- **Involve students.** When students are involved in preparing, serving, and surveying other students during a taste test, they will be more willing to try the new foods. Work with educators to create a schedule for classes to participate in preparing and sharing the taste tests.
- **Recruit volunteers.** Parent volunteers are very helpful during taste tests, especially for serving or helping to prepare food. Place a note in your school or afterschool program newsletter asking for parents and guardians interested in helping out.
- **Have a regular schedule.** Commit to taste tests on a certain day each month; this aids planning and makes taste testing a predictable part of the school or program culture.
- **Choose appropriate recipes.** The best recipes are simple and inexpensive to make, so they can be easily added into the regular meal program. Look at the "Cafeteria Bites" and "Classroom Bites" handouts for recipe ideas each month. The "Harvest at Home" handouts contain the same recipes as the "Classroom Bites" handouts.
- **Use local ingredients.** Whenever possible, use ingredients that are grown or raised locally or in Montana for taste testing for the HOM items and the other ingredients. Consider working with the food service to coordinate purchasing of HOM items.
- **Use Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program funds.** Harvest of the Month works great with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack program since it includes both the foods and nutrition education. Not all months are fruits or vegetables, so find other Montana products to feature those months for the snack program.
- **Advertise.** Generate excitement for your taste tests by announcing them in the school newsletter, take-home letters, bulletin boards, and morning announcements.
- **Don't Yuck My Yum!** Remind students that we do not say negative things about how something tastes because it might offend someone and discourage others from trying something new. If a student tries something that she or he does not like, request that they quietly spit it out in a napkin so other students have an opportunity to taste it and form their own opinions. Encourage students to use respectful language such as "I don't care for it." Remind students that sometimes it takes trying new things twenty times before you begin to like them. You never know how many times of trying a new food it will take before it becomes your new favorite!
- **Use the right materials.** If you're doing a taste test in the cafeteria, talk to your food service director about whether you can simply serve a sample on each child's tray. Consider purchasing reusable sample cups for the total approximate number of students you plan to engage in taste tests.
- **Send home copies of the recipe.** Students love to share what they have done and learned at school with their families. Ask students who tried the recipe at home.
- **Share the harvest!** Post photos, results, student comments or recipes at <http://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/connect/share-story.html>.

How should I collect feedback from students?

Getting feedback, both formally and informally, from the students is an important part of the taste test process. There are many ways to gather this feedback, and the size, scope, and context of your taste test will determine which approach is best. Here are three suggested methods of capturing feedback:

Ballot Boxes or Cups:

- Set up a table in the cafeteria with three containers labeled to indicate “Tried it” “Liked it” and “Loved it” options. The ballot boxes could display the words or symbols such as smiley/frowny faces or thumbs up/down. Have a container of small objects such as dry beans or tokens ready for students to use to cast their votes.
- After the kids have tasted the food, encourage them to cast their vote in the box that corresponds to their opinion.
- This method is interactive, fun, and allows them to record their opinion anonymously. Students might also be more apt to vote in accordance with their own opinion, rather than being influenced by what their friends’ reactions are.
- For taste tests in the classroom, count out the tokens aloud with the students and chart the results.



Visual Count, Tally:

- In a large group you can walk around the room and keep a tally for every “Tried it” “Liked it” and “Loved it” as each child tells you their opinion about the taste test.
- Count and keep a tally.



Paper Survey:

- Casting a paper ballot can be fun, and it has the same advantage as an anonymous ballot box: the secrecy can encourage students to vote in accordance with their own opinion.
- Create a simple paper ballot asking students to circle their preference: Tried it, Liked it, or Loved it.
- Set up a ballot table and remind students to cast their votes after trying the taste test.

What do I do with the data once it is collected?

Food and nutrition education has both cross-curricular and extra-curricular applications. Below are a few ideas:

- **Curriculum Connections.** Taste test votes provide a wonderful set of data to work with in mathematics lessons about statistics, graphing or percentages. See the monthly "Classroom Bites" for more activity ideas.
- **School Garden Connections.** If a taste test item is particularly popular, contact your school garden coordinator(s) to see if it would be possible to grow it right there on the school grounds.

Ambassador Classrooms

Whether your taste tests occur in the classroom or the cafeteria, designating an “Ambassador Classroom” (AC) for each month is a wonderful opportunity to promote leadership and to share the responsibility of managing the taste test program. One classroom may opt to take on the responsibility for the whole year, or multiple classrooms may sign up for their turn throughout the year. At the beginning of each school year, fill out the Ambassador Classroom & Taste Test Schedule (see appendix) at the beginning of the year.

Ambassador Classroom Roles and Timeline:

- **1-2 weeks before taste test:** If conducting classroom-based taste tests with food prepared by the cafeteria and/or AC, present the *Classroom Taste Test Delivery Sign-Up Sheet* (see appendix) at a staff meeting at least a week in advance of taste test day. This form allows educators to indicate their preferred time slot to receive cafeteria-prepared taste tests. If taste tests are being prepared in classrooms, this is not necessary.
- **Week of taste test:** AC teacher distributes *Taste Test Reminder* (see appendix), *Classroom Taste Test Survey Form*, if appropriate (see appendix), and current "Classroom Bites" handout in each teacher's mailbox.
- **Day of taste test:** AC students can help prepare taste test with cafeteria staff (if appropriate).
 - For classroom taste tests: AC students deliver portioned-out taste tests to each classroom; Receive tally sheets from each classroom, and compile school-wide results; Submit results on HOM website.
 - For cafeteria taste tests: AC students pass out taste tests during lunch time to all interested students; Collect data on *Cafeteria Taste Test Survey Form* (see appendix) and compile *School-Wide Results Sheet* (see appendix); Submit report indicating a taste test was completed on HOM website.

For More Information

Lizzie Gill, Montana Local Foods Specialist lizzieg@ncat.org | (406) 494-8672
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The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana communities. This program is a collaboration between Montana Farm to School, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Team Nutrition Program, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Montana State University Extension, Gallatin Valley Farm to School, FoodCorps Montana, Montana Organic Association, and Montana Department of Agriculture. More information and resources are available at: mtharvestofthemonth.org.

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Ambassador Classroom & Taste Test Schedule

Month & HOM Item	Taste Test Date	Ambassador Classroom
August Cherries		
September Brassicas		
October Apples		
November Winter Squash		
December Lentils		
January Carrots		
February Beets		
March Grains		
April Chickpeas		
May Beef + Bison		
June Leafy Greens		
July Dairy		



Classroom Taste Test Delivery Sign-Up Sheet

Date of Taste Test:

Featured Harvest of the Month:

Taste Test Recipe:

Ambassador Classroom:

Teachers, please sign-up for your preferred delivery time by entering your grade level and name in the appropriate time slot below

Classroom Taste Test Delivery Schedule

Time slot 1: _____ _____	Time slot 2: _____ _____	Time slot 3: _____ _____	Time slot 4: _____ _____

Thank you for your help!

You'll receive a reminder in your mailbox the week of the taste test.



Taste Test Reminder

Date of Taste Test:

Featured Harvest of the Month:

Taste Test Recipe:

Ambassador Classroom:

Grade/Teacher:

Your classroom's taste test delivery is scheduled for:

(time)

Other Reminders:

- Please see the attached "Classroom Bites" for lessons and activities related to this Harvest of the Month!
- Please fill out the attached Classroom Taste Test Tally Sheet and return it to the Ambassador Classroom once the taste test is completed.

Thank you!



Classroom Taste Test Survey Form

Harvest of the Month Item:

Today's Recipe:

School:

Teacher Name:

Total # Students:

Date:

Reminders for Teachers or HOM Volunteers:

- Please remember to share fun facts from the "Classroom Bites" with your students. This is a great opportunity for students to practice reading out loud.
- Pass out the taste test samples, then, ask for a show of hands to complete the survey below. Thank you!

Show of Hands Survey

<i>Raise your hand if you...</i>	<i># of students</i>
Tried it	
Liked it	
Loved it	

Thank you for helping collect this data.

Please return this form ASAP to: _____

(HOM Coordinator or Ambassador Classroom)



Cafeteria Taste Test Survey Form

Harvest of the Month Item:

Today's Recipe:

School:

Total # Students:

Date:

Reminders for Cafeteria Staff or HOM Volunteers:

- If the environment permits, share fun facts from the "Cafeteria Bites" with students.
- If there is a voting station, make sure it is clearly marked.

Taste Test Results

Tried it (Voted Tried it)	
Liked it	
Loved it	

Comments:

Thank you for helping collect this data.



School-Wide Results Sheet

Date of the Taste Test:

Harvest of the Month Item:

Recipe:

Where did the taste test take place? _____ Classrooms _____ Cafeteria

Tried it	Liked It	Loved It

TOTAL*			
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**Remember to submit your monthly Taste Test report. All evaluation links are available in the HOM Portal.*



Taste Test Ballots

Circle Only One



Tried it



Liked it



Loved it

Circle Only One



Tried it



Liked it



Loved it

Circle Only One



Tried it



Liked it



Loved it

Circle Only One



Tried it



Liked it



Loved it