Community Food & Agriculture Coalition

Strategic Plan 2017-2021

Our Challenge

The way we grow, harvest, process and consume our food has dramatically changed in our lifetime. The pesticides and hormones used to grow our food are having a profound impact on our health and that of the planet. The increasing use of fertilizers and the huge distances that food now travels from farm to market contribute significantly to climate change, have long-term consequences on the food system’s viability and weakens farm economies. An aging farmer population and the displacement of family farms by multinational corporate farms put our ability to produce food in the future at risk.

CFAC envisions a future where houses, farms and ranches grow together; people are well-fed and food secure; family farms are sustainable, successful, and supported within our region; and farmers and ranchers can access the land they need to meet our growing food demand.

Lifeline Produce. Photo by Jeremy Lurgio
The dominant, corporate-controlled food system is unsustainable and has taken decision-making around food and agriculture out of local hands. In response to this problem hundreds of communities across the United States are working to challenge industrial agricultural by creating resilient local food systems where small local farmers are producing fresh, healthy foods for their communities. To ensure we have a stable, healthy food system for our children and grandchildren we must support and encourage a new generation of farmers, protect prime farmland from development and create viable markets for local, sustainably produced local food.

In Montana

In Montana, 70% of food consumed was grown and produced locally up until the 1950s. By 2007 less than 10% of Montana's food was produced in state (National Center for Appropriate Technology). Food currently travels, on average, over 1500 miles before reaching our plates, creating both environmental and economic challenges. The average farmer is 59, and ownership of 57% of all farmland will change hands within the next decade (American Farmland Trust). Many Montana families (16% of the population) are unable to afford healthy food on a consistent basis without having to seek emergency food assistance (Montana Kids Count).

Our Solution

The Community Food & Agriculture Coalition (CFAC) was established in 2005 to bring a collaborative and innovative approach to solving systemic weaknesses in the ways we produce, access and consume food. Following a robust Community Food Assessment (CFA), the city and county of Missoula sanctioned CFAC to lead the effort and pledged in a Joint Resolution to “actively support efforts to increase the security of our local food system so that it is based on sustainable agriculture which enhances the local economy and builds regional self-reliance and so that all citizens have access to nutritious and affordable food.”

Photo by Bryony Schwan

It is time to transform agriculture into a sustainable enterprise, one based on systems that can be employed for centuries -- not decades -- without undermining the resources on which agricultural productivity depends.

~ Union of Concerned Scientists
Food systems are complex and comprise many components, from inputs (land, seeds, water, etc.), to producers (farmers, ranchers), to food processing, to storage, distribution and finally to consumers, including those who cannot afford healthy food. Through the CFA and the input from stakeholders, CFAC determines where there are opportunities to fill the gaps in the system and initiates new solutions.

**Accomplishments**

To date, CFAC has improved Western Montana’s food landscape by strengthening the connections between its distinct but related segments, including farms, farmers, and markets.

**Farm Lands**

- CFAC is recognized as the leader in the movement to conserve farmland in Western Montana, mobilizing over 200 people consistently over eight years, in support of public policies that will protect farmland from urban sprawl.
- Successfully defended attacks on farmland preservation in the state legislature, killing 16 bills aimed at removing farmland protection statewide.
- Crafted a successful chicken ordinance in Missoula, allowing up to six hens per household.

**Farmers**

- Developed an interactive website, Farm Link Montana, to help beginning farmers find land, on-farm employment, mentorship and resources. Launched this summer, this site has attracted more than 5,000 users with over 30,000 page views.
- Created a robust training program for beginning farmers and ranchers with over 500 people in attendance at workshops and field days across the state.
- In 2016, partnered with statewide and national entities to assist three farmers in financing their farms through mini-grants, zero percent interest loans, federal loans and cost-shares.
Market

• Partnered with Missoula County Public Schools (K-12) to establish the Farm to School Program, serving over 4,000 pounds of food in the 2005-2006 school year, growing to nearly 43,000 pounds in 2008-2009. This program is now integrated into the budget and practice of the school food system.

• Established the state’s first SNAP (food stamps) program at the Missoula Farmer’s market. Approximately $25,000 SNAP dollars are spent annually. These funds go directly to farmers, helping to ensure their success, and re-circulating the money into our local economy.

• Increased SNAP sales at participating venues by 100% per year on average. Initiated a Double SNAP Dollar program to double the buying power for healthy foods in western MT. The program increased participation from $20,000 in 2015 to $35,000 this season. Over 1,600 people have benefitted with this program.

Goals 2017-2021

CFAC plans to increase the consumption of locally produced, sustainable food in western Montana from 10% to 20% by 2021 and to 30% by 2030 by making farming a more viable vocation, encouraging food policies that support a robust food system, and developing a network of new farmers successfully growing that food.

1. Protect all remaining farmlands, currently approximately 95,000 acres, within Missoula County's Planning Regions with the greatest development pressure (Missoula, Evaro, Huson-Frenchtown and Lolo) by mitigation policies and other conservation tools within the subdivision regulations by 2021.

2. Increase the number of successful beginning farmers and ranchers selling directly into the local food market and institutions (colleges, schools, hospitals etc.) in Western Montana to 25 new farmers by 2021.

3. Determine the percentage of local food purchased in western Montana and increase the market share to 20% in 2021.
The issue: Western Montana has experienced exponential growth in the last decade and the rich agricultural soils that once were so abundant in the valley floors are now quickly being converted to housing subdivisions. In the last 30 years, Missoula County lost 29,000 acres to development. Only 2% of our best soils remain undeveloped. To ensure that there is an abundance of locally grown food for the future, it is critical that policies are put in place to preserve these critical agricultural lands. CFAC is working to pressure the Missoula City and County governments to pass policies that protect farmland from development. Over the past decade, CFAC reviewed and opposed over 30 subdivisions that impact critical farmland, affecting over 15,000 acres that were converted to non-productive housing lots. Currently, there are just under 100,000 acres of cropland left to save, and while the large majority of this land is outside the Missoula valley, some of the best farmland and most critical soils are within the urban interface between Lolo, Missoula and Frenchtown where development pressure is greatest.

Activities

1. Create a groundswell of support sufficient to pass an Open Space Bond by November 2017 that would create a pool of funds to purchase conservation and restrictive easements on farmland. The bond should have specific language that prioritizes farmland preservation and quantifies how much money will be spent to conserve farmland.

2. Work with the University of Montana’s GIS Lab to develop a methodology to measure and track the amount, classification and location of agricultural lands at risk of development.

3. Work to ensure the adoption of a mitigation policy within the County Subdivision regulations that would require a percentage of any development proposal be set aside for agricultural purposes by April 2018.

4. Work to pass an agricultural enhancement area policy that would create financial and development incentives for landowners within the Missoula Valley that keep lands in active agricultural use, by November 2020.
The issue: The number of farmers in Montana has been steadily declining and the average farmer is now 59 years old. Ownership of 57% of all farmland will change hands within the next decade. However, the number of farmers producing food for local markets increased from 37 to 68 from 1997 to 2007 (Losing Ground: The Future of Farms and Food in Missoula County). If we want to increase the amount of locally produced food, then we need to encourage and support new farmers. However, new farmers and ranchers face many challenges when launching their new businesses including gaining access to land, markets, capital, networks and production education. Most of them need technical assistance and support. To ensure their success, CFAC provides workshops, trainings, technical assistance and other resources.

Note: A beginning farmer is defined as a farmer who has been farming for commercial production less than 10 years.

Activities

1. Provide training, resources and one-on-one technical assistance to 100 beginning farmers to develop at least 25 new successful agricultural businesses by 2021.

2. Help 750 farmers access land, mentorship opportunities, on-farm employment and other resources through the Farm Link Montana website by 2021. Increase number of unique users by five percent each year – currently 5,000 unique users have accessed this resource online.

3. Assist 50 farmers in identifying and obtaining farm financing. Offer financing support to 10 farmers annually, through Kiva (regionally) and Specialty Crop mini-grants (statewide).

4. Analyze market opportunities and obstacles for all beginning farmers.

5. Build a statewide network of 30 community service providers (such as Extension offices, CDCs, etc.) who work with 300 beginning farmers to better serve farmers across Montana. Provide an annual retreat and additional support as needed to service providers across the state.
Goal #3

*Markets: Determine the percentage of local food purchased in western Montana and increase the market share to 20% in 2021.*

**The issues:** In the last decade since the 2005 Community Food Assessment was completed, there has been a significant increase in the amount of food grown, processed and sold in western Montana, and especially Missoula County. Despite this growth, there is still much work to be done to increase public awareness, demand and markets for local food. Further, 16% of Montana’s population is unable to afford healthy food on a consistent basis, even though western Montana farmers are producing more than enough for everyone in the region to have fresh, healthy food on their tables. A sustainable food system is also an equitable system that benefits entire communities. As such CFAC works to increase the overall market share of local food in the region and to ensure food access needs are met.

To identify how our food system has advanced in the past 10 years and what gaps still exist, CFAC will commission an update of the 2005 Community Food Assessment. This assessment will focus on identifying the current level of regional food production and consumption, demand for local foods and barriers to inclusive participation in the food system. The results will inform needed education and identify potential market opportunities and better ways to make local food more accessible to more community members.

**Activities**

1. Coordinate and commission a 2017 Community Food Assessment, that incorporates best practice methodology to continually measure the region’s progress towards the goal of a 30% increase in local food production and consumption by 2030 (including metrics on low-income and minority participation in local food initiatives)

2. Increase public support of local food by coordinating disparate local marketing efforts into one robust branded partnership and marketing campaign, (such as “Montana Local”) that engages businesses, government, farmers, food retailers, restaurants and institutions to promote the benefits of eating locally grown food.

3. Increase institutional market opportunities by developing a collaborative network of at least 25 businesses engaged to re-
define food procurement and preparation, and create a food service model that can be duplicated in other regions.

4. Continue to support an inclusive food system by increasing participation in the Double SNAP Dollars program by 20% each year.

5. Engage low-income community members to identify one new strategic opportunity to increase access to healthy, local foods by 2021.

Capacity

To accomplish this CFAC will need to:

• Hire a development and communications person in 2016.
• Increase administrative support by summer 2017
• Update website and logo to better represent CFAC’s work.
• Recruit five additional board members with expertise in marketing, community outreach, and fund development.
• Revise board governance documents and practices.
• Create an annual event that significantly increases the public’s awareness of CFAC’s work and thus serves as a pipeline for increasing CFAC’s membership base.

In order to accomplish these initiatives, CFAC will require an increase in capacity and infrastructure including additional staff, more fundraising capacity and an expanded investor and membership base. In addition, CFAC will need a larger and highly engaged board of directors following clearly articulated board governance procedures.
Revenue

There are two basic factors that will drive increased revenue:

1. By further growing its community engagement and producing (one or more) highly impactful local engagement events, CFAC will increase its membership loyalty and connection. In addition, by educating its membership and the public about local food issues via its new communications plan, CFAC will show its supporters that its work goes beyond farmland conservation. These stronger emotional connections will generate more revenue from CFAC’s membership.

2. By being clear on CFAC’s future, the initiatives and programs that are needed and the impact CFAC has on the western Montana community, CFAC can better attract investment funding from private individuals, businesses and foundations.

CFAC will pursue significantly increased revenue in the following areas:

**Membership & Investments:** Increasing citizen engagement directly results in more people contributing. Increasing loyalty via compelling program goals and activities generates even more revenue as the average contribution increases. CFAC currently has 86 yearly contributors who contribute about $25,000 and plans to increase this amount to $175,000 by 2021. The ability to articulate a clear, aspirational direction is the best method of attracting major investments from the community.

**Grants:** Just as with individual investors, grants are more likely to be awarded to those organizations that are focused on innovation and community impact. CFAC will attract larger and more frequent grants, as specific initiatives are developed that are innovative and support the overall direction outlined here. CFAC will increase our grant income by 100% over the life of this plan, and obtain at least three new foundation sources each year.

**Sponsorships:** By launching a robust branded partnership and marketing campaign that engages business and others to promote the benefits of eating locally grown food, CFAC will be able to secure significant corporate support via sponsorships.
## Projected Budget 2017 - 2021

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