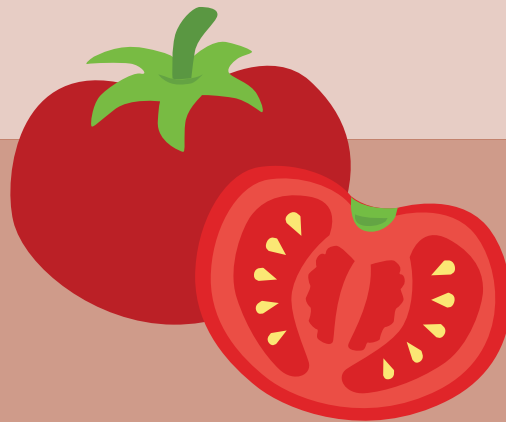




MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '24



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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This toolkit was created through collaborative efforts between Mission West Community Development Partners, Montana Office of Public Instruction, Northwest Food Hub Network, Kitchen Sync Strategies, and Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger (MT PECH).

We also want to acknowledge the Montana food service directors who provided valuable feedback and input on the toolkit and its resources. And to all the food service professionals who work exceptionally hard to feed Montana students safe, nutritious, and delicious school meals - we are so grateful for your dedication to your students and communities.

Finally, this project is possible through funding support from USDA Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program and Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign. Thank you for your support and commitment to this work!



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OUR TEAM

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 (NWFHN) 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 (WMGC) 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.



KITCHEN SYNC STRATEGIES

Kitchen Sync Strategies is a social enterprise brokerage and consulting company dedicated to supporting small producers. Their team serves as the brokers for the Northwest Food Hub Network, and they are driven by the belief that a smarter, healthier food economy is built around people in relationship with their food and farmers. Kitchen Sync helped launch Montana Marinara in 2021 and is a critical player in developing the project's strategy, partnerships, and sustainability.



Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger (MT PECH) collaborates with communities around healthy food solutions to curb hunger today while cultivating systemic change alongside community leaders to end hunger for the future. MT PECH 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 Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (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, Montana Farm to School Coordinator

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

125

Number of Montana school districts that ordered for the 2023–2024 school year

10,060

Pounds of locally sourced ingredients used

134

Average miles traveled from Montana farm to our processing facility

1/2

Cup of red/orange veggies per ½ cup serving of Montana Marinara

\$0.44

Share of each dollar returned to local farms

89%

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

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Montana Marinara contains 1/2 cup of red/orange veggies in every 1/2 cup serving. Packed full of local veggies, Montana Marinara is a nutritious and delicious addition to your menu!



Somers Middle packed local flavor into this lunch! Meatball subs with local beef and Montana Marinara on a homemade bun, Montana carrots and lettuce, and apple crisp with Montana oats and apples!

HOW TO ORDER: SY 2024-2025

Montana Marinara was fully funded by MT OPI for SY 2023-2024. For SY 2024-2025, MT OPI has once again committed to fund Montana Marinara!

You can order Montana Marinara on your USDA Foods survey in February 2024.

Montana Marinara will be listed on the survey for the value of USDA tomatoes per case (estimated \$9), which will be drawn down from your entitlement fund. It will be delivered by MT OPI in late 2024 or early 2025.

Want more Marinara? Montana Marinara is also available to purchase at a commercial price through the Western Montana Growers Cooperative. To learn more, contact Michelle Perkins at Kitchen Sync Strategies: michelle@kitchensyncstrategies.com



RECIPE AND MENU IDEAS

Montana Marinara is not only delicious, but it's also versatile! Try it on your students' favorite type of pasta, as a dipping sauce for cheese sticks, on meatball subs, or wherever else you serve tomato sauce. Our sauce can also be tailored to your students' tastes through the addition of herbs and spices to match your desired flavor profile - or incorporated into new recipes!

Check out the recipe links below to see some creative ways that Food Service Director Kate Huston at Anderson School is using Montana Marinara!

[Indian Butter Chicken](#)
[Creamy Tomato Basil Soup](#)
[Red Enchilada Sauce](#)
[Beef Walking Tacos](#)
[Bison Chili](#)

We have also provided some menu costing examples to show how MT Marinara can fit into your existing menus.

[Menu Costing Example: Cheesy Breadsticks with Montana Marinara Dipping Sauce](#)

[Menu Costing Example: Rotini Pasta with Montana Marinara](#)



MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '24

This spring, it's Marinara Madness here in Montana! The Northwest Food Hub Network, in partnership with Montana OPI, is sending shipments of Montana Marinara to schools across the state starting in January. 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
- **The Oil Barn (Shelby, MT)** - Safflower Oil
- **Rocky Mountain Produce (Augusta, MT)** - Onions
- **Harlequin Produce (Arlee, MT)** - Carrots

"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."

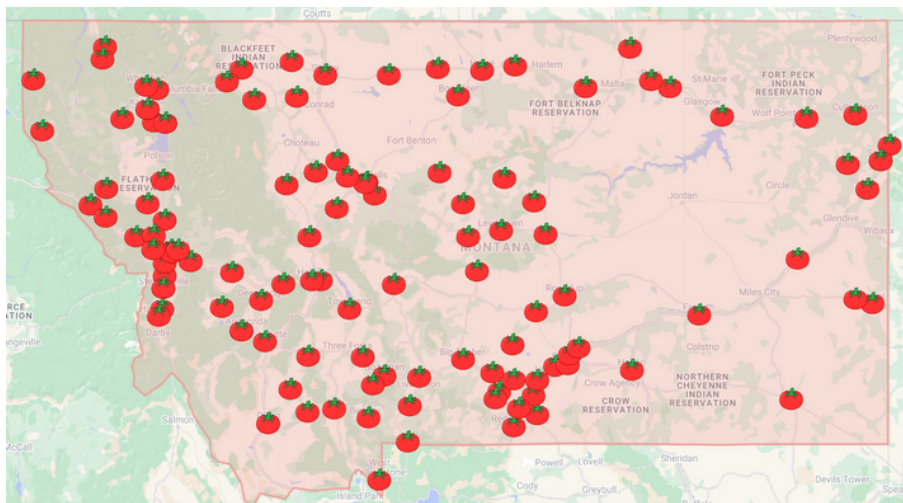
– Ian Barry, Lowdown Farm

We're encouraging teachers and staff from the 120+ 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.

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!

Is your school district on the map?





MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '24

GET IN THE GAME

Ready to get started? The next two pages highlight six ideas for celebrating local food this spring.

Tell the story behind the food.

Share our [printable farmer story sheets](#) with your students or simply display them in your cafeteria or classroom. These story sheets provide an inside look at the local farmers that grew the butternut squash, carrots, onions, and safflower oil that we put in every batch of Montana Marinara.



Anderson School showcased our farmer story sheets next to their lunch line! Students could read about the farmers that grew the Montana Marinara veggies while they were served a delicious lasagna.

Farm(er) to School

Invite a local farmer to speak in the classroom or talk with students over lunch - and we can help! Let us know if you'd like an introduction to a local grower.

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.



Somers Middle put together an all-Montana meal with meatball subs made with local beef and Montana Marinara, local carrots and salad, and homemade apple crisp with Montana apples!



MARINARA MADNESS

MONTANA | SPRING '24

GET IN THE GAME

Hold a taste test!

Want to know what your students think about Montana Marinara? For elementary or middle school 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 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.



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 local produce!

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!



Above: A vibrant field of carrots at Harlequin Produce!

Left: Hardin Middle School students vote in a taste test using a Tried it, Liked it, Loved it sticker chart. "Loved it" won with Hardin's tasty Montana Marinara with Meatballs.



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 Montana 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 Community Development Partners (FB/IG: @missionwestcdp)**
- **Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger (FB/IG: @montanapech)**
- **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 120+ 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 social media post?

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

Look no further than Montana's own Farm to School of Park County for local food inspiration on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). This picture-perfect Facebook post demonstrates their knack for skillfully—and succinctly—highlighting Farm to School going-on in the county.



We're big fans of [Rock on Cafe](#) and their impeccable food photos! This coalition of foodservice staff recently unveiled a mouthwatering baked ziti using locally sourced beef and cheese.

[And a great recipe idea for Montana Marinara!]



Take your Farm to School celebration to the great outdoors like [Hamilton Farm to School](#)! Check out how this hardworking team came together with community volunteers to help students build their school garden.



We got a kick out of [Moore School's](#) recent Facebook post of their beef-to-school success featuring empty trays and many thumbs up! They've certainly mastered how to say "Moore" with less.

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 120+ 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.



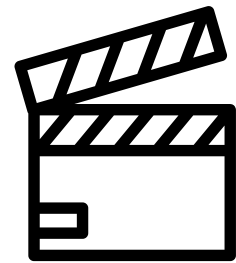
FULL COURT PRESS RELEASE



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.
- **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.
- **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.



Choteau Schools worked with Montana Farmers Union and MT No Kid Hungry (now MT Partnership to End Childhood Hunger) to invite KRTV to their lunchroom during Marinara Madness! [Click here](#) to see the video and news article.

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 Menu Costing Examples](#)

 [Press Release Template](#)

 [Morning Announcement](#)

 [MT Marinara Processing Photos](#)

 [March Menu Template](#)

 [Montana Marinara Coloring Page](#)

 [Montana Marinara Poster](#)

 [MT Marinara Flyer](#)

 [Flyer for Parents/Guardians](#)

 [Survey Flyer for High School Students](#)

 [Lunch Line Label](#)

 [Farm Photos](#)

 [Montana Marinara Recipes](#)

 [Veggie Coloring Pages](#)

MEET THE TEAM!



Mission West staff admiring Montana-grown butternut squash.



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

**Questions about this toolkit?
Contact Anne Harney at anne.harney@missionwestcdp.org**