



MONTANA OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

School Year 2024-2025 Annual Report

406-444-2501

Helena, MT 59620

<https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Management-Operations/School-Nutrition>

** indicates small font size warning.*



MEET THE TEAM

OPI School Nutrition Programs

Director	Christine Emerson, MS, RD
Assistant Director	Erin Turner, BS, DTR, SNS
Summer Food Service Program Specialist	Sarah Kuhn, RD
Program Specialist, FFVP Manager	Sydney Dickinson, MS, RD, LN
Program Specialist	Rachel Ariaz, BS
Program Specialist	Valerie Evans, MPH, RD
Program Specialist	Ryan Beaudoin, BS
Food Distribution Manager	Erin Benson
Farm to School Specialist	Amber Lewis, BS
Data Analyst	Alie Wolf
Data Processor	Ashley Bodle
Administrative Assistant	Tarryn Erickson
Project Manager	Bitsey Draur
Software Developer	Kelley Larsen



MEET THE TEAM

Montana Team Nutrition

Team Nutrition Co-Director	Molly Stenberg, RD, LN
Team Nutrition Co-Director Farm to School Coordinator	Jay Stagg
Program Lead	Haley Scott, MPH
Administrative Coordinator	Kylie Cassidy, BA
School Meals Support Program Coordinator	Kate Huston

Contact Information

Montana Team Nutrition Programs

Montana State University
PO Box 173370
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<https://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/contact.html>
<https://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/>

Montana Office of Public Instruction

School Nutrition Programs
PO Box 202501
Helena, MT 59620-2501

406-444-2501

<https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Management-Operations/School-Nutrition>



MONTANA STUDENTS THAT QUALIFY FOR FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH



48.70% of students



Bainville Public Schools

Noxon Public Schools



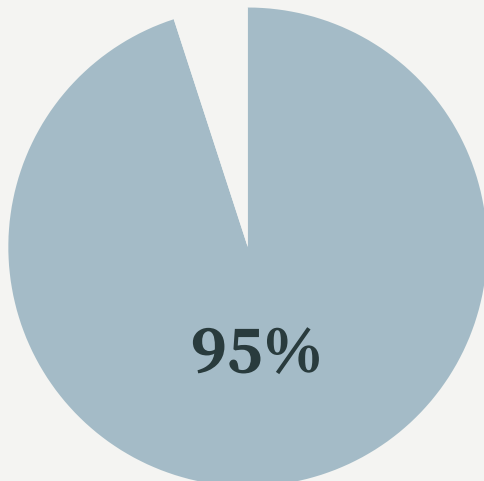
TOTAL LUNCHES SERVED

12.09 MILLION

TOTAL REVENUE TO SCHOOLS

61.7 MILLION

SCHOOLS THAT OFFER BOTH BREAKFAST AND LUNCH



SCHOOL SITES PROVIDING ALL FREE MEALS THROUGH THE COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION



251 out of 567 eligible school sites.



Mountain Plains Regional Farm to School Summit *

PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED *

In school year (SY) 2024-2025 the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) School Nutrition Programs (SNP) administered U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs:

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Afterschool Snack Program (ASP)
- Special Milk Program (SMP)
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- USDA Food Distribution Program (USDA Foods)
- DOD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DOD Fresh)
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)
- Montana Team Nutrition Program; Farm to School
- SUN Bucks (Summer EBT)

SNPs reimburse sponsors and distribute USDA Foods for meals served to children, teach workshops for school personnel, ensure that schools implement federal regulations, and provide nutrition education for students. Sponsors include: public and private schools; government agencies; and nonprofit residential child care institutions, organizations, and camps.

VISION *

Empower school nutrition program professionals with knowledge as community leaders to provide **equitable** access to healthy meals, **nutrition education**, and food systems that **support the success** of Montana's children.

MISSION *

The OPI School Nutrition, including Montana Team Nutrition, **collaborates** with partners to provide program sponsors with **training**, support, and resources to **strengthen program integrity** and access to **healthy meals**.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES *

- Children's health and academic success are furthered through community-driven partnerships and solutions, bringing recognition to the vital role of Montana's passionate child nutrition professionals.
- As stewards of public trust and funds, equitable resources and benefit provisions are effectively and efficiently offered with indiscriminate respect for all.
- Dedication to providing exceptional customer service by remaining responsive and adaptable to the dynamic experiences and strengths of sponsors and community partners.
- Decision making and operations management are seeded in evidence-based practices and real-time data.
- Valuing continuous learning inspires ongoing professional development and leads to opportunities for the celebration of progressive accomplishments.
- Training and technical assistance activities yield strengthened self-efficacy and program outcomes.
- Investments in local food sources promote sustainable food system procurement and practices.
- Sponsor and school wellness culture are inclusive, supportive, and strengthen academic success and wellbeing.



TRAINING PROGRAM STAFF

OPI and Montana Team Nutrition staff are located statewide to better serve **rural districts**, providing essential professional development for all roles, including food service directors, claim contacts, business clerks, and determining officials.

OPI School Nutrition Programs

+80 hours of continuing education provided by OPI SNP

32 webinars hosted online and shared to an online repository

2 conferences presented at to provide training to school nutrition staff including:

- Montana School Nutrition Association (SNA) Conference
- Montana Association of School Business Officials Conference



Montana SNA Conference Room

Montana Team Nutrition

- **10 webinars** for school nutrition program staff on topics related to reducing sugar and sodium, scratch cooking, and Indigenous recipes.
- **3 culinary events** trained 65 school nutrition professionals in knife skills and advanced culinary techniques.
- **Technical assistance provided to 57 schools/partners** to expand Team Nutrition and Farm to School reach.



Menu Planning & Production Records

10-2-2024

Putting Montana Students First

OPI School Nutrition Wednesday Webinars



GRANTS *

FY 2025 NSLP Equipment Assistance Grants

\$31,220

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, distributed \$10 million to state agencies to competitively award Equipment Assistance Grants to eligible school food authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Montana OPI School Nutrition Programs competitively awarded these funds to nine school districts to make equipment purchases improving their school nutrition programs.

Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement

November 2022 - July 2025

\$727,981

Section 5(c) of the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 USC 714c(c)) Funds provided for the purpose of purchasing domestic, locally grown foods from local producers, small businesses, and socially disadvantaged farmers/producers for distribution to schools.

Farm to School State Formula Grant

September 2022 - September 2026

\$682,693

Section 1001 of the American Rescue Plan Act (Public Law 117-2). American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to State agencies administering the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency (supply chain resiliency). The funds support State agency efforts to coordinate and provide technical assistance to build and increase the capacity of participating institutions to procure and use local foods in program meals as well as provide agricultural education opportunities for participating children.

FY 2021 Technology Innovation Grant (nTIG)

September 2021 - September 2025

\$1,890,997

Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Public Law 117-103). Funds provided to State agencies for the purposes of developing, improving, and maintaining automated information technology systems used to operate and manage all Child Nutrition (CN) Programs.

FY 2023 Technology Innovation Grant (nTIG)

September 2023 - September 2026

\$373,134

Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Public Law 117-103). Funds provided to State agencies for the purposes of developing, improving, and maintaining automated information technology systems used to operate and manage all Child Nutrition (CN) Programs.



GRANTS CONTINUED *

\$957,836

FY 2025 Direct Certification Improvement Grant

November 2024 – September 2027

Section 749(h)(1)(A) and (C)(i) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010 (Public Law 111–80). Funds provided to State Agencies for the purposes of implementing, maintaining, and improving high performing direct certification systems.

\$339,958

FY 2024 Farm to School Grant

July 2024 - June 2026

The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.) establishes a Farm to School Program in order to assist eligible entities, through grants and technical assistance, in implementing farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

\$798,030

FY 2024 Team Nutrition Training Grant

September 2024 - September 2027

Team Nutrition Training Grants for State agencies that administer the NSLP are authorized under Public Law 111–296, which amended Section 19 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. As authorized under Section 6(a)(3) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, 42 USC 1755(a)(3), USDA FNS provides Team Nutrition Training Grants to support training and technical assistance for School Nutrition Professionals, nutrition education for students and their caregivers, and activities to build a healthy school nutrition environment.

\$746,268

FY 2024 Non-Competitive Technology Innovation Grant

September 2024 - September 2028

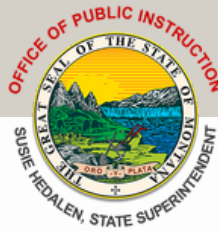
Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117-328) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (Public Law 118-122), to State agencies for the purposes of developing, improving, and maintaining automated information technology systems used to operate and manage Child Nutrition (CN) Programs (i.e., National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)).

\$541,924

FY 2025 Non-Competitive Technology Innovation Grant

September 2025 - September 2028

Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (Public Law 118- 42) and the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (Public Law 119-4) to State agencies for the purposes of developing, implementing, improving, and maintaining modernized information technology systems used to operate and manage Child Nutrition (CN) Programs (i.e., National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer EBT).



GRANTS CONTINUED

FY 2025 NSLP Equipment Assistance Grants

Funded by the USDA through the Agriculture Appropriations Act, these competitive grants help schools purchase equipment to improve food safety, support healthier meals, and expand student access to school lunches.

Total Grant: \$31,220

\$5,000	Geraldine Public Schools
\$5,000	Richey Public Schools
\$2,241	Cayuse Prairie Elementary
\$2,904	Box Elder Public Schools
\$4,881	Rau Elementary
\$4,131	Sweet Grass County HS
\$2,794	Glasgow K-12 Schools
\$3,021	Wibaux K-12 Schools
\$1,248	North Star Public Schools

Healthy Meal Incentive (HMI) Recognition Award Sub Grant

The Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Initiative, led by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and Action for Healthy Kids, provided sub grants and recognition awards to schools for improving student nutrition.

Total Grant: \$7,000

\$1,000	Dillon Elementary
\$1,000	Geraldine Public Schools
\$1,000	Somers Elementary
\$1,000	Whitefish Public Schools
\$1,000	Bozeman Public Schools
\$1,000	Three Forks Public Schools
\$1,000	Belgrade Public Schools



FEDERAL MEAL REIMBURSEMENT RATES

Effective July 1st 2024 – June 30th 2025

National School Lunch Program

Category	60% or More	+ 9 cents	Less Than 60%	+ 9 cents
Free	4.45	4.54	4.43	4.52
Reduced	4.05	4.14	4.03	4.12
Paid	0.44	0.53	0.42	0.51

Schools may qualify for the “60% or more” lunch reimbursement if during the second preceding year 60% or more of lunches served were free or reduced price. The additional nine cents lunch reimbursement is made available to schools certified to be in compliance with the meal pattern requirements.

Average increase from SY23-24 to SY24-25 rates across all categories is approximately **4.59%**.

School Breakfast Program

Category	Severe Need	Non-Severe Need
Free	2.84	2.37
Reduced	2.54	2.07
Paid	0.39	0.39

Schools may qualify for the "severe need" breakfast reimbursements if during the second preceding year 40% or more of lunches served were free or reduced price.

Average increase from SY23-24 to SY24-25 rates across all categories is approximately **3.72%**.



Afterschool Snack Program

Category	Area Eligible	Regular
Free	1.21	1.21
Reduced	N/A	0.60
Paid	N/A	0.11

An Afterschool Snack Program site is area eligible if it is located at a school or in the attendance area of a school where at least 50% of the enrolled children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. All students at an area-eligible site receive an afterschool snack at no charge and schools claim all snacks served at the free rate.

Average increase from SY23-24 to SY24-25 rates across all categories is approximately **5.07%**.

Special Milk Program

Program	All Milk	Paid Milk	Free Milk
Pricing Program without Free Option	0.27	N/A	N/A
Pricing Programs with Free Option	N/A	0.27	Average cost per ½ pint of milk
Non-pricing Programs	0.27	N/A	N/A

Average increase from SY23-24 to SY24-25 rates across all categories is approximately **2.86%**.

Summer Food Service Program

Meal Type	Rural and Self-Prep Sites	Vended Urban Sites
Breakfast	3.08	3.03
Lunch/Supper	5.40	5.30
Snacks	1.28	1.25

Average increase from SY23-24 to SY24-25 rates across all categories is approximately **3.91%**.



PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE



Choteau Public Schools



Medicine Lake K-12 Schools

Program	Meals/Snacks	Reimbursement / Entitlement
School Breakfast Program	6,259,047	\$12,947,653
National School Lunch Program	12,086,574	\$34,876,902
Afterschool Snack Program	257,316	\$278,069
Special Milk Program	16,937	\$4,990
Summer Food Service Program	1,051,604	\$4,554,685
Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program	—	\$2,965,171
USDA Foods Entitlement & DOD Fresh	—	\$6,116,828
Totals	19,671,478	\$61,744,297



SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

The federally funded School Breakfast Program (SBP) ensures students begin their day with a nutritious meal by providing free or low-cost breakfasts. Administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, the program flows from state agencies to local school food authorities, which receive reimbursements to operate nonprofit meal services in schools and residential childcare institution.*

69% of breakfast meals are served to Free & Reduced priced-eligible students *



Total Meals Served

6,259,047



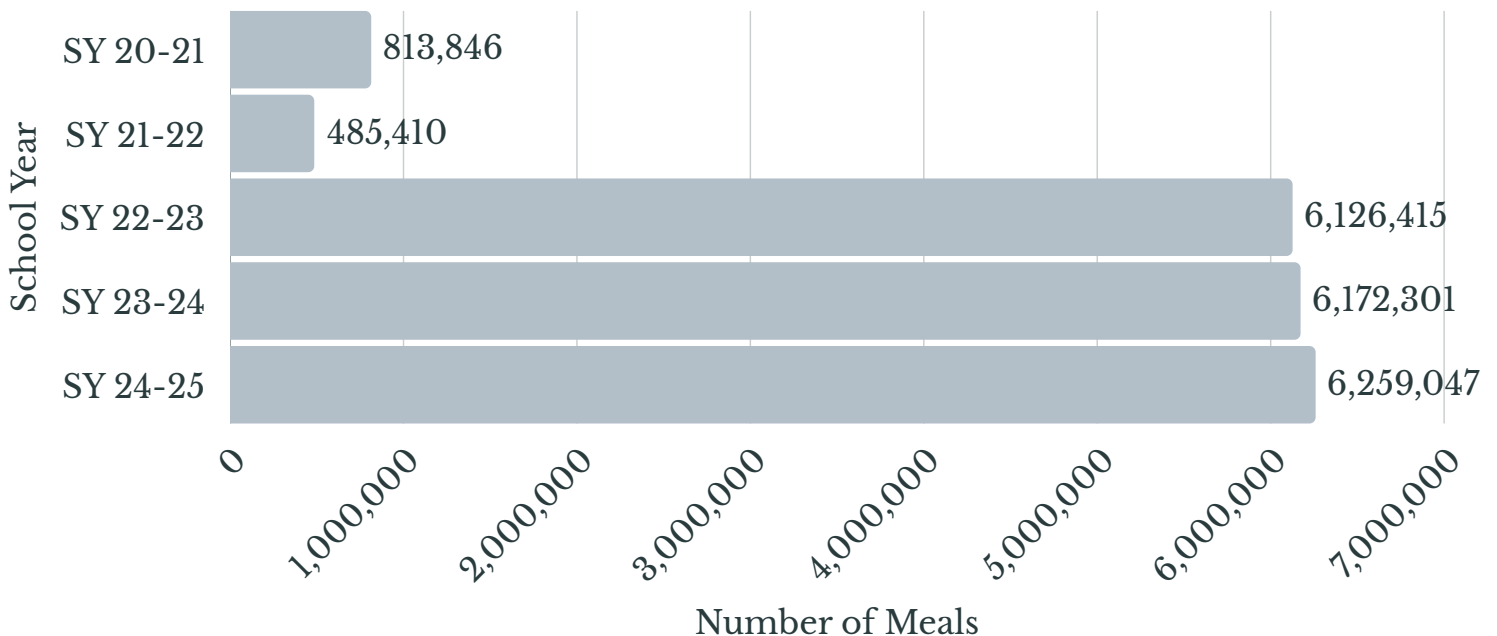
+1.39%

Increase from SY23-24



Fairview School District

5-Year Growth in School Breakfasts





NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM



Total Meals Served

12,086,574



-0.09%
Decrease from SY23-24

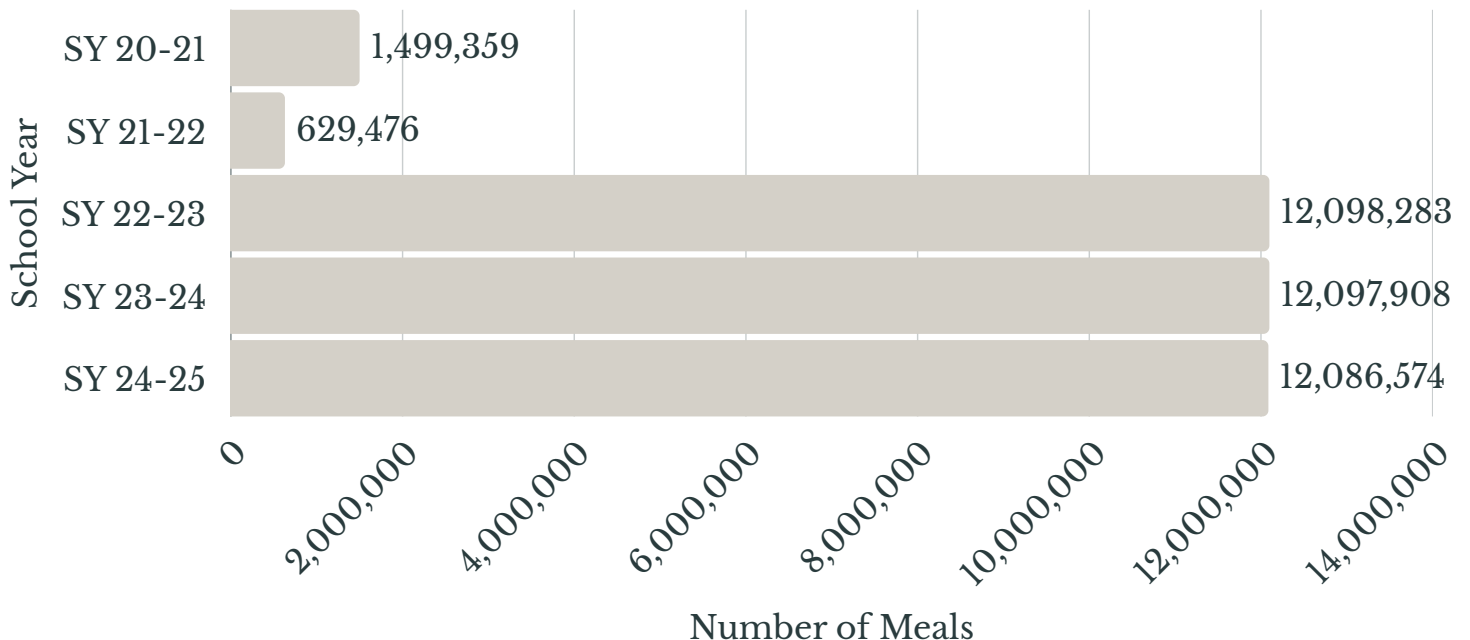
Established in 1946, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to students daily. Administered by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and flowing through state agencies, the program provides federal reimbursements to schools and residential childcare institutions to support nonprofit meal services.*

62% of lunch meals are served to Free & Reduced priced-eligible students *



Power Public Schools

5-Year Growth in School Lunches





FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAM

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) is a federally assisted grant program that provides elementary school students with a free fresh produce snack during the school day. By introducing children to different fruits and vegetables they might not otherwise experience, the program helps build lifelong healthy eating habits, improve overall nutrition, and supports a more vibrant learning environment.



Kalispell Public Schools, Local Apples

214

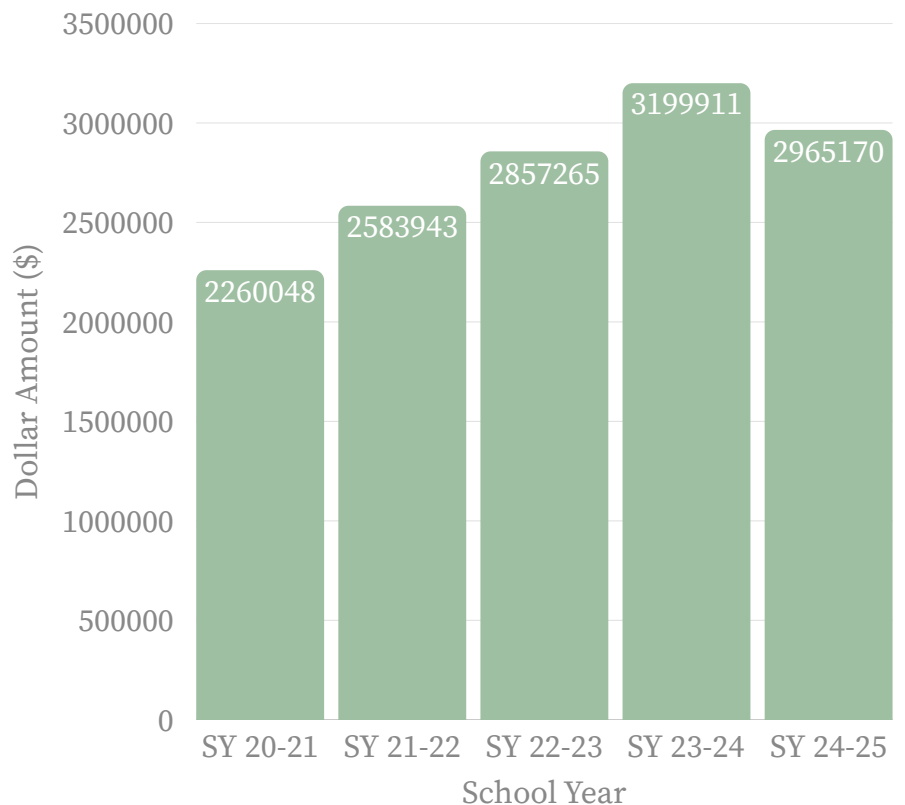
participating school sites

39,949

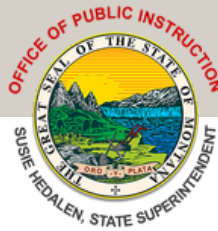
students with access to the FFVP snack at participating sites

Annual FFVP Allocations by School Year

*Note: The SY 24-25 decrease reflects higher school spending of FY 23 FFVP funds, resulting in less carryover to SY24-25. Total federal grant support from the USDA remained stable.**



Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, Local Butternut Squash



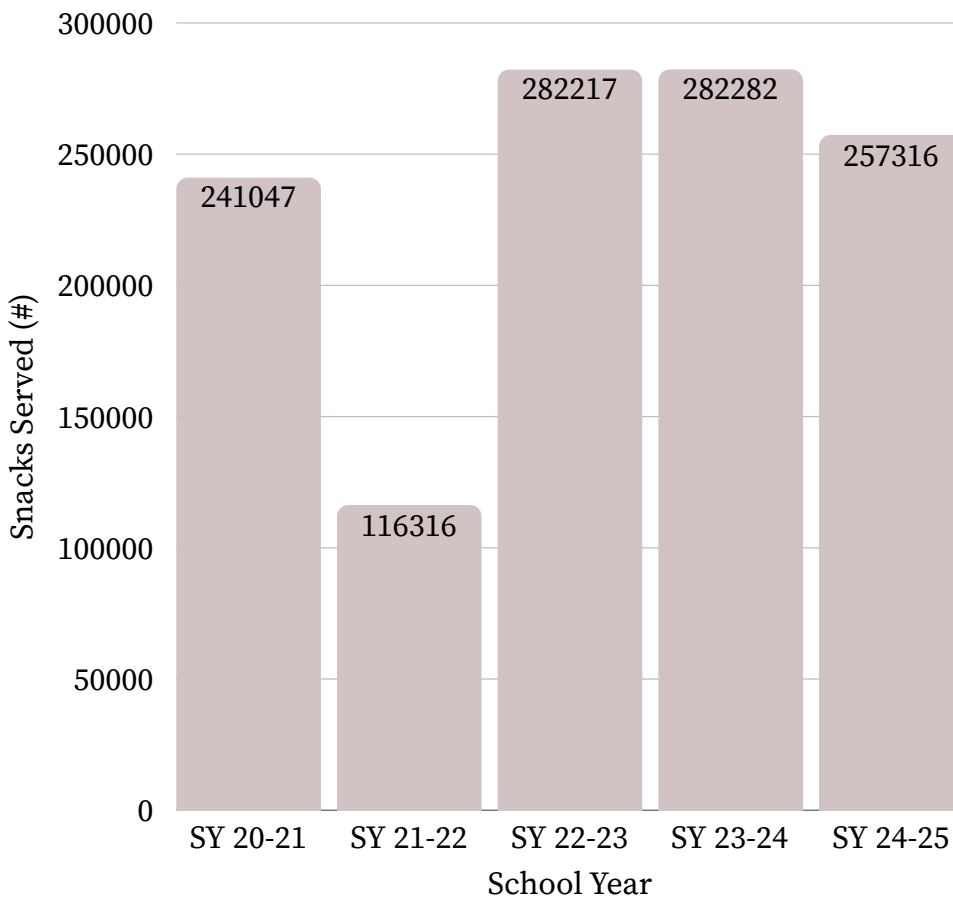
AFTERSCHOOL SNACK PROGRAM



Potomac Schools

The Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) provides reimbursements to schools for serving nutritious snacks to children in supervised afterschool activities. To qualify, programs must offer regularly scheduled educational or enrichment activities in a structured environment. This service helps fill the afternoon hunger gap, ensuring students receive a nutritional boost after the school day ends.

Snacks Served Per School Year



114

number of participating school sites



SPECIAL MILK PROGRAM

The Special Milk Program (SMP) provides federal reimbursements to help public and nonprofit schools, child care institutions, and summer camps offer fluid milk to children who do not operate other federal meal programs like the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).



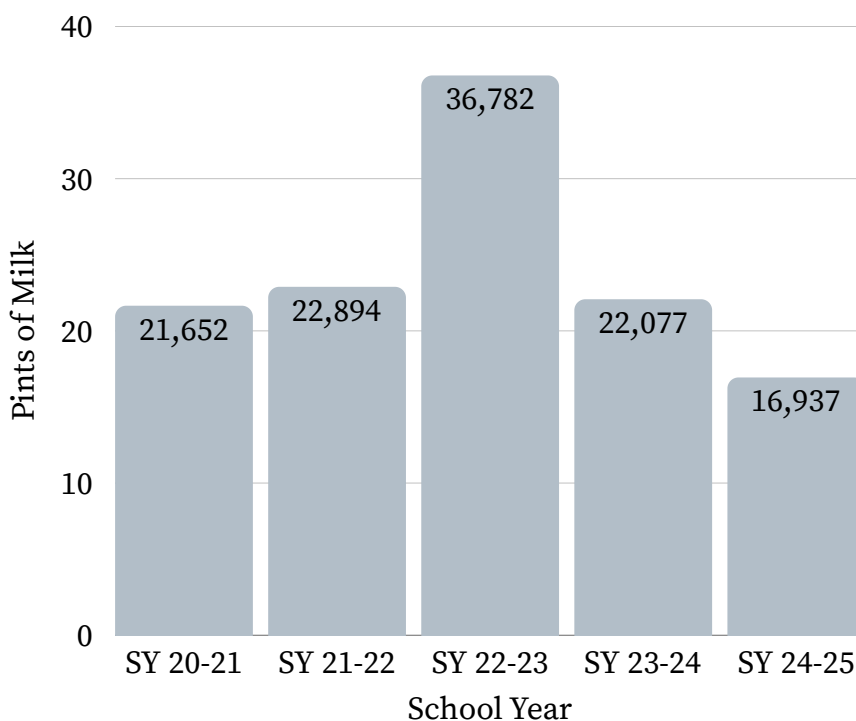
16,937

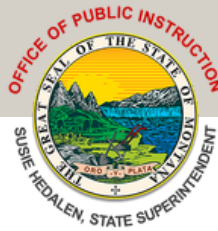
pints of milk served in the SMP this school year

7

small schools operated the SMP that *do not* offer breakfast or lunch to students.

Pints of Milk Served Per School Year





USDA FOOD AND DOD FRESH

USDA Foods provides schools with quality, 100% American-grown foods, helping to lower overall food costs while supporting domestic agriculture. This includes staples like meats, grains, fruits, and vegetables.

DoD Fresh is a partnership with the Dept. of Defense that allows schools to use a portion of their USDA Food entitlement to purchase a wide variety of fresh and regional produce for student meals.

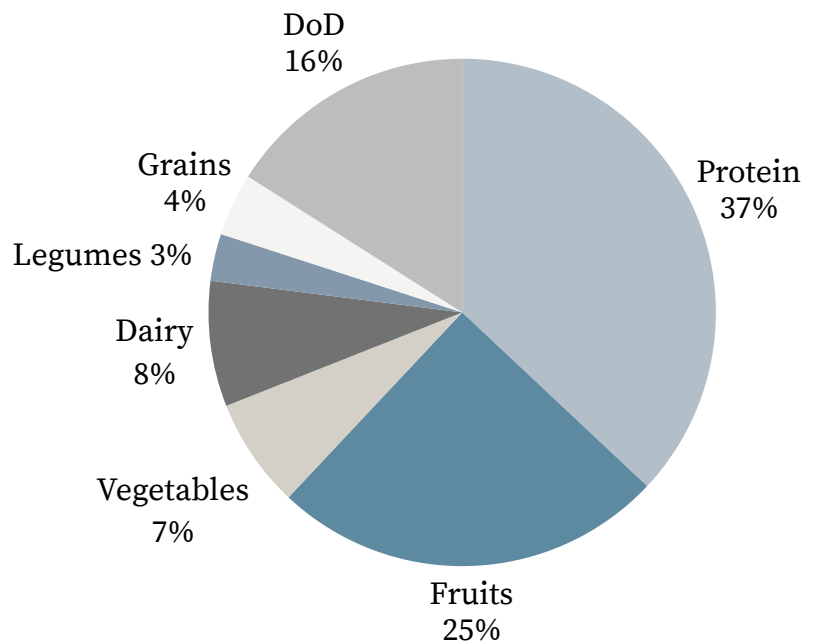
\$6,116,828

Total Annual Entitlement

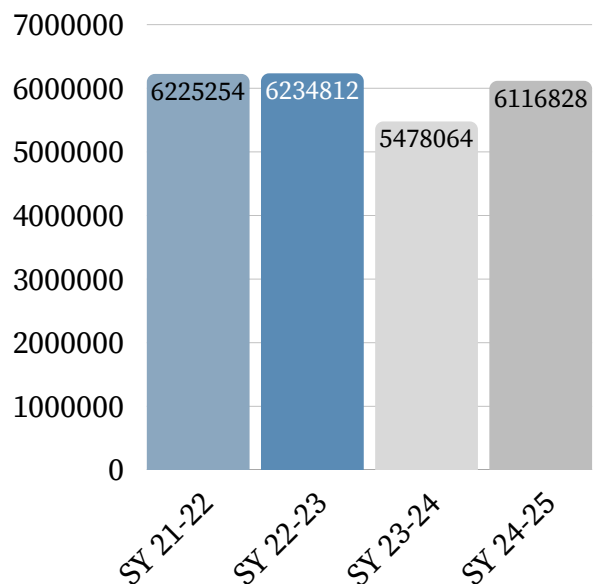
\$813,082

Diverted to DoD Fresh

Types of Food Purchased



Amount of Entitlement Over the Years



Erin Benson
Food Distribution Manager
with Montana Marinara



SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals to children in low-income areas through eligible organizations, primarily in the summer months when most schools are closed for instruction. USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers SFSP sites. SFSP sites include schools, camps, parks, playgrounds, housing projects, community centers, churches, and other public sites where children gather in the summer.

Typically, sites are eligible to offer free USDA-funded meals and snacks if:

- The sites operate in areas where at least half of the children come from families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty level; or
- School data must indicate that the proposed meal site is located in the attendance area of a school where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. *

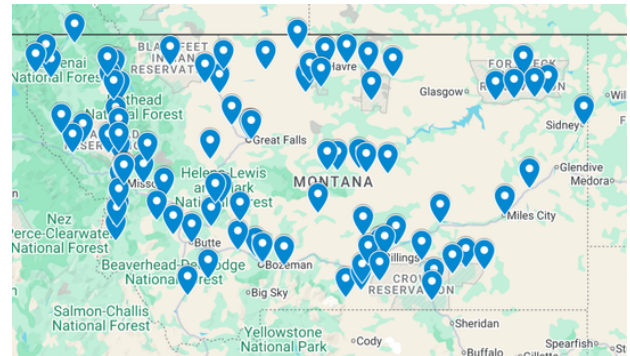
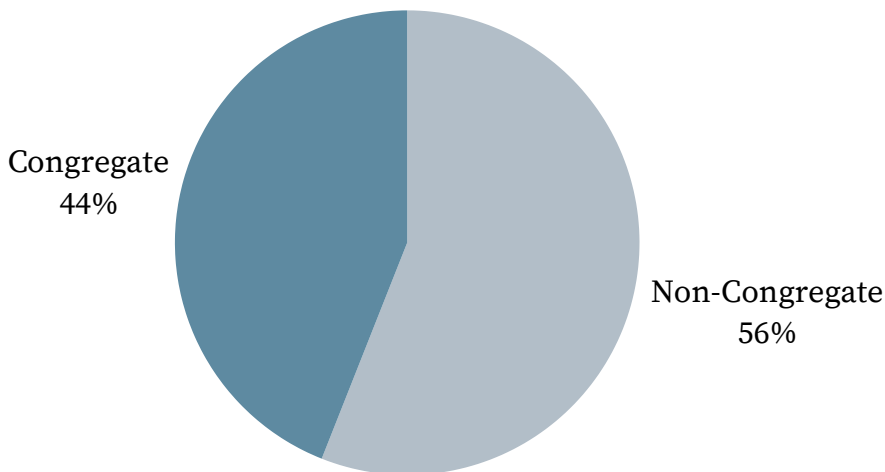


More summer food options for more summer smiles

98 total sponsors across Montana

Congregate vs Non-Congregate Meals Served

Montana has seen a 10% increase in SFSP meals served since the introduction of the Rural Non-Congregate meal service option.



Visual of sponsors around Montana

287 total sites across Montana



Total Meals Served

1,051,604



+2.00%

Increase from Summer 2024



SUN BUCKS PROGRAM



The SUN Bucks program (previously known as Summer EBT) is a federal nutrition program that provides families with \$120 per eligible school-age child to purchase groceries during the summer months. It is designed to supplement other services, like Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meals, when school is out.

This new USDA program began in Montana in 2024. The Montana OPI and DPHHS administered the program together in the summer of 2025.

\$8,139,720

dollars issued to
eligible children

67,856

children issued
benefits





THE MONTANA TEAM NUTRITION PROGRAM

Montana Team Nutrition provided engaging trainings to schools across the state to increase their knowledge and confidence around the new meal pattern. Training was delivered through Wednesday webinars, the Montana School Nutrition Association Conference, and standalone workshops focused on reducing sugar and sodium through scratch cooking, knife skills, food label reading, and innovative salad bar strategies.

Team Nutrition and Farm to School By the Numbers:

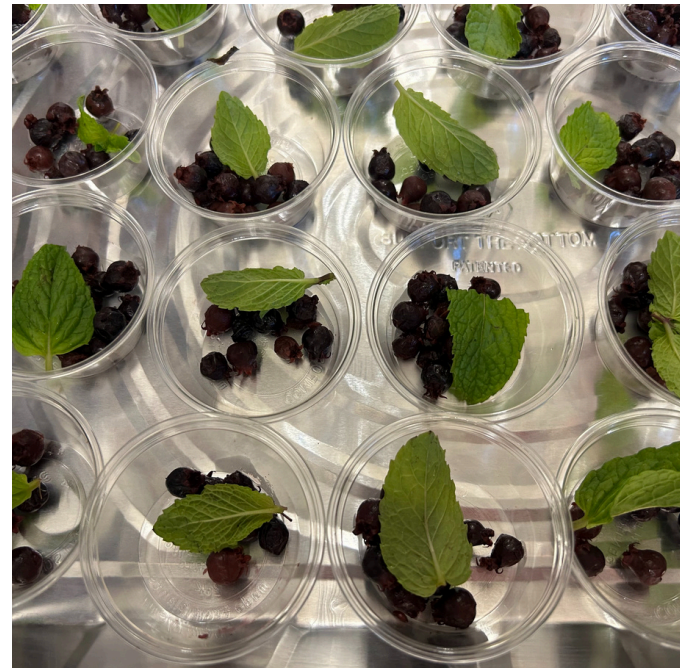
43 Training opportunities offered

85 Hours of training offered

108 School districts reached

42% Of Montana's school districts reached

181 Hours of individual technical assistance offered to schools and partners



Sacred Sips: Indigenous Tea Traditions in School Nutrition at Browning Public Schools



Collaborative work during culinary training



These activities were funded by a 2024 USDA Team Nutrition Training Grant



MONTANA FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Thanks to a 2024 USDA Farm to School Grant, the Montana Farm to School program expanded opportunities for local food access and education across the state. Highlights include the newest addition to the Montana Harvest of the Month calendar, the 11th annual Crunch Off, the launch of a new wholesale local foods map, and a dedicated Farm to School track at the Montana School Nutrition Association Conference.

Key Highlights



The newest **Montana Harvest of the Month** seasonal item, the potato was released.



23,473 Montanans crunched into local foods to celebrate the annual **MT Crunch Off** event.



Partnered with **Abundant Montana** to create a wholesale local food map, allowing schools to purchase larger volumes of local products.



Swanky Roots Tour at the Montana School Nutrition Association Conference

Montana School Nutrition Association Conference Farm to School Track

Participants had the opportunity to get their hands dirty at the following sessions:

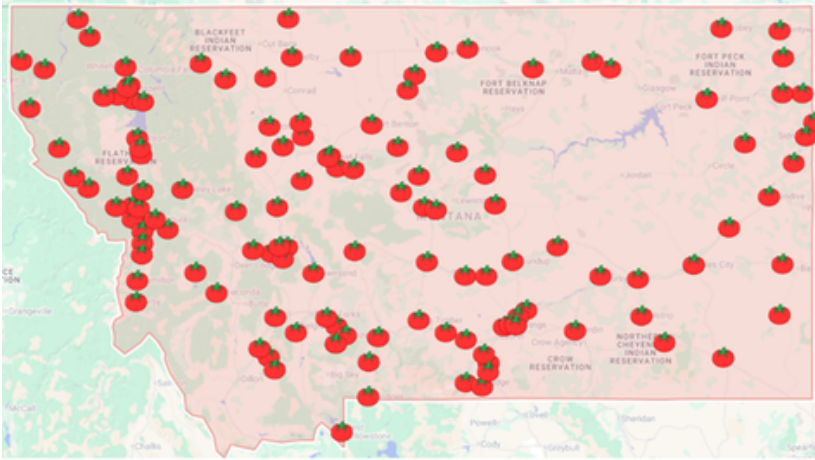
- Native Plant and Community Garden
- Teaching Kids to Grow and Cook Food
- HOM in Your Community
- Taste Tests in the Cafeteria and Classroom
- Flavoring with Fresh Herbs
- Tea Blends and Infused Waters
- Farm to School Lunch with all Local Ingredients



School Nutrition Professionals visited Park County's Farm to School Program



MONTANA MARINARA



Map of 149 Montana Schools that Received Montana Marinara in SY2024-2025

Montana Marinara is the first in a line of locally sourced value-added products designed with schools in mind.

MT OPI diverts USDA Foods canned diced tomatoes to Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) in Ronan, MT.

MMFEC sources Montana-grown carrots, onions, squash, and safflower oil from the Western Montana Growers Cooperative and the Northwest Food Hub Network.

Updated Packing for Montana Schools
Montana Marinara is now available in shelf-stable jugs, reducing the need for limited freezer space and making it easier for schools to store and utilize local products year-round

\$44,637
dollar value of local ingredients in Marinara from SY22-23 to SY24-25

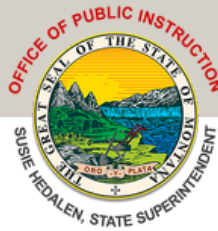
4,022
Cases distributed to schools from SY22-23 to SY24-25

34,130 lbs
of local ingredients used from SY22-23 to SY24-25

132 average miles traveled from farm to processor



Erin Benson, Foods Distribution Manager with Montana Marinara Samples



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1. mail:

U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

2. fax:

(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

3. email:

program.intake@usda.gov.

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