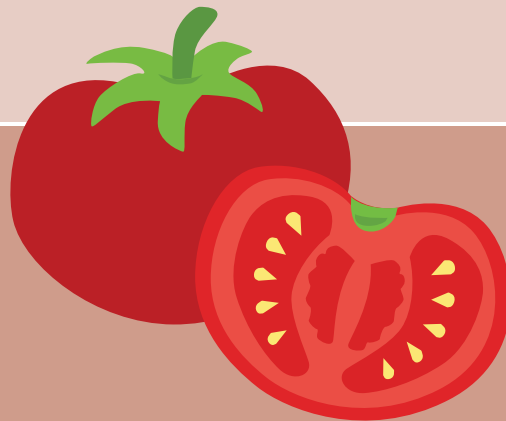




MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '23



**Tools and resources for celebrating
MT Marinara and other local foods**

Designed by:
Mission West Community Development Partners
Northwest Food Hub Network

OUR STARTING FIVE

This project has been made possible through the efforts of actors at every step in the value chain working together to build a more resilient regional food system.



Mission West Community Development Partners houses the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC). MMFEC is a shared-use food processing and manufacturing facility that incubates start-up food product enterprises, strengthens Montana’s food supply chain, and bolsters our local food economies. At MMFEC, product development experience and processing infrastructure work together to bring Montana Marinara—and other local products—to fruition.



Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) empowers local school nutrition professionals as community leaders to provide equitable access to healthy food and environments that support the success of Montana’s children. As the USDA Foods in Schools program coordinator in Montana, the agency facilitates the ordering and distribution of Montana Marinara to schools across the state.



The Northwest Food Hub Network is a collective of farmer-owned cooperative food hubs in Montana and Washington that connects organizations like school districts, hospitals and colleges with local, sustainable food. The Network provides shared infrastructure and cultivates partnerships to support market access and reinvestment in its 200+ source farms and their communities.



Western Montana Growers Cooperative is a coalition of growers in the Flathead, Jocko, Mission and Bitterroot Valleys—including the farms behind Montana Marinara’s locally grown ingredients. A founding member of the Northwest Food Hub Network, the cooperative supplies the region with fresh, quality products while enhancing the sustainability of its member farms and contributing to local economic growth.



Montana No Kid Hungry collaborates with communities around healthy food solutions to curb hunger today while cultivating systemic change alongside community leaders to end hunger for the future. Montana No Kid Hungry has been an indispensable ally in the project, providing strategic guidance and creating new partnerships to support our local-first approach to meeting school nutrition needs.

THE PLAYBOOK

What is Montana Marinara?

Montana Marinara is the first in a line of locally sourced value-added products designed with schools in mind. Montana OPI diverts USDA Foods tomatoes to MMFEC where they are combined with Montana-grown carrots, onions, squash, and safflower oil sourced through the Western Montana Growers Cooperative and the Northwest Food Hub Network. The final product is veggie-packed, cost-conscious, and accessible to districts across the state through OPI's existing distribution network. By working together, we leverage each other's strengths, support hard-working Montana farmers, and expand access to affordable local food for schools like yours.

"I think the most impressive part of the Montana Marinara project is the collaboration of all the entities that it took to be successful—OPI's sourcing and distribution, MMFEC's processing facility, local farmers' buy-in. All Montana schools will benefit greatly."

– Jay Stagg, Whitefish School District

We believe school lunches can change the way students eat in a positive way for the rest of their lives. Our goal is to build capacity for schools to instill good habits, values, and sense of place by educating students on the impacts of their food choices and introducing them to foods that they might not have at home. By providing schools with picky-eater-approved products featuring sustainably sourced ingredients—grown and processed right here in Montana—we save staff time in the kitchen without asking you to compromise on the quality, nutrition, and taste of your meals. Plus, every purchase directly supports Montana farms, food hubs, and processors and celebrates our state's history of supporting agriculture.



STATS

151

Number of Montana school districts that ordered for the 2022-2023 school year

12,366

Pounds of locally sourced ingredients used

96

Average miles traveled from farm to processing facility

1/2

Cups of red/orange veggies per ½ cup serving of marinara

\$0.44

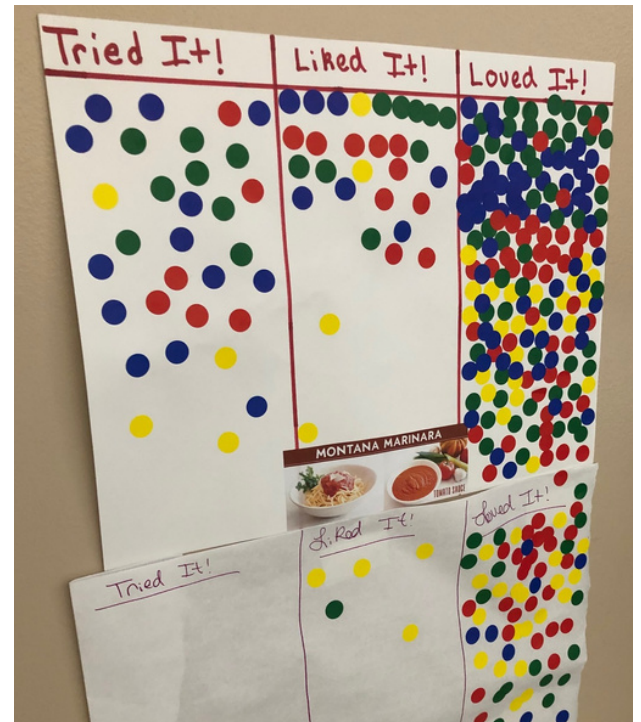
Share of each dollar returned to local farms

89%

Share of Montana high school students who told us they would eat MT Marinara again

NUTRITION AND MENU INFORMATION

MT Marinara contains 1/2 cup of red/orange veggies in every 1/2 cup serving. Packed full of local veggies, MT Marinara is a nutritious and delicious addition to your menu! Try MT Marinara on your students' favorite type of pasta, as a dipping sauce for cheese sticks, on meatball subs, or wherever else you serve tomato sauce! [Click here](#) to see a menu costing example.



TASTE TESTS

Want to know what your students think about Montana Marinara? For elementary students, divide a large poster-size paper into three columns titled Tried It, Liked It, and Loved It! Ask students to cast their vote by placing a sticker on the chart, or use labeled cups and small voting pieces, such as dried beans. Tally the votes and see what your students think! Note that there's not an option to vote for *Yuck* or *I don't like it*. Remind your students that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy new foods or one that they already like—don't yuck their yum! Don't forget to send us the results!

For middle- and high-schoolers, try a short online survey that students can take on their phones. Simply display [this survey flyer](#) in the cafeteria! The flyer has a QR code that students can scan to access the survey. We'll compile and share the results with your team.

HOW TO ORDER: SY 2023-2024

You can order Montana Marinara on your USDA Foods survey in February 2023! Your order will be delivered by MT OPI in late 2023 or early 2024.

Montana Marinara was fully funded by MT OPI for school year 2022-2023. For next school year, the cost of Montana Marinara to schools will be equivalent to the cost of the USDA Foods in the product and will be drawn down from your entitlement funds.



MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '23

This spring, it's Marinara Madness here in Montana! The Northwest Food Hub Network, in partnership with Montana OPI, is sending its first shipments of Montana Marinara to schools across the state starting in March. Let's make the most of this opportunity to bring students and school nutrition staff closer to their local farms and the food they grow.

Our Source Farms

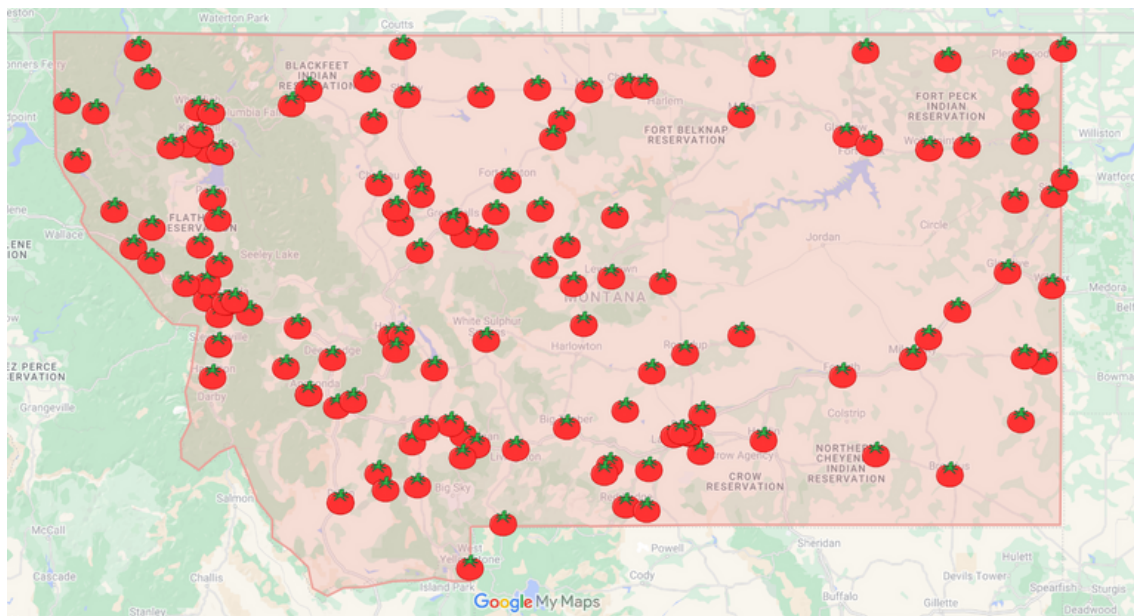
- **Lowdown Farm (Moiese, MT)** - Squash & Onions
- **The Oil Barn (Shelby, MT)** - Safflower Oil
- **Rocky Mountain Produce (Augusta, MT)** - Onions
- **Five Fox Farm (Moiese, MT)** - Onions
- **Harlequin Produce (Arlee, MT)** - Carrots & Onions

"Montana Marinara has been a great project to be a part of. Not only do we love delivering delicious local food to our schools but reliable markets like the Farm to School program gives us the security of a guaranteed sale and an outlet for produce that might otherwise be composted due to aesthetic standards."

– Ian Barry, Lowdown Farm

We're encouraging teachers and staff from the 150+ districts who ordered to plan activities connecting the cafeteria, classroom, and community. Think of it as a special springtime edition of Farm to School Month focused on how our farms, food hubs, and school nutrition staff are collaborating to expand access to local food for Montana students. This toolkit features ideas for local food festivities, recipes, and promotional resources—everything you need to celebrate the work we're doing together to cultivate farm-to-school connections.

Is your school district on the map?





MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '23

GET IN THE GAME

Ready to get started? Here are six ideas for celebrating local food this spring.

- **Tell the story behind the food.** Share our [printable farmer stories sheets](#) with your students or simply display them in your cafeteria or classroom.
- **Farm(er) to school.** Better yet, invite a local farmer to speak in the classroom or talk with students over lunch—don't hesitate to reach out if you'd like an introduction!
- **Celebrate with your favorite recipe.** Organize festivities at lunchtime around a marinara-centric main course! Craft the rest of the menu to include locally sourced produce, meat, dairy, and more. If you can, coordinate with staff from across campus to carve out time to engage and educate your students about their local food system.
- **Or taste-test a new one!** Incorporate Montana Marinara into a new dish and ask your eaters what they think—if they like it, share your idea with us! Capture photos of kitchen staff preparing the meal and smiling students enjoying it, then post to Facebook or Instagram using **#MTMarinara** and tagging **@NWFoodHubNetwork**.



Harlequin Produce (Arlee, MT)

- **Take a field trip—without leaving campus.** Invite students to cook with you in the kitchen. If the weather warms up, walk the grounds of your school garden and teach students about the locally grown veggies that go into every batch of Montana Marinara.
- **Get an up-close look at local food.** Schedule a field trip to a local farm, farmers market, or food hub. Take photos to document the occasion or—better yet—invite local news media to follow along!

How can we help?

If you're looking for more resources or want to connect with one of our farms, reach out to: team@nwfoodhubnetwork.com. We're happy to assist you!



SHARE YOUR HIGHLIGHT REEL!

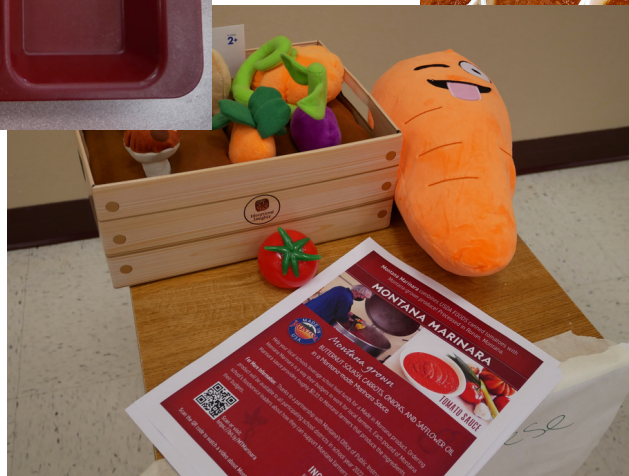
Join the fun by sharing your photos!

There's no wrong way to celebrate **#MTMarinara** this spring! So, whether you're receiving your shipment, serving up your favorite meal, or hosting festivities featuring Montana Marinara...

Post a photo to Facebook or Instagram and tag **@NWFoodHubNetwork**. Include a caption describing why you love **#MTMarinara** and your favorite way to serve it—we might just give you a shout-out!

We can't wait to see, share, and build excitement around how you're incorporating Montana Marinara into your menus and the creative ways you're engaging students around local food!

Not on social media or want help putting together a post? Just email your photo and caption to **teamenwfoodhubnetwork.com**. We welcome highlights from the kitchen, lunchroom, or wherever else you're holding Farm to School festivities with your students and staff this spring. *Remember: be sure to follow your school's photo permissions protocols before sharing your photos.*



POST UP!

Want some ideas for social media?

These sample posts are designed to help your school spread the word on social media about how your school is celebrating MT Marinara and other local food! Simply copy, paste, edit, and post.

Post from your food service program's Facebook or Instagram account—or share this toolkit with your communications team to publish a post through your district's primary account. Use **#MTMarinara** and be sure to tag **@NWFoodHubNetwork** when you post—our project partners would love a shout-out, too!

- **Mission West CDP (FB/IG: @missionwestcdp)**
- **Montana No Kid Hungry (FB/IG: @mtnokidhungry)**
- **Montana Farm to School (FB/IG: @montanafarmtoschool)**
- **Western Montana Growers Co-op (FB/IG: @westernmontanagrowerscoop)**

Preparation

Our order of Montana Marinara has arrived! We can't wait to serve our first batch of [name your favorite marinara-based recipe!] with this one-of-a-kind pasta sauce, made with locally sourced ingredients processed right here in Montana.

We're proud to be one of 150+ districts across the state that ordered Montana Marinara this school year. This spring, we're celebrating #MTMarinara by...

School districts across the state are celebrating #MTMarinara this spring—and we're excited to be one of them! We're hosting #FarmtoSchool festivities like [describe your plans!] to bring our students closer to local farms & the food they grow.

Game Day

This spring, it's Marinara Madness here at [name your school or district]! Students, staff, teachers, and parents in our district are celebrating the delicious locally sourced #MTMarinara that packs a vitamin-rich serving of Montana-grown veggies into every spoonful.

We invited [e.g., students, parents, and local farmers] to campus today to enjoy a lunch of [name your dish!] with Montana Marinara, a locally sourced and processed pasta sauce that features Montana-grown squash, carrots, and onions in every spoonful.

This week, we taste-tested our favorite [name your dish!] recipe with Montana Marinara—a picky-eater-approved pasta sauce featuring Montana-grown squash, carrots, and onions. The smiles on our students' faces say it all! #MTMarinara

We're celebrating healthy kids, local farmers, and vibrant communities as part of #MTMarinara, a seasonal #FarmtoSchool celebration here in Montana by...

Share and Celebrate

We're proud to be part of a growing network of Montana farms, food hubs, and foodservice teams working together to bring picky-eater-approved products featuring sustainably sourced ingredients—grown and processed right here in Montana—to school districts across the state.

[Name your school or district] loves Montana Marinara because it saves our staff time in the kitchen without compromising on the quality, nutrition, and taste of the meals we serve our students. Plus, every purchase directly supports Montana farms, food hubs, and processors and celebrates our state's history of supporting agriculture.

Montana Marinara simplifies our #FarmtoSchool sourcing. Every batch is locally sourced and processed, meaning we can support our local food economy while freeing up time for our staff to engage with students about making healthy choices while introducing them to new foods that they might not have access to at home.



PASS IT TO THE PROS

Unsure of how to pen your post?

Here are some first-rate Farm to School social media accounts you might look to for reference on posting and sharing photos:

Montana’s own Farm to School of Park County is super active on both [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). This picture-perfect Facebook post demonstrates their knack for skillfully—and succinctly—highlighting Farm to School goings-on in the district.



[Rock on Cafe](#) maintains one of our favorite Instagram accounts. This coalition of foodservice staff recently taste-tested locally sourced pasta at an elementary school. Check out their photo gallery of the event if you’re planning something similar!



If you’d like to peruse a Facebook feed featuring a wide array of local food festivities, look no further than [Umpqua Valley Farm to School](#). Their students took a field trip in the fall to rebuild a local school garden—click the photo to see how they documented the day.



We’re not on Twitter, but [Boulder Valley School District](#) sure is! See how they manage to say a lot about local food in not a lot of words—we got a kick out of this recent post highlighting a Crunch Off celebration featuring locally grown carrots.

NOTHING-BUT-NET NEWSLETTER TEXT



Share all about Marinara Madness in your school's newsletter!

We've provided some sample text options below:

Newsletter Sample #1

We're proud to be one of 150+ districts across the state that ordered Montana Marinara this school year. This picky-eater-approved pasta sauce is processed right here in Montana and features locally grown squash, carrots, and onions. It tastes great, saves our staff time in the kitchen, and packs a vitamin-rich serving of veggies into every spoonful. Plus, every purchase directly supports Montana farms, food hubs, and processors and carries forward our state's legacy of supporting agriculture.

Newsletter Sample #2

This spring, we're celebrating #MTMarinara—a month of Farm to School festivities taking place across the state—by [describe what you're up to!]. We're grateful for the opportunity to be part of a growing movement here in Montana dedicated to engaging with students about making healthy choices, introducing them to new foods, and bringing them closer to their local farms and the food they grow.



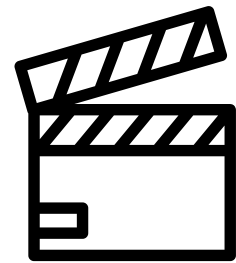
FULL COURT PRESS RELEASE



Click below to download a press release template that can be adapted to your school and whatever festivities you have in store! The sample language in this template includes background information on Montana Marinara and the partnerships behind the project.

[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD](#)

GET AN ASSIST FROM LOCAL MEDIA



Consider reaching out to local media to help bring visibility to the activities you're planning.

Here are some ways to involve the media in your celebration:

- **Cooking demo.** Invite local media to interview your foodservice director and capture photos or footage of the meal they're preparing with Montana Marinara.
- **In the lunchroom.** Have local media capture interviews, photos, and footage of staff, students, parents, and teachers (perhaps even some local farmers!) enjoying your favorite Montana Marinara dish together in the cafeteria.
- **Stories from the field.** If you're taking students to the school garden or out to a local farm or food hub, invite local media to follow along and document the trip.
- **Pass the mic.** Give local media the chance to ask your students what they know and like best about local food. This might not be suitable for every context, but it can be a great way to balance the perspectives of school staff, teachers, and administrators. Just be sure that all of your interviewees get the appropriate permission slips signed at home.
- **Advocacy opportunity.** Invite an elected official to lunch or have a Farm to School champion in your district pen an op-ed on why they're invested in this work.



GETTING STARTED

- If you don't have a media contact in mind, do an online search to find the outlets, reporters, or bloggers who have covered local food, schools, the environment, and agriculture in your area.
- Make use of the press release template in this toolkit—write and share your press release as part of your media outreach, emphasizing the local-impact angle while placing your activities in the context of the statewide celebration.
- If you're reaching out to television, print, or online media, be sure to describe the visual elements they'll be able to capture. Fresh-cooked food, smiling students, and community camaraderie all make for appealing video and photo ops!
- Remember that children will need permission slips before being filmed, photographed, or interviewed. Plan in advance and with your administration to be sure you can engage a group of students who have completed the necessary forms.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

Check out the links below for more resources.

🍅 [Farmer Story Sheets](#)

🍅 [MT Marinara Flyer](#)

🍅 [MT Marinara Menu Costing Example](#)

🍅 [Flyer for Parents/Guardians](#)

🍅 [Press Release Template](#)

🍅 [Survey Flyer for High School Students](#)

🍅 [Morning Announcement](#)

🍅 [Lunch Line Label](#)

🍅 [MT Marinara Processing Photos](#)

🍅 [Farm Photos](#)

MEET THE TEAM!



Mission West staff admiring Montana-grown butternut squash.



The hard-working processing staff at MMFEC that made your Montana Marinara!