We still have a few more Saturday markets to go, but I’m going to go out on a limb and call this year’s farmers’ market season a huge success. Success means different things to different people, so here’s how I am defining it: an increased use of the farmers’ market Food Stamp EBT/credit card program. The farmers’ market EBT program allows customers to swipe their EBT (electronic benefit transfer) food stamp, credit, or debit card on a wireless transaction machine at the Missoula Farmers’ Market and the Clark Fork River Market; customers then receive their desired monetary value in tokens to spend at participating vendors’ stalls.

This program has been collaborative in nature from its inception. A combination of ingenuity, funding, and donations from Bonnie Buckingham, Missoula Food Bank, CFAC, Creative Catering, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Alternative Energy Resources Organization, and Big Sky Commerce have led to the creation and success of the EBT program. The program allows everyone who attends the market access to locally grown food, benefits the vendor by increasing sales, and benefits the local economy by keeping federal dollars from the Food Stamp EBT program within Missoula. Before this program was initiated, people who used food stamp benefits did not have the choice of shopping at the markets (because vendors could not swipe the cards) and people who forgot cash were out of luck or had to go to an ATM off-site. Everyone has the option of purchasing food from the farmers’ market and supporting local producers.

While the Clark Fork River Market started the program in September of 2006, this is the first season that both farmers’ markets have accepted all EBT, debit, and credit cards. Last season five pilot markets in Montana processed more than $5000 in EBT sales and over $5000 in debit and credit sales. Even with several markets left this season Missoula’s two markets alone have seen over $10,000 in EBT sales and almost $20,000 in...

Food Security: Can We Go Back To the Future?

Much of the food we purchase in our grocery stores today was grown and processed elsewhere. The present rise in food prices are largely attributable to the high cost of fuel required to transport the groceries we buy from their place of origin, often thousands of miles away. The diminished quality of the food we eat has a direct correlation with its lengthy time in storage. Is this present situation an unavoidable scenario we must unquestionably accept for the future or do viable alternatives exist? Perhaps a brief historical examination of local food production in the Missoula valley may suggest some possible options. Orchard Homes was an accurate description of that part of Missoula fifty to sixty years ago. The small farms in this area produced not only food for the owners but produce which was sold locally. Combined with the production of a large truck farm in Hellgate Canyon and one on McClay Flats, these enterprises grew an estimated 70% of all of the produce sold in Missoula grocery stores. All farms, large and small, in Missoula County had large gardens for their own use and most raised chickens and other livestock for their own personal consumption. The farms and ranches of those times were essentially food independent. Their surplus eggs were sold to local grocery stores providing Missoulians with a dependable supply of fresh eggs from free ranging chickens. Local bee raisers processed the honey sold in our stores. Practically all of the sugar on the store shelves was refined by the sugar beet factory which occupied the present location of the West Gate Shopping Center. Many tons of sugar beets were harvested yearly from land now eliminated from future productivity by the construction of the Missoula...
Rooted in the Soil

Farm Tour

The Community Food and Agriculture Coalition would like to extend a special thanks to everyone who participated in the “Rooted In the Soil” Farm Tour. On Sunday, July 27, sixty people attended the event, which toured four farms located in various parts of the Missoula Valley and featured a number of speakers who covered topics ranging from the value of preserving the valley’s agriculturally viable land to the struggles and challenges of today’s local farmers.

Thank you to Kim Murchison and Josh Slotnick of Clark Fork Organics, Chou Moua and Sai Khang, George and Laverne Mastel, and Jim and Earlene Cusker, who graciously allowed us to tour their farms and shared their experiences with us.

Thanks to all our “Rooted In the Soil” sponsors, including: Montana Farmers Union, The Good Food Store, Missoula City-County Office of Planning and Grants (OPG), Missoula County Rural Initiatives, University of Montana’s Farm to College Program, UM’s Environmental Studies Program (EVST), and Edible Missoula Magazine.

A very special thanks to Martha Buser and The Catalyst Café for providing a delicious, all-local lunch for participants. Food and beverages were also provided by Le Petit Outre, Kettlehouse Brewery and the Big Dipper.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Grant Provides New Opportunities For Farm to School

By Lauren Amato

The beginning of the 2008-2009 school year may have marked a turning point in the health and well-being of many Missoula schoolchildren. Five days a week, throughout the entire school-year, every student at Hawthorne, Franklin, Lowell and Russell elementary schools will now have access to a choice of fresh fruits and vegetables during a school-wide snack time. Not only is this an incredible opportunity to increase the vitality of our school-children, it also presents a chance to increase the amount of locally-grown produce purchased through the Missoula Farm to School program.

In July 2008, the USDA announced that an amendment to the Farm Bill would allow the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program (FFVP) to expand nationwide. A total of over $48 million dollars would be available to schools in all fifty states. The state of Montana was granted $640,998; the four Missoula schools received a total of $80,000 from these funds. Schools selected to be recipients of the FFVP grants are elementary schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program with rates of 50% or greater free and reduced meal eligibility.

The FFVP began as a pilot program in 2002 in 207 schools located in four different states and one Indian Tribal Organization. Due to the tremendous success of the pilot project, the FFVP continued to grow until it reached the nationwide level it has today. The FFVP’s goals are to “create healthier school environments by providing healthier food choices, expand the variety of fruits and vegetables children experience, increase children’s fruit and vegetable consumption, [and] make a difference in children’s diets to impact their present and future health.”

In Missoula, Valerie Addis and Edward Christensen, Supervisor and Assistant Supervisor of Food and Nutrition have included an additional objective to the FFVP. “Our emphasis for the program is definitely on local,” said Addis. “We’d like to use as much of the funds as we can on locally-grown fruits and vegetables. And so far it’s been working out quite nicely, since we’re able to use much smaller quantities than compared to the lunch program.” These smaller quantities have opened up a market for growers like Patty Fialcowitz of Fialky Farm in Dixon. Fialcowitz had an excess of plums this fall—though not quite enough to serve in the school lunch program—so the schools purchased her golden plums specifically for the FFVP.

To date, the schools have been able to serve local apples, cantaloupe, peaches, and plums to participants of the program. Thanks to Addis and Christensen’s hard work and dedication to the Farm to School program, a total of 1,585 pounds of local food has been served to children and $1,632.50 have remained in our local economy.

Missoula County Public Schools continue to help make the Missoula Farm to School program one of the leading Farm to School programs in the nation. The Missoula approach to the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program is another great step in the movement to create a sustainable local food system!

If you are interested in learning more about the Farm to School program, contact the Missoula Farm to School coordinator at (406) 274-0437 or farm2school@missoulafac.org.
UFDA: Overwhelmed No More

By Jason Wiener

In the dialect of Norwegian common to Upper Midwesterners, the expression "uff-da" implies that a speaker is overwhelmed by circumstances. So it’s fortuitous the Missoula City-County Office of Planning and Grants (OPG) has dubbed its comprehensive data collection and regional planning effort the Urban Fringe Development Area (UFDA). The database includes information on the city and immediate vicinity, mapping everything from public safety response times to transportation linkages, from cultural resources to agricultural soils. UFDA’s goal is to harness change, to place Missoulians in charge of how our community develops by looking at where we can develop with the least impact to what we value most.

Toward that end, OPG crafted a suitability analysis based on UFDA data that measures where Missoula can best accommodate more housing with the fewest resource impacts and infrastructure investment. The suitability analysis, in turn, informs a proposed amendment to Missoula’s growth policy that allocates anticipated development among regions of the Missoula valley. Based on public input from scores of UFDA presentations and Envision Missoula—a long-range transportation plan that considered how land-use decisions shape transportation spending—the policy amendment aims to substitute smarter growth, preservation of resources, and prudent investment of limited infrastructure dollars for status quo sprawl.

CFAC has been involved from the outset of UFDA to the present, most recently leading a collection of Missoula conservation groups in support of the growth policy amendment’s intentions. At the same time, CFAC suggested an adjustment to the suitability analysis that gives additional weight to agricultural parcels larger than five acres; this would channel growth away from prime soils in the area east of Reserve Street and north of Mullan Road. City Council and County Commissioners will consider the growth policy amendment beginning in October, and CFAC will stay involved throughout.

Contact CFAC staffer Paul Hubbard (pnhubbard@gmail.com) for more information on UFDA and CFAC’s Land Use and Viability committee.

Jason Wiener represents Ward One on the Missoula City Council.


Missoula Farmer’s Market Token Program A Success!

Continued from page 1 debit and credit sales! Response from vendors and customers about the token program has been positive; when asked why she purchased food at the market, one customer said, “For the environmental benefits of eating locally” while another said, “I really like the fresh and unusual food!”

Members of CFAC and the Clark Fork River Market did outreach about the program before the season began (signs on Mountain Line busses, newspaper ads, posters around town) and have seen a significant increase throughout the season in the number of people who frequent the token stand as well as the amount of transactions completed (a transaction being swiping the EBT or credit card for tokens).

More customers and vendors have utilized the program throughout the season and both markets have had multiple Saturdays in which over $1000 in tokens were bought. Now I’d call that success!

It is certain that the Food Stamp EBT/credit card program has made it possible for more people to purchase locally grown food, support local growers, and boost our local economy. We look forward, to continued success of this program as we know it will lead to even stronger community food-security.
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. CFAC is currently seeking new members. Now is your opportunity to get involved in developing our local food system!

To find out more information about joining CFAC, go to our web-site: www.MissoulaCFAC.org.

☐ Yes, I want to be involved with the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition to enhance our local food system! Please use my donation to protect our valuable ag land from development, help farmers access land, and provide healthy, local food to our community.

☐ Please put me on your mailing list and keep me informed about: 
__________________________________________________________________________

Name ________________________________________________________________
Address _______________________________________________________________
City, State, Zip ______________________________________________________________________
Phone _________________________  Email ____________________________________________

Please make check payable to CFAC and mail to: Community Food and Agriculture Coalition, 127 N. Higgins, Ste. 305, Missoula, MT 59802
Montanans Working to Redevelop Food Processing across the state

By Kevin Moore

Montanans treasure our vast agricultural landscapes. Despite the fact that more than half of Montana is farm and ranch land, it is very difficult for residents to actually buy and use the agricultural products that are growing right outside our windows. Only sixty years ago, 70% of the food Montanans ate was produced in-state, but today it is down to about 10%. Historically, food producers were more diversified, exporting some crops while selling the majority locally. Through a myriad of factors, Montana’s farmers and ranchers have moved to an agricultural system in which large quantities of few raw commodities are exported.

Integral to Montana’s historic food system was local processing. Many people still remember slaughteringhouses scattered across the state, and mills near every grain elevator. In fact, during the 1930’s food processing was Montana’s number-one employer, but today there is so little processing in Montana that U.S. Census doesn’t even track it. The redevelopment of Montana’s food processing industry is essential to meeting our state’s food needs while revitalizing our rural communities.

With Montana’s legislative session just around the corner, the statewide food policy coalition Grow Montana is looking to utilize existing resources toward rebuilding our processing infrastructure. Currently, there is a network of five economic and business development centers around the state, and Grow Montana is initiating an appropriation bill that will continue to fund them and two additional centers both with shared-used food processing and business incubation abilities. The existing facilities’ mission would broaden to include more food related capacities and be renamed Food and Agriculture Development Centers.

Food processing is a growing topic in Montana, and currently there are many people looking at additional ways to address this need. The state Environmental Quality Council (EQC) looked at the use of tax incentives to encourage small food businesses to use Montana-grown ingredients, but further research is needed to fully understand how this incentive would work. Additionally, agricultural and economic development advocates are working to extend the expiration date on state economic development programs, including some that could substantially fund food systems work.

The benefits of a Montana-based food system reach all residents, which is why food processing and other food system legislation should enjoy broad public support in 2009.

For more information or to learn specific ways to support legislation contact: Grow Montana (www.growmontana.ncat.org)

Assessing the Retail Food Environment, Food Security, and Access To Food in Missoula

By Blakely Brown and Jennifer Elliot, UM Department of Health and Human Performance

A nutrition environment describes the number, type, location and accessibility of food stores in a community and what consumers encounter in and around the places where they buy food. Food availability, price, promotion and quality are also part of the nutrition environment. Assessing local nutrition environments is important because reports show disparities exist between low-income neighborhoods and higher-income neighborhoods in regards to access to supermarkets and healthier foods.

Research suggests that fewer supermarkets are located in minority and low-income neighborhoods and healthier food items such as fruits and vegetables are more expensive relative to income in these neighborhoods. Access to supermarkets is important because supermarkets most commonly provide the highest variety of heart healthy food items compared with other retail food stores.

In the coming months, researchers from The Department of Health and Human Performance at The University of Montana in conjunction with Missoula CFAC will be conducting a study examining the Missoula retail food environment, access to food, and food security in Missoula in relation to the socioeconomic and health status of its residents. These variables will be assessed in four Missoula neighborhoods. The neighborhoods will be selected based on income level and population density using 2000 U.S. Census tract data. Project surveys will be administered to grocery store shoppers at every supermarket, grocery store, and convenience within each of the four selected neighborhoods.

A validated survey will be used to collect data on food item availability, price, and quality in each store. Approximately 40 stores and 400 – 800 food shoppers will be included in this study.

In 2004, CFAC conducted The Missoula County Community Food Assessment to learn more about the food-related concerns of Missoula County residents. Results of this study indicate that Missoula residents are most concerned with food quality, local food, price of food, availability, and transportation to food stores, the last three being particularly important to low-income residents.

In order for community groups such as CFAC to advocate for changes in the local food system, it is necessary to gain a full understanding of the nutrition environment within the community and what community residents view as food-related concerns. This study will build on the previous research done by Missoula CFAC and that of other prominent researchers around the country by contributing to the understanding of the local food environment and how built environments can influence the health and well-being of community residents.
By Kate Keller

On June 14th of this year, members of the Missoula Community Co-op held a celebration of years of collaborative labor. The first of many milestone celebrations, the “grand” opening of the little food co-op on the Westside marked a shift in business in Missoula- so distinct in fact, that there are few others like it in the country. The premise and business model is this- many hands make light work, and ultimately, yield extraordinary results.

Following the Community Food Assessment of 2003, multiple groups set out to address the many-faceted issue of food security (local food sustainability) in Missoula County. In that broad coalition of Farm to School, CFAC, and the Food Bank was a somewhat unlikely partner, the North-Missoula Community Development Corporation, an organization whose mission is to improve the livability of its service area, Missoula’s North and Westside neighborhoods. Their part of the challenge was, “how do we make good food, local food, less expensive?” In the three years that followed, the NMCDC absorbed a neighborhood buying club, met with numerous consultants, contracted out business and architectural plans, purchased a giant Westside warehouse, and hatched the embryonic food cooperative. And while these accomplishments are truly formidable the response to the question that the NMCDC and the Missoula Community Co-op set out to answer was fundamentally simple- we, the members of the co-op, will work together to meet our needs.

The Missoula Community Co-op is an organization that exists for the benefit of its members and the community as a whole. The work contributions of its members (just 3 hours every four weeks), cashiering, or phone calling, systems planning or carpentry, photography or just talking to folks, are strengthening the unique organism that the co-op is. As we grow, we are effectively lowering the cost of good food, and shifting the paradigm to one of widespread mutual support- an unusual business, indeed.

If you are interested in joining the co-op or learning more, contact Kate Keller at coop-kitchen@montana.com.

Can We Go Back To The Future?

At the end of September, the Congressional Hunger Center honored the Missoula Farm to School program as a recipient of the 2008 Victory Against Hunger Award. The award’s theme for 2008 was to recognize innovative Farm to School programs. To be eligible to receive an award, a program must have been nominated by a member of the US Congress. When Erin Foster West, the 2007-2008 Missoula Farm to School coordinator, learned about the award, she sought the help of Senator Max Baucus and Representative Denny Rehberg to nominate the Missoula program. Of the ninety programs nominated and twenty-five award-winners, Missoula Farm to School was the only program to receive two nominations.

The $1,000 Victory Against Hunger Award funds will be incorporated into the Western Montana Farm to School pilot mini grant program. Beginning in November, four awards of $1,000 apiece will be available to school districts in Western Montana to help start their own version of Farm to School. Examples of possible projects include: creating a school garden, hosting all-Montana meal days in cafeterias, introducing a classroom cooking cart, and/or developing nutrition and agriculture curriculum. For more information, please contact Lauren Amato at farm2school@missoulacfac.org or 274-0437.

Can we once again achieve the food security enjoyed by the citizens of Missoula County a half century ago? We can do so only if we preserve the productive agricultural land which has thus far escaped development. We must expand opportunities and incentives for producers to grow and market their products locally. And we must attract, promote, and invest in local enterprises which will process the products of our farms and ranches. The achievement of these goals can provide us with ongoing food security and will greatly enhance the quality of the food consumed. Can our food future be better than our present condition? With increased awareness and a lot of hard work, yes it can!