



SELLING MONTANA FOOD TO MONTANA SCHOOLS

Montana schools are eager to serve more Montana food, and producers play a key role in making that possible. Selling to schools looks a little different than selling at farmers' markets or through traditional wholesale channels, but with the right information, it can become a reliable and meaningful market. This guide outlines what school nutrition programs need to build strong, successful partnerships that feed Montana students.

DISTRIBUTION/DELIVERY PATHS

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For the most part, schools don't have the time or means to pick up products.

A producer may need to:

- deliver directly to schools.
- sell through an ag coop, food hub, or distributor.
- sell through a local processor/value-added business.
- become a USDA vendor.

PRODUCT QUALITY

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Schools often cut/slice their food and accept B grade products. One of the most significant barriers to purchasing local foods is processing limitations. Depending on the time they have, school nutrition professionals may prefer products like leafy greens, beef, apples, and others that require less prep.

BEYOND THE CAFETERIA

03

Schools may be able to use smaller quantities of food for purposes outside of meals, such as fundraisers, taste tests, activities, and after-school snacks. Producers might choose to start with small sales and work up to lunch.

GET TO KNOW THE SCHOOL YOU'RE WORKING WITH

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- What meals and snacks do they serve?
- Have they purchased from a producer before, or is this something brand new?

BILLING & PRICE RESTRICTIONS

05

- Schools must use an invoice system for billing. Expect 2 weeks for payment.
- School meal costs are predetermined. They're able to spend:
 - \$0.30-40 for 0.5 cup of fruit
 - \$0.30-40 for 0.5 cup of vegetables
 - \$0.60-70 for 3 oz of protein
 - \$0.25-39 for 2 oz of whole grain or grain product

REQUIRED CERTIFICATION

06

There is no federal requirement to be GAP certified. Schools might request proof of insurance or wish to visit the farm to do their own certification. If you (the producer) already sell wholesale, then you're good to go.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

07

Schools LOVE having guest speakers visit!

- Offer farm field trips, guest speaking during class, and cafeteria visits!
- If students have a connection to their food, such as helping to grow or prepare the food, they're more likely to eat it.

UNDERSTANDING QUANTITY

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To determine fruit and vegetable amounts, schools use cups, and to determine protein and grain amounts, schools use ounces. To compare prices to large vendors, schools use case count size.



Celebrate!

Let your community know about your success by inviting the press and posting about the partnership on your website or social media page. Promote your efforts; it'll create more opportunities!

For more information on selling to schools, visit:

Montana Farm to School: montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool

Montana Harvest of the Month: mtharvestofthemonth.org

National Farm to School Network: farmtoschool.org

Or reach out to:

Jay Stagg, Montana Farm to School Coordinator: jay.stagg@montana.edu

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