

# + Montana Farm to School Successes



## Saying Yes! in Kalispell

By: Melissa Lafontaine

Kalispell School District's recipe for farm to school success is characterized by their willingness to say "yes!" and give new things a try. This includes building community partnerships, serving local foods, and establishing new school gardens. Jennifer Montague, Kalispell's Food Service Director, has been instrumental to growing farm to school in her district, as she believes in the many benefits of local procurement and community partnerships. Jenny who has been the Food Service Director since 2011 said, "the first year we were purchasing about 10% local and after three years we are purchasing about 30% local." They have served local beef, flour from Wheat Montana, and seasonal hearty produce from the Western Montana Growers Co-op. Additionally, 75% of their apples are purchased from local orchards.

### Cost

Jenny has successfully transformed her food purchasing strategy while staying within her budget by cutting costs elsewhere. Jenny shared that maintaining open communication with the school board and community members has been instrumental to her success. Jenny says, "I can show them that the price of a pre-made corn dog is

higher for me to buy than to purchase a local burger bun and patty." The new central kitchen garden is anticipated to increase local food products in the lunchroom and defray external purchasing.

### Benefits

**The world right now is ripe for change in this area and so they just need people to go in there and say 'yes'!**

"With these changes more students are purchasing lunch at schools and students who are part of the free and reduced lunch program feel like they are a part of a new, cool thing." Jenny has also observed changed in moral amongst her kitchen staff, despite the extra prep time. She expressed "I feel the extra work has been compensated for feeling good about their jobs because the kids are interested and thankful for what they are putting out." The program is also supporting the community. The district is putting \$40,000 back into local businesses for just local meats alone!

### Partnerships



Kalispell community members are also essential to farm to school success and are involved in multiple ways. Funding has come from the local Credit Union and Nourish the Flathead, Center for Restorative Youth Justice has been one of their most instrumental partners for the

## + Montana Team Nutrition Program

More information available at [www.opi.mt.gov/Farm2School](http://www.opi.mt.gov/Farm2School)  
Montana Team Nutrition Program is housed at Montana State University and works in cooperation with the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



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## Montana Farm to School Story

success of the school gardens.

"Youth who have gotten in trouble, will work off their fines through community service by maintaining the gardens over the summer time which engages them in meaningful work in terms of therapy and recovery." Parents are also critical in maintaining garden sites throughout the summer, by signing up for one week of gardening. Jessica Manly, Kalispell's FoodCorps Service Member shared the transformations she's observed amongst several families as they feel more capable gardening and are paying more attention to the quality of their food. Jenny and Jessica share that their farm to school successes are largely dependent on support from the community, parents, school administration, and especially teachers.

Teachers overall have been very supportive of the Kalispell farm to school program as they discuss the menu with their students and where specific products come from. Flathead High Schools FFA Teacher Amanda Matdies has been a huge proponent for farm to school. After attending the National Center for Appropriate Technology's Growing Leaders Summit with her students in fall 2013 she worked with several students to create a school garden and environmental club. She remained a strong supporter of the garden despite some push back from the community who wished to turn the garden space into a parking lot to deal with parking issues. Fortunately for the students the garden is here to stay for the long run!

With strong dedication from Jenny, Jessica, parents, administration, and teachers like Amanda Matdies, Kalispell farm to school is on the track for continued success. Jenny shared "that the world right now is ripe for change in this area and so they just need people to go in there and say "yes". I feel like that's the most positive thing that I've done is just been saying YES and let's try it!"

*Photo Credit (lunch tray): Kelly Campbell Photo*



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