



MISSION WEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

MISSION WEST

Community Development Partners

Serving Lake, Sanders, Mineral Counties and Beyond

2025 Annual Report



Our Sincerest Gratitude

We sincerely thank the following state and federal agencies for their continued trust and partnership:

- Montana Department of Agriculture (MDOA)
- Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC)
- United States Department of Agriculture: Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA AMS); Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS); Rural Development (USDA RD)
- United States Department of Treasury (USDT)
- United States Economic Development Administration

We also extend our gratitude to the following community foundations and organizations for their generous support and collaboration:

- Headwaters Foundation
- Hopa Mountain
- Treacy Foundation
- High Stakes Foundation

Our work to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of our communities is made possible through the management and implementation of the following state and federal programs:

- MDOA: Montana Food and Agriculture Development Center Network
- MDOC: Certified Regional Development Corporations Program; Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program
- USDA-AMS: Local Food Promotion Program; Regional Food Systems Partnerships; Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
- USDA-RD: America's Healthy Food Finance Initiative; Rural Energy for America Program; Rural Cooperative Development Grant; Rural Community Development Initiative Grant; Rural Microentrepreneurship Assistance Program

Mission West Community Development Partners is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of all residents in Lake, Sanders, and Mineral Counties and the Flathead Indian Reservation.

~ THE MISSION OF MISSION WEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

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Friends of Mission West,

This report showcases 2025 as a year of exceptional growth, momentum, and impact for Mission West Community Development Partners. Through change and expansion, we strengthened our role as a driving force for community and economic development—powered by strong leadership and a deeply committed team.

Our annual Farm to Table fundraiser was a major success, raising over \$20,000 from 150+ attendees to reinvest in Montana’s food and agriculture sector, including new equipment for MMFEC. The event highlighted the strength of our local food system, featuring a standout meal prepared by MMFEC Operations Manager Travis White and his crew. We continued to expand our regional influence through strategic partnerships by hosting the USDA Farm to School Summit and collaborating with the Northwest Food Hub Network. With these collaborations, we helped elevate opportunities for producers and strengthen connections across the food system.

Our Cooperative Development Division built significant momentum, launching three new co-ops and advancing the Ronan Community Investment Co-op for 2026—creating lasting pathways for local ownership, investment, and community wealth-building.

Through Business Development, we directly supported entrepreneurs and communities with equipment financing, startup assistance, historic building restoration, and targeted investments across Sanders County and the broader region- fueling economic resilience and long-term growth.

A defining achievement this year was the revitalization of the historic Pearl Theatre in Ronan. In partnership with the Western Montana Musicians Co-op, we helped transform this landmark into a vibrant hub for music, creativity, and community connection- bringing new energy to downtown and creating opportunities for artists of all levels.

As we reflect on 2025, Mission West Community Development Partners continues to demonstrate the strength of community-driven economic development across Western Montana. It is my honor, as Board President,

to support an organization that remains deeply committed to fostering opportunity, resilience, and long-term prosperity in the communities we serve.

Over the past year, Mission West has advanced critical initiatives that strengthen local businesses, expand access to capital, and support workforce and food system development. Through strategic partnerships, innovative programming, and a steadfast focus on community needs, we have helped build a more sustainable and inclusive regional economy.

Our success in 2025 is a direct result of the dedication of our staff, partners, and stakeholders who share a common vision for growth and opportunity. Together, we are not only addressing today's challenges but also laying the foundation for a thriving future.

Looking ahead, Mission West remains committed to empowering entrepreneurs, supporting rural communities, and driving meaningful economic impact throughout the region.

Sincerely,



Sjaan Vincent, *Board Chair*



The People of Mission West

Staff

Jan Tusick *Executive Director; Food and Agriculture Development Center (FADC) Director*

Taylor Lennox *Community Economic Development (CED) Program Manager*

Brittany Simonich *Community Development Program Coordinator*

John Whitworth *Loan Portfolio Manager*

Westyn Kiehn *Business Development Program Manager*

Terrell LaForge *Business Development Program Coordinator*

Charlie Michel *Cooperative Development Director*

Blake Lineweaver *Local Food Promotion Manager*

Travis White *Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) Operations Manager*

Nickolas Wilkins *Production Manager*

Euriyka Caye *Lead Processor*

Fiona White *Food Safety Technician*

Clarence Thomas *Processing Assistant*

Michael Wilkins *Processing Assistant*

Susan Misgen *Bookkeeper*

Jennifer Ruggless *Office Manager*

Karl Sutton *Brownfields Project Manager*

2025-2026 Board of Directors

Sjaan Vincent *President* | Facilities & Fair Manager for the Lake County Fair

Roxanne Duckworth *Past President* | Glacier Bank

Brian Crain *Vice President* | First Security Bank

Jay Preston *Past President* | Access Montana

Kimberly Sassaman *Secretary/Treasurer* | Retired City Government

Jay Preston | Access Montana

Billie Lee | Lake County Grant Specialist / Director Special Projects

Michael Dolson | Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council

George Simpson | Chief of Police, City of Polson

Patrick Mangan | Montana State University Extension

Dan Rowan | Sanders County Commissioner

Steve Stanley | Lake County Commissioner

Roman Zylawy | Mineral County Commissioner

Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center

GROWING MONTANA'S LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY



Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) is a USDA inspected, Certified Organic, and FDA-registered shared-used food processing facility serving clients statewide.

From our Facility to Tribal Members: In 2025, MMFEC staff packed over 10,000 Confederated Salish and Kootenai Food Sovereignty Food Boxes for Tribal Families here on the Flathead Reservation.

These boxes contain local meats, cheeses, and produce to help feed Tribal Members. The use of local food helps Farmers, Producers, and Suppliers stay in business, and the Food Boxes themselves are a welcome sight to many families across the Reservation.

Montana Lentil Burger: The Montana Lentil Burger has seen a surge of popularity in local markets, such as Good Food Store and Western Montana Growers Co-Op. Look for our Burgers there, fire up the grill, and have a wonderful, healthy meal that is made locally with local ingredients.

PHOTO RIGHT ABOVE - CSKT Food Distribution - Courtesy of Char-Koosta Newspaper;
PHOTO RIGHT BELOW - Montana Lentil Burger



556 : Food and Value-Added Ag businesses were
: assisted in their business capitalization, planning,
: and manufacturing licensing

152

Number of school districts that served Montana
Marinara in the 2025 school year

Montana Marinara Madness: From our Facility to your Children's Schools! Montana Marinara: Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center continues to partner with the Office of Public Instruction provide local food to Schools all over Montana.

Over 34,130 pounds of local ingredients have been sourced, 313,716 meals served using Montana Marinara, and 80,440 pounds of Marinara produced and shipped to schools between 2022-2025.

We recently installed a new bottling line to increase volume and safety, which allows us to process almost hands free. Watch about it below!



**SCAN THE QR CODE OR CLICK THE LINK TO
VIEW THE VIDEO!**

<https://www.kpax.com/news/montana-ag-network/montana-agnetwork-ronan-food-facility-addsautomated-bottling-system-to-boostproduction>

*PHOTOS: TOP- Kettle of Montana Marinara
MIDDLE- Marinara Madness at School
BOTTOM- MMFEC Crew with finished inventory*

Client Success Story

Powder Hound Hot Chocolate was born on the snowy slopes of Montana. When the Kaiser family went skiing, the kids wanted hot chocolate. But their mother, Andrea- born and raised in Bogotá- didn't want her kids drinking "sugar bombs."

Drawing on her Colombian heritage, Andrea crafted a custom mix using less sugar, ethically sourced South American cacao, and natural ingredients. The kids loved it, and soon other parents were clamoring for the recipe.

Realizing they had something special, the Kaisers decided to launch Powder Hound Hot Chocolate. But they faced a steep learning curve in bringing a food product to market. MMFEC guided them through every step of the process. After a successful launch in 2026, the team is now ramping up production to meet demand for next winter.



“From permits and licensing to manufacturing and packaging, MMFEC has been an invaluable resource,” ... “We couldn’t have done it without them.”

~ James Kaiser, Co-founder, Powder Hound

PHOTO - The Kaiser Family with their new product coming to store shelves soon!

Community Economic Development

PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



A Year of Momentum: Building a Thriving Rural Region through Tourism Development and Revitalization Projects

2025 was a busy year for community economic development across the Mission Valley and beyond. Mission West continued its role as a catalyst for downtown revitalization, tourism infrastructure, and regional capacity building.

The PCTGP—\$1.25 million, two year grant from the Montana Department of Commerce—made significant strides in 2025. Capital improvements advanced the Lake County Fairgrounds, including grandstand reclamation and community center bathrooms upgrades, while the Spring Creek Mural Project brought new public art to downtown Ronan.

The program supported three Main Street businesses—The Ronan Cooperative Brewery, The Pearl Theatre (operated by the Western Montana Musicians Cooperative), and Evolve Fitness—leveraging private investment alongside grant dollars. Engineering and planning work was completed or advanced for the Non-Motorized transportation Plan, the 3rd Avenue Pathway and Lighting Plan, the Thompson Falls Trail Extension, and the Trout Creek Park Community Master Plan in Sanders County.

Regional projects also progressed in Sanders County, including fairground improvements and the Whitepine Grange Picnic Pavilion, and capacity building work to support Sanders County Community Development Corporation (SCCDC). Projects are planned for Mineral County in 2026.

14



Number of Tourism related projects underway in Lake, Mineral, and Sanders Counties

\$1.6 MM



\$1.6 million in funding has been secured in the past year for regional projects

Mission West coordinated with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Road Program to submit two Tribal Transportation Program Safety Fund (TTPSF) applications through grant writing partner KLJ: one to fund implementation of the 3rd Avenue Pathway in Ronan, and one to support planning and design updates for the Hot Springs/Hwy 77 Pathway in Sanders County.

Mission West hired a new Community Development Coordinator in early 2026, increasing capacity to deliver on tourism grant commitments, support program partners, and manage community outreach. Additionally, Mission West is assuming coordination of Ronan's affiliate status in the Montana Main Street program, pairing tourism grant investments with new tools, grant opportunities, and community engagement pathways.

Looking ahead, Mission West will launch its 2027–2032 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) process. The CEDS is federally required planning document through the Economic Development Administration (EDA) that guides economic MWCDP's work in diversification, job growth, and infrastructure investment across the region and is essential to maintaining Economic Development District designation.

Potential implementation dollars from the Tourism Grant bringing shovel ready projects to life



\$3 MM

\$106k+ secured in grants to increase energy savings

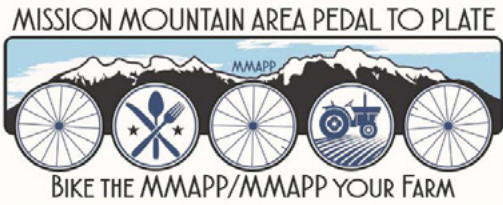
Over the past year, Mission West's Food and Ag center partnered with MDOA's Rural Energy for America (REAP) and delivered technical assistance that helped 6 businesses save over 186,000 kwh of Energy.

Mission West supported rural businesses and agricultural producers in energy efficiency and reducing costs through the Rural Energy for America (REAP) program. In partnership with the Montana Department of Agriculture and Montana Rural Development, six businesses invested \$172,000 in private funds- resulting in annual energy savings of 186,000 kwh. An additional six Lake County businesses received funding for energy efficiency or renewable upgrades while seven REAP applications remain pending amid federal program changes.

We also led a feasibility study with Missoula Electric Cooperative exploring an Inclusive Utility Investment model, where efficiency upgrades are financed upfront and repaid through energy savings. This approach has the potential to lower costs for ratepayers, support workforce development, and reduce strain on utility infrastructure. Additionally, Mission West was awarded a \$500,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant to support redevelopment in Lake, Sanders, and Mineral counties. This program provided environmental assessments and cleanup planning, helping remove barriers to investment, and making property reuse more accessible and predictable.

PHOTOS - Groundwater Testing, Rail Link Park Dedication, Soil Samples





Mission Mountain Area Pedal to Plate 2025 stretched almost 40 miles over gravel, asphalt, and plain old grass.

Riders began at Foust Farms, then enjoyed visiting The Bison Range, Ploughshare Farm, Lowdown Farm, Bucketeer Farm and Ranch, Triple Divide Seeds Co-op, Fresh Roots Farm and ended at Bee Kind Honey for farm fresh food prepared by Chef David Max from FrigginFulla, the Farm to Fork food truck.



PHOTOS: Top Left - FrigginFulla lunch; Top Right - Snacks at Ploughshare Farm; Bottom Left - Start at Foust Farms; Bottom Right - Flathead Lake Lookout





A photograph of three men standing in front of a building with a sign that says "AAW". The image is overlaid with a blue tint. The men are standing side-by-side, smiling slightly. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The man in the middle is wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. The man on the right is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The building behind them has a sign that says "AAW" and some smaller text below it. The overall scene is outdoors with some greenery visible.

Business Development

CULTIVATING BUSINESS ONE BLOCK AT A TIME

Left to Right: John Whitworth, Senior Loan Manager; Taylor Lennox, Community Economic Development Program Manager; Westyn Kiehn, Business Development Program Manager

\$1.25MM

 in loans issued this year to 16 businesses,
  creating 12 more jobs in the region

Mission West's **Business Development** program, serving Lake, Mineral, and Sanders Counties, empowers businesses to thrive by providing a variety of financing options, technical assistance, and workshops to help them grow and develop sustainability.

Bankers Breakfast: The events provided a venue for local lenders to come together to discuss changes in Lending, and to learn more about Mission West and our services we offer the Region. With these partnerships, Mission West is able to leverage fair and consistent lending practices that benefit local businesses.

Workshops: Mission West facilitates small business workshops designed to provide local entrepreneurs with the resources they need to develop, sustain, and grow their business. In the last year, MWCDP facilitated 13 workshops that 197 people attended, focusing on AI, software programs, and Google integrations.

1,132

 hours of technical assistance
  provided to 170 different clients

PHOTOS: Bankers Breakfast 2/15/25



399 : number of businesses assisted in the region

Technical Assistance: The Business Development spent the last year working with Credit Builders Alliance to begin reporting our loan portfolio to the major credit bureaus and with that addition are beginning to build a credit counseling program in order to better serve our clients.

We will continue looking for ways to grow our department capacity and pivot wherever our communities need us to.



\$4.9MM : additional funds leveraged to assist local businesses

“We’re grateful for the role Mission West Community Development Partners has played in our journey and excited to continue growing in the years ahead.”

~ Apex Lawn and Landscape



Client Success Story

Apex Lawn & Landscape started its roots in 2014 with a simple goal-provide dependable, high-quality landscaping services while building something meaningful for our community.

What began as a small, hardworking operation has grown steadily over the years into a trusted name for outdoor solutions. In 2024, that growth reached a new level with the support of Mission West Community Development Partners. This support allowed them to grow not just in size, but in capability. With Mission West’s help, Apex was able to expand services and invest in the equipment needed to take on larger, more complex projects.

This expansion has also allowed Apex to create more local job opportunities and better serve homeowners and businesses throughout the community. From their beginnings in 2014 to where they are today, Apex’s mission has stayed the same-deliver quality work, build lasting relationships, and take pride in every project they complete.

number of projects assisted by the
Business Development department

: 256



Cooperative Development

OWN IT TOGETHER, SHARE THE BENEFITS



Collaboration in Practice

Food Hub Manager Working Groups

- **Sales Working Group** Purposes regional market, implements and coordinates hub-to-hub transactions.
- **Innovation Working Group** Develops our hub-to-hub supply chain and assesses performance metrics.
- **Cooperative Working Group** Supports organizational design create a values aligned future.
- **Food Safety Working Group** Supports risk assessment, food safety plan development, and audit-readiness.



24



projects assisted by our Cooperative Development Program

Cooperative Development Program: In 2025, our Cooperative Development Center secured nearly triple the USDA funding through a strategic partnership with the Northwest Agriculture Business Center and Northwest Cooperative Development Center- expanding services across the Rocky Mountain and Northwest regions.

This year, we helped launch three new cooperatives, supported nearly 500 jobs, and marked one year of our Cooperative Governance Community of Practice, engaging 30+ leaders from 10 cooperatives in ongoing peer learning. We remain committed to strengthening rural communities by building people-centered businesses that drive lasting economic and social impact,

Community Ownership Comes Home: We guided the Moscow Community Investment Cooperative (MCIC) from initial conversations to incorporation, demonstrating the power of real estate cooperatives in rural downtowns. With our support, MCIC established its mission, governance, and a successful pledge campaign-securing 300+ commitments and over \$500,000 in community investment.

This model highlights how local ownership can keep rents affordable, preserve community character, and support small businesses. Building on this success, we are leading efforts to launch a similar cooperative in Ronan. The group is developing the cooperative's structure and investment strategy-advancing our vision to place Main Street properties in community hands and drive long-term Downtown revitalization.

full-time jobs created in rural communities

44

250+  local producers accessed new markets through the Northwest Food Hub Network

2025 Northwest Food Hub Network Summit

Mission West hosted its fourth annual Northwest Food Hub Network Summit on March 13-14 in Spokane, Washington, on the campus of Gonzaga University. The event brought together 175+ food hub managers, producers, market stakeholders, and advocates from 23 cooperatives, food hubs, and networks from here in our region and across the country.

On-site learning opportunities at CasaCano Farms, LINC Foods, and Gonzaga Campus Dining gave participants an inside look at our regional food system, while a networking event, panel sessions, and breakout groups offered space to share knowledge and build relationships.

The Northwest Food Hub Network, launched by Mission West in 2022 in partnership with Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative, LINC Foods, and Western Montana Growers Cooperative, continues to grow as model for regional collaboration. Inspired by the cooperative principle of cooperation among cooperatives, the Network's farmer and worker-owned food hubs trade inventory, coordinate transportation, and align sourcing standards- creating new market opportunities for hundreds of local producers while expanding access to fresh, local food for communities.

By hosting the Summit each year, Mission West brings the Network's success to a wider audience and invites new partners to join us in advancing our vision for a more vibrant food system.

Cooperatives and Small Businesses assisted by our center in 2025  **78**



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