Tokens for All at Farmer’s Markets in Missoula

By Lauren Butz

Spring has sprung, and planting has begun for the fresh fruits and vegetables that will be sold at the two farmer’s markets in Missoula beginning on May 3rd!

Did you know you can use either your EBT (food stamps) or your debit card to purchase food at the markets? Again this season, users of EBT cards have the opportunity to purchase fresh, locally grown food at Missoula’s two farmers markets beginning in May. What is new this year, is that the Missoula Farmer’s Market joins the Clark Fork River Market in extending the opportunity to use market tokens, rather than cash, to debit and credit card holders as well.

Using your EBT, debit, or credit card at the markets is simple! If you are a card holder, simply stop by the EBT information stall at each market and have your card electronically swiped to receive your chosen amount of dollars in tokens. Stroll the market and purchase fruits, vegetables, meat, cheese, bread, seeds and plants starts at participating vendor’s stalls marked with a “We Accept EBT Tokens Here” sign; exchange the tokens for food and enjoy! By spending a few extra minutes getting tokens, you can support your local farmers and our economy.

Why should you take advantage of this program? If you have ever gone to a farmer’s market, you can appreciate the joy of casually strolling through stalls of fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables, meeting up with friends, and greeting your favorite apple or squash vendor by name. Feeling a direct connection to your food source is knowledge and power. You can buy food with confidence, knowing that the person directly selling to you grew that food and knows how it was grown. Additionally, your money supports local farmers and the economy while building community through interacting with food producers and fellow Missoula citizens.

The Clark Fork River Market begins on May 3, under the Higgins Street bridge next to Caras Park and is open Saturdays from 8:00am to 1:00pm. The Missoula Farmer’s Market begins Saturday May 10 and is open from 8:30am to noon. It is situated on Circle Square on the North end of Higgins Avenue.

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CFAC Reviews Sub-Division Proposals to Evaluate Impact on Farm Land

By Jim Cusker

At the request of the Office of Planning and Grants, CFAC has been asked to review all proposed subdivision requests and submit an analysis of the possible impact on agriculture of each proposal.

To accomplish this assignment two person teams from the CFAC Land Use and Viability Committee review the paperwork submitted to determine the USDA designation of the property soil type, the proposed density, the present zoning, and the land use proposed by comprehensive plans and, if available, a historical description of past agricultural use.

This is followed by a site inspection to further evaluate the past land use of the property along with its potential for future agricultural productivity. The field inspection provides information on the availability of water for irrigation, the slope of the land, past and present evidence of agricultural use, and confirms the designation of soil type.

From these studies, a statement is derived as to the probable impact of the proposed sub-division on agriculture. The memorandum is sent to the planning officer in charge of the proposal. A CFAC representative is often requested to provide testimony on our findings at the public meetings of the Planning Board and the City Council or County Commissioners where approval of the proposals is ultimately determined. At this time, six proposals have been reviewed with public officials at all levels expressing appreciation for our input. In the past, although sympathy has been expressed by these officials for the loss of productive agricultural land, a systematic review process to evaluate the problem has not existed.

CFAC is now providing the missing link needed to evaluate the potential loss of a valuable local, state, and national treasure: the productive soils upon which crops can be grown to feed our ever increasing population.
School Gardens “Growing” in Missoula

By Jason Mandala

Here in Missoula we are lucky enough to have an abundance of areas to use as outdoor classrooms. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for students and teachers to get to these locations. This is why school gardens are such a great idea. School gardens are an excellent way for schools to give students an opportunity to learn in an outdoor classroom that is right next to the school.

Gardens can obviously be used to teach students how to grow healthy food, but they are also a great place for teachers to discuss lifecycles, ecology, seasonality, and even math. Gardens can be paired with school art projects to beautify the school and neighborhood. They are also a wonderful place for students to learn about cooperation and the hard work that goes into every meal they eat each day. Food grown at school gardens can be used in cooking projects at the school or possibly as a part of the school lunch program.

As a part of the Missoula BEANS (Blending Education Agriculture Nutrition in Schools) program the Garden City Harvest (GCH) School Gardens project assists schools in starting school gardens and using them effectively as outdoor classrooms. We currently run a school garden at Meadow Hill Middle School, and this year we are helping Willard High School start a new school garden and lending a hand to Lowell Elementary School with their garden plans. All three of these gardens are run in conjunction with the Flagship Program, which has been an integral part of these exciting garden efforts.

Meadow Hill’s school garden is moving right along this spring and should be greening up very soon. This year we had to say goodbye to Meadow Hill School Garden coordinator Audrey Roderick, we will miss her deeply! Fortunately, Betsy DeFries, an experienced educator and gardener, will take over, ensuring another fun and successful year at Meadow Hill. Meadow Hill also offers community garden plots, giving students and community members an opportunity to work together to grow food and make their neighborhood a better place. Much of the food grown last year at Meadow Hill was used in after school cooking classes, we plan on that continuing again this year!

This spring we will “break ground” (actually we are building raised beds) at Willard High on a perfect spot behind the school. Faculty, staff, students, and Flagship coordinator Vanessa Nie have been very supportive and committed to the project and we all look forward to seeing a green garden by May! Plans are to grow vegetables, berries, and fruit trees, and the hope is this food can be used in a native cooking class. Students have had the opportunity to talk with members of the BEANS team and give input on what they would like to grow in their garden. We look forward to the unique opportunity to work with the students at Willard.

Lowell Elementary School is also planning a school garden to be located in the Westside Park adjacent to the school. Teachers, community members, and Flagship Supervisor Lisa Beczkiewicz have taken on this project to create an outdoor classroom and community resource. The plans for the garden are to have areas of native flora and areas to grow vegetables, as well as open spaces for students and teachers to have class.

Ground breaking for the Lowell School Garden is planned for September of 2008, so we won’t see any green there until 2009, but everyone is working hard to make this dream a reality!

For more information or to help out with school gardens contact GCH Youth Education Coordinator Jason Mandala at 239-5524 or email gch_education@yahoo.com.

Movie Review: Two Angry Moms

By Niraja Golightly

The recent ground beef recall and its effect on the school lunch programs in Montana only serves to highlight the concerns of many parents, educators, and health professionals as represented by the film, “Two Angry Moms.” Contrary to the title, we discover that “renegade lunch ladies,” restaurant chefs, school teachers and administrators—as well as parents—are concerned with what is happening to our children’s health and their understanding of the consequences of the food choices being promoted in school and in the media. Throughout the film we follow Amy Kalafa and Susan Rubin as they unravel the contributing factors and oftentimes conflicting priorities that have created an environment where school breakfasts and lunches consist of low quality government commodities, prepackaged salt, sugar, and chemical-laden entrees—as well as the ever-popular junk food a la carte items that often supplement strapped school budgets. Take heart—there is hope for future generations of our school kids!

What they discover is that besides challenging school boards, large food corporations, or the USDA, there are many different ways to change this all too prevalent status quo. This includes developing a comprehensive all-day approach to food in schools by designing wellness policies that emphasize the importance of local, healthful, school food offerings, building relationships with local farmers and ranchers, and creating attractive eating environments devoid of junk food. District policies can support kitchen managers in creating new food preparation protocols that limit over-processed non-nutritious junk food selections and facilitate hands-on curriculum concerning the continuum of food from soil to plate—a curriculum that incorporates “food field trips” to gardens and grocery markets as well as food nutritional planning and preparation. Interested? Visit www.angrymoms.org for resources and how-to information. Also highly recommended is the “renegade lunch lady’s” webpage: www.lunchladies.org.
Meat Recall Creates Opportunities for Local Producers

By Erin Foster West

Local ranchers can often have a hard time getting their foot in the door competing against large meat companies and CAFO’s (concentrated animal feeding operations). In February, however, one of the largest meat companies left the door open for local producers. Westland/Hallmark Meat Company recalled over 100 million pounds of beef that came from “downer” or sick cattle. Much of this meat had been distributed through the USDA commodity program to public schools and food banks.

This has spurred many schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program to rethink where their food is coming from and how it is being produced.

The Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) sent back 80 cases of beef crumbles that were supplied by the USDA, according to the Assistant Supervisor of Food and Nutrition, Ed Christiansen. At 40 pounds a case, that adds up to a lot of beef, and the schools had to quickly find a replacement. Local food processors stepped up to the challenge and Rocky Mountain Gourmet Steaks, a Missoula packing company, will be supplying MCPS with beef crumbles this spring.

The meat recall has also created more interest in starting new Farm to School programs. Victor School in Ravalli County has decided to start a Farm to School program. After the majority of their meat was recalled, the food service director decided that buying locally would be a priority.

Maria Strover, Victor’s school food service director, sent back 13 cases of commodity beef but has always found the quality of USDA commodity beef lacking. The meat recall came as a last straw for their program as Maria has already been interested in purchasing food locally. “We’ve purchased Lifeline dairy and we’re really blessed to live in a county with a lot of good options” explains Maria.

Victor joins Bozeman and Alberton schools in starting Farm to School programs this year. Alberton had a Farm to School kick-off in November featuring vegetables from Western Montana Grower’s Co-Op, potatoes from Bausch potatoes, and local beef from the Lolo Locker. Bozeman’s Hawthorne Elementary School is working closely with the Farm to College program at Montana State University after receiving a Gold Star in the Healthy School Challenge for the quality of their school meals.

If you are interested in starting a Farm to School program at your school, contact the Missoula Farm to School program at (406) 549-0543 ext. 109.

Tokens for All at Missoula Farmer’s Market

The Missoula Farmer’s Market, Clark Fork River Market, Missoula Food Bank, Community Food and Agriculture Coalition (CFAC), Creative Catering, United Way of Missoula County, and Big Sky Commerce all worked together to make this exciting program a reality.

The EBT Farmers Market program is one of the many programs initiated by CFAC which aim to enhance the local food system so that all community members have access to healthy local foods. It is now in its second full-season year, having brought over $5,000 of federal dollars into the markets. With its win-win possibilities, this program is sure to continue to grow, bringing more folks to the market and more money into our local farmers’ hands.

Land Link Montana Now Accepting Applications

Land-seeking farmers, Producer-seeking landowners may now enroll in farm/ranch transfer program

By Paul Hubbard

Keeping agricultural land under the stewardship of farmers and ranchers requires that we not only protect fertile ground from development, but also that we bridge landowners and retiring producers with farmers who are looking for land. If you are a farmer or rancher who is looking for agricultural land, Land Link Montana might be able to help you find the land that meets your goals. Similarly, if you are a landowner who would like to sell or lease your land to a producer, Land Link Montana can work with you in finding the right person for your land and individual situation.

In either case, our match-making process starts with an application for both producers seeking agricultural land and landowners seeking a farmer or rancher. Both applications are available for download at our website: www.landlinkmontana.org. The simple goal of the questionnaire is to get the requisite information from you in order to find a compatible match.

Once the application is complete, a summary of your information will be available to other Land Link Montana members. These listings do not include names or contact information, but will give other members just enough information to determine whether your listing is a possible fit for them, and whether to request more information. Next, Land Link staff will follow up with you to further discuss your goals and situation in exploring potential matches. Finally, we have consultants and legal assistance to inform and facilitate the farm/ranch transfer process, once a landowner and farm/ranch seeker are ready to enter into a business agreement.

Please direct any questions and inquiries to Paul Hubbard, phubbard@gmail.com or 543-0542. We’d be glad to speak with you or your larger community about our farm and ranch transfer program.
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, please visit our website: www.missoulacfac.org.

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! I am interested in getting involved with CFAC to help develop our local food system.

☐ Please add me to your mailing list and keep me informed.

Name: ____________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________
Email: ___________________________________________ Phone: ____________________________

☐ I would like to make a donation to help CFAC continue its projects. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation of $_____.

Mail to: Community Food and Agriculture Coalition, 219 South Third St. West, Missoula, MT 59801