Open Space Bond Money Used to Protect Vital Farm Land

By Jim Cusker and Nancy Heil

Development pressure in western Montana is making land more valuable for growing houses than for growing food. Level farm lands in valley bottoms require minimal preparation prior to home construction and are highly desirable for development. This has resulted in an alarming loss of highly productive land in Missoula County. Farming cannot compete economically with development. While many farmers and ranchers love their life style, they are understandably tempted by the financial gain of selling their land to developers.

One key link in supporting a local food system is ensuring that land is still available for agricultural uses. In November 2006 Missoula County voters approved a $10 million dollar bond to preserve open space in Missoula County. One purpose of the funds is for conserving working ranches, farms, and forests. Four of the six bond projects approved to date protect working farms and ranches through conservation easements that limit future development. The owners give up development rights while retaining ownership, which allows them to continue using the land for agriculture. Two of these purchases protect 601 acres of farm and ranch land in the Potomac Valley. A third purchase will enable the long time residents of Grass Valley to continue farming on their 341 acres of historic agricultural land west of Missoula. The fourth purchased easement protects an additional 3520 acres of a combined ranch and timber operation at Sunset Hill up the Blackfoot. Although the owners in each instance receive compensation for excluding development, they have given up a much higher potential income in the future. The money they receive from the purchased easement allows them to remain on the land, continue doing what they love to do, and protects a national treasure for generations to come.

Local Kids Weigh in on Local Food

By Erin Foster West

“This is the best lunch ever! When is the next one?” “I’ve never had Flathead cherries before.” “We should have Montana pizza everyday!” Does this sound like a conversation in a school lunch room? It was on Montana Meal Day, October 10, 2007, at all the elementary and middle schools in Missoula as part of the Missoula County Public School Farm to School Program. On this day students enjoyed a delicious lunch of apples, cheese pizza, and a cherry parfait made from locally grown ingredients. Cheese for the pizza came from Lifeline Farm in Victor, wheat for the crust was provided by Wheat Montana, cherries came from Fat Robin Farms in Polson, and yogurt came from Meadow Gold.

This is quite a change from the school lunches I remember as a kid. Who knows where the mysterious Stromboli came from and the only things I looked forward to were the chocolate cake and maple bars. The students I spoke with during the Montana Meal chowed down on their cherry parfaits and told me how much they liked the carrots and garden salad.

And it’s about time school lunch made a change. According to the Center for Disease Control, the prevalence for childhood obesity has doubled within the past 10 years and seventeen percent of children under 18 are overweight. In the same amount of time the rates for diabetes have almost tripled in Montana and this generation of school age children is the first generation to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) is working hard to make sure that Missoula

Continued on page 2
Local Kids Weigh in on Local Food …continued from page 1

does not fall into these statistics. The Farm to School program is a first step in ensuring our school lunches are healthier and more nutritious for Missoula children by serving more fresh produce while supporting local farmers. Thus far in the school year, MCPS has served cantaloupe from Dixon, peaches from Paradise, and pears from Stevensville. The schools also serve apples from various local vendors on a daily basis and all their baked goods contain whole wheat flour from Wheat Montana.

However, there is still a long way to go. Last year, three percent of MCPS Food and Nutrition budget was spent on local food, not including milk. Encourage your school, PTA group, school board, or local legislators to support the Farm to School program and increase the amount of local food served by public institutions.

To learn more about the Farm to School program contact Erin Foster West at missoulaf2s@montana.com or 549-0543 ext. 109.

Edible Missoula: A new regional food magazine debuts in Western Montana!

Magazine is a homegrown delight!

By Kristen Lee-Charlson

Western Montana will have a new source for in-depth information about local food, sustainable agriculture, and the traditions of the table: Edible Missoula. At the heart of the magazine is a commitment to sustaining the unique local flavors and economic viability of the region, showcasing the people and places that make the food from Western Montana distinctive.

Edible Missoula is a publication designed to celebrate the culinary heritage and abundance of local foods, season by season. Filled with engaging editorial and enticing photography, we will tell the stories of local farmers, vintners, brew masters, food artisans, chefs, and food related businesses in a manner that inspires consumers to actively seek local alternatives. The magazine will also have recipes, resources and other succulent surprises.

Join us! We are in search of:

- Writers
- Advertisers
- Ideas
- Magazine Distributors
- Supporters!

The inaugural issue will premiere January 2, 2008.

Edible Missoula is a member of Edible Communities, Inc, (ediblecommunities.com) a growing family of award-winning locally based publications around the country. Edible Missoula, a quarterly/seasonal publication, will be available free at selected retailers, at the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and other locations across Western Montana. Subscriptions will also be available for $28.00 per year.

Land Link Launches

By Paul Hubbard

Landowners and beginning farmers and ranchers are already enrolling in Land Link Montana, although we are just beginning to get our funding and structure established. As one landowner said, Land Link Montana will “help me find someone who could work the land, and I won’t have to go looking for them.” That someone could be a beginning producer, who enrolled in the program, or a farmer or rancher who needed to access more land for his or her operation.

Land Link Montana’s goal is to keep agricultural land under the stewardship of farmers and ranchers, as generations come and go. The program matches landowners with producers, who are looking for land, based on compatible interests. We also work with individuals to help them explore all of their options for entering or exiting an agricultural operation—especially those options that allow the next generation of growers to access fertile land.

How you can help:

1. Make a donation. We are currently looking for ways to fund this important program.
2. Offer insights on how to make it work for our region.
3. Sign up. If you are an owner or are looking for land, get in touch.
4. Spread the word. Let folks know how to be involved.

To learn more about Land Link Montana, find us on the web, www.umt.edu/cfa/landlink.htm, or call Paul Hubbard at 543-0542.

This summer, Missoulians benefited from two programs CFAC initiated to increase viability of area farms and ranches while providing access to the local bounty of our garden city.

The Buy Fresh Buy Local Farm to Restaurant Collaborative introduced local diners at several downtown restaurants to local food, served up in unique and creative ways. Each First Friday Gallery Night, local chefs prepare special menus using local foods from around the area.

The EBT Food Stamp Program enabled low-income folks to use their electronic benefit card to purchase fresh, local foods at the two Farmers’ Markets. Over $5000.00 federal dollars were spent at the markets.

Land Link Montana's goal is to keep agricultural land under the stewardship of farmers and ranchers, as generations come and go. The program matches landowners with producers, who are looking for land, based on compatible interests. We also work with individuals to help them explore all of their options for entering or exiting an agricultural operation—especially those options that allow the next generation of growers to access fertile land.

How you can help:

1. Make a donation. We are currently looking for ways to fund this important program.
2. Offer insights on how to make it work for our region.
3. Sign up. If you are an owner or are looking for land, get in touch.
4. Spread the word. Let folks know how to be involved.

To learn more about Land Link Montana, find us on the web, www.umt.edu/cfa/landlink.htm, or call Paul Hubbard at 543-0542.
Working To Ensure Everyone Has a Place At The Table  
Two-year Study from FSFI Released

By Tegan Maynard-Hahn

People who provide services and people who use them have much more in common than anyone might think, according to a report from the Finding Solutions to Food Insecurity (FSFI) project, which has been studying food insecurity in Missoula County for the past two years. The solutions these two groups recommend to address food insecurity are strikingly similar.

Food Insecurity in Missoula County: Barriers, Opportunities and Solutions is a report based on the work FSFI. One of the project’s primary goals was to ensure the participation of people who had first-hand experience of food insecurity in the fact-finding and solution-building process. The project was a collaborative effort that brought together researchers from the University of Montana, people who struggle to put food on their tables, and representatives from a number of community service organizations.

“We really wanted to learn about the experiences of service users and service providers, and what they thought were the barriers to and opportunities for food security locally,” explained Maxine Jacobson, a local researcher who helped to facilitate the project. “I think opportunities are those points of agreement where two or more groups are able to come together on their thinking. Change has a better chance when people agree.”

Chris Rugeley, a UM research assistant added, “Over 600 community residents participated in interviews, town hall meetings, focus groups and surveys. Twenty-nine steering committee members were involved in the project, many with direct experience with food insecurity. They helped design the research and participated in collecting data. Some of the questions would have never been asked without their input. We like to think we’ve come up with a more comprehensive picture of food insecurity and where to start doing something about it that includes everyone at the table.”

It is the hope of the FSFI steering committee that the information gathered in this report will help guide next steps in addressing food insecurity in Missoula.

For more information on the report and/or ways to get involved in the future of the FSFI project contact Maxine Jacobson at 396-0183 or maxjacobson@bresnan.net

Missoula Farm to School Featured in National Report

This summer the Missoula Farm to School program was featured by the National Association of Counties (NACo) as “Best Practice Example” of a Farm to School program. NACo’s Center for Sustainable Communities released a report on Counties and Local Food Systems as a guide to how counties can support local food systems. It provides four methods each with a case study focused on youth and access to fresh food. Missoula County is featured as an example of how counties can support Farm to School programs due to several county resolutions that support CFAC and local food systems.

To view the full report visit: www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications_133.pdf.

Missoula Updates City Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

By Giovanna McLaughlin

Missoula’s zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations will soon undergo a major overhaul in an effort by the City to clean up the woefully outdated regulations governing land development today.

The last overhaul to the regulations was conducted in 1972, and many of the current provisions date back to 1932 when Missoula first adopted zoning. Needless to say, the current regulations are unpredictable, nearly incomprehensible, and far from user-friendly.

The Office of Planning and Grants initiated the update project, and the Missoula City Council and Mayor John Engen will serve as the project’s fearless leaders. Additionally, the City hired Duncan Associates, an experienced consulting team, to guide the City through the process.

Public involvement is crucial to the success of the project, and the City is undertaking serious efforts to engage the public as much as possible in the process. The project is expected to take two years and, during this time, the City will be holding a number of public meetings and listening sessions so the public can contribute to the shaping of the regulations to ensure a good result for our beautiful city.

Keep an eye out for meeting dates and times and make your voice heard! For more information, visit: www.zoningmissoula.com.
The Community Food and Agriculture Coalition (CFAC) is comprised of a diverse membership base that represents many facets and perspectives of the Missoula County food system. For more information about CFAC see: www.umt.edu/cfa.

We aim to develop and strengthen Missoula County’s food system, promote sustainable agriculture, build regional self-reliance, and assure that all citizens have equal access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food.

Yes, sign me up to receive the Missoula Community Food Digest bi-annual newsletter.

Name: ________________________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________________________
Email: __________________________

mail to: Community Food and Agriculture Coalition, 219 South Third Street West, Missoula, 59801