

FOOD, FARMS & THE FUTURE OF THE MISSOULA VALLEY

COMMUNITY FOOD & AGRICULTURE COALITION
WWW.MISSOULACFAC.ORG

Protecting agricultural land means changing the way growth patterns shape our landscape and planning for farms and ranches to be a part of our community years into the future. But why should we bother? There are several reasons to conserve Missoula County's farm and ranchland:

★ **Our COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY** requires that we sustain agricultural lands for current and future generations. With rising oil prices, increasing food shortages, and a changing global climate, we need to enhance and retain the ability to feed ourselves.

★ **Local food systems offer ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT opportunities.** Markets for locally grown and processed foods are expanding across western Montana, putting more money into the hands of farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

★ **Farmland is FINITE AND IRREPLACEABLE.** Only 8% of Missoula County's land base has agriculturally important soils, and much of that lies along the valley floor, directly in the path of development. Many of these farm and ranchlands have already been lost, although no comprehensive inventory exists. We simply cannot manufacture good soil.

★ **Agricultural land generates more in local TAX REVENUES than it costs in government services.** On average, for every incoming tax dollar, residential land costs a local government \$1.19 to service, while farm and ranchlands cost \$0.39.¹

★ **Farmlands have SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND HISTORIC VALUES.** Working farms and ranches create a sense of place in Missoula County. They are part of our heritage and vital to our legacy.

★ **Well-managed agricultural land provides ECOSYSTEM SERVICES,** such as flood control, groundwater recharge, wildlife habitat, and open space.

Farmland Trends in Missoula County:

- **Agriculture is important to our economy:** Missoula County producers sell \$8,361,000 worth of agricultural products, annually.² Missoula County residents eat much more than that, providing lots of room to grow.
- **Missoula County is losing its farm and ranchlands:** Between 1960 and 2000, the County's population increased 114%. Meanwhile, the acres in agricultural production decreased 34%.³ From 1990 to 2005, 15,660 acres were subdivided, most of which was outside the city limits of Missoula.⁴
- **Sprawl unnecessarily threatens the future of farming and ranching:** The amount of residential land each person takes up has more than doubled since 1970.⁵ The average new residential lot in Missoula County is now 2.2 acres.⁶

Farmland Trends across the U.S.:

- America loses two acres of farmland every minute. From 1992 to 1997, more than 6 million acres of agricultural land—an area the size of Maryland—were irreversibly converted to non-farming uses.⁷
- The U.S. is developing the most fertile and productive land 30% faster than unproductive land.
- 86% of U.S. fruits and vegetables, 63% of dairy products, 39% of meat products, and 35% of grains are produced in urban-influenced areas, right in the path of development.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

For starters, it's not just about agricultural land. CFAC sees a future where houses, farms, and ranches thrive together; people are well-fed and food secure; family farms are supported within a community food system; and beginning farmers and ranchers can access agricultural land to feed the rest of us. We are not there yet. Moving towards this vision will take great care and strategic planning. Here's an outline of CFAC's strategy:

✎ **GROW MARKETS for local foods.** Western Montana is gobbling up locally produced food in schools, universities, restaurants, farmers' markets, and grocery stores. CFAC has been working to create new markets and ensure fresh, local food is accessible to families of all income levels. Our programs include: Farm to School, EBT (food stamps at farmers' markets), Buy Fresh Buy Local (restaurant initiative). What we've learned is that the market's appetite for locally produced food often exceeds the supply, creating new business opportunities for agricultural enterprises.

✎ **Develop conservation strategies with these GOALS in mind:**

1. Comprehensively protect the agricultural lands that are most viable for farming & ranching.
2. Provide predictability to developers, planners, policy makers, and residents.
3. Facilitate producers' access to agricultural land.
4. Respect the interests of agricultural landowners and the equity built in their land.

✎ **Implement PLANNING POLICIES AND TOOLS, such as:**

- **Inventory Agricultural Lands** to determine which properties are the most viable for farming and ranching. To inform farmland conservation strategies, local government and stakeholders need to know which farmlands remain in good quality.
- **Transfer of Development Rights** is a market-based planning tool that relies on the voluntary exchange of development rights. TDRs could fit some areas that are already zoned, face high development pressure, and have logical areas to both encourage and discourage growth.
- **Farmland Mitigation Ordinances** first discourage the development of farmland, and second ensure that the loss of agricultural land is mitigated by permanent farmland protection elsewhere.

✎ **Help BEGINNING FARMERS AND RANCHERS get started.** While we protect agricultural land, we need to ensure that producers can access it. Aspiring farmers face many challenges: how will they find and afford land; where will they get the production and marketing skills to run a viable business? Two programs can help western Montana give the next generation of growers the right stepping stones to feed our swelling population:

- **Land Link Montana** is a farm and ranch transfer program that CFAC is piloting to help aspiring producers find farmland and establish viable tenure arrangements. Visit us at www.landlinkmontana.org.
- **Incubator farms** support growers in establishing—or “incubating”—their businesses. Typically, beginning farmers lease land and share equipment and infrastructure, as they learn the ropes of farming, develop their markets, and refine their business plans.

¹ *Cost of Community Services Fact Sheet*, American Farmland Trust, August 2007.

² 2002 U.S. Census of Agriculture.

³ Neva Hassanein and Maxine Jacobson, editors, *Our Foodshed in Focus: Missoula County Food and Agriculture by the Numbers*, Missoula County Food Assessment, 2004.

⁴ Neva Hassanein, “Rooted in the Soil,” *Edible Missoula* (Spring 2008).

⁵ Jacquelyn Corday, *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 2006 Update.

⁶ Patrick O'Herren, Missoula County Rural Initiatives, Presentation in 2006.

⁷ *Farming on the Edge: Sprawling Development Threatens America's Best Farmland*, American Farmland Trust, 2002.