

Grow Montana 2007 Legislative Priorities

(as of 12/18/06)



Allow public institutions more flexibility to buy Montana-produced food through an optional exemption in the Montana Procurement Act.

Current law requires public institutions, such as universities and K-12 schools, to buy the cheapest food possible (in contract purchases). Though not all Montana-produced food is more expensive than national competitors, public institutions should be allowed to consider where and how the food was produced when making decisions. Grow Montana proposes an **optional** exemption from the Montana Procurement Act to allow food purchasers to buy Montana-grown food (within specified parameters). The exemption would be used only when deemed consistent within the agency's fiscal goals and constraints.



Create an interim study committee to research and propose solutions for value-added food processing in Montana.

For Montanans to better feed ourselves, we need a significant increase in value-added food production such as meat and even vegetable processing. An interim legislative committee, along with government and private agencies who specialize in food and agriculture, should explore ways that our state can invest in value-added production as a form of **community-based economic development**, where more of the end product's value stays in Montana and profits recirculate within Montana's communities. Research should include best practices and models from other states.



Provide poultry producers an exemption from inspection requirements for on-farm sales of 1000 birds or less.

In many other states, including Washington and Texas, legal exemptions allow producers to sell up to 1000 birds processed on-farm without inspection. Through this exemption, the producer can only sell **directly to consumers** who buy the bird on the farm where it was raised and processed. A simple facility permitting process replaces complex and expensive meat inspection requirements, while still promoting food safety. The exemption can have serious economic rewards for producers, while also providing an option for consumers who want to purchase farm-fresh poultry.



Encourage more meat processing in Montana by removing the federal ban on interstate commerce of state-inspected meat. Pass a state resolution urging Congress to act.

Montana has a state meat inspection program that is required by the USDA to meet or exceed all federal regulations. State-inspected meat can be sold at any retail, wholesale, or direct market in Montana. However, even though it meets or exceeds federal inspection, it cannot be sold in any other state. This **limits** the market opportunities for state-inspected meat, therefore discouraging meat producers from adding value to their livestock and entrepreneurs from developing processing facilities in Montana. Since the lack of local processing is a major obstacle in Montana's food system, we must do what we can to remove the obstacles and support a more entrepreneurial business climate. Grow Montana urges passage of a state resolution encouraging Congress to remove the USDA's ban on interstate commerce of state-inspected meat. We will work closely with the Montana Farmers Union on this resolution.

Grow Montana will *strongly support* the following policies in 2007:

- Develop state-funded Montana Agriculture Innovation Centers to provide technical assistance and capital availability to food entrepreneurs.
- Retain Montana's important agricultural development programs currently scheduled to expire in 2010 by removing their "sunset clause."

About Grow Montana

Grow Montana is a coalition of groups working to create the means for more of Montana's food and farm products to be used closer to home, to retain more of the value that's added to our agricultural products in Montana communities, and to improve all our citizens' access to healthy, nutritious food. More information is available on our website at www.growmontana.ncat.org.

What about food security? Grow Montana's priorities include increasing access to Montana grown food for low-income people. So far, our findings have led to **non-legislative** approaches. For more information, please see our website.

Grow Montana's steering committee members represent:

Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO); Artemis Common Ground; Lake County Community Development Corporation; National Center for Appropriate Technology; Stranie Ventures, LLC; The University of Montana Environmental Studies Program, Montana Farmers Union, (eastern Montana's) Farm to Table Project, and the Food Policy Council of the Montana Food Bank Network.

For more information about Grow Montana, visit www.growmontana.ncat.org or call Crissie McMullan at 406-531-5162.