

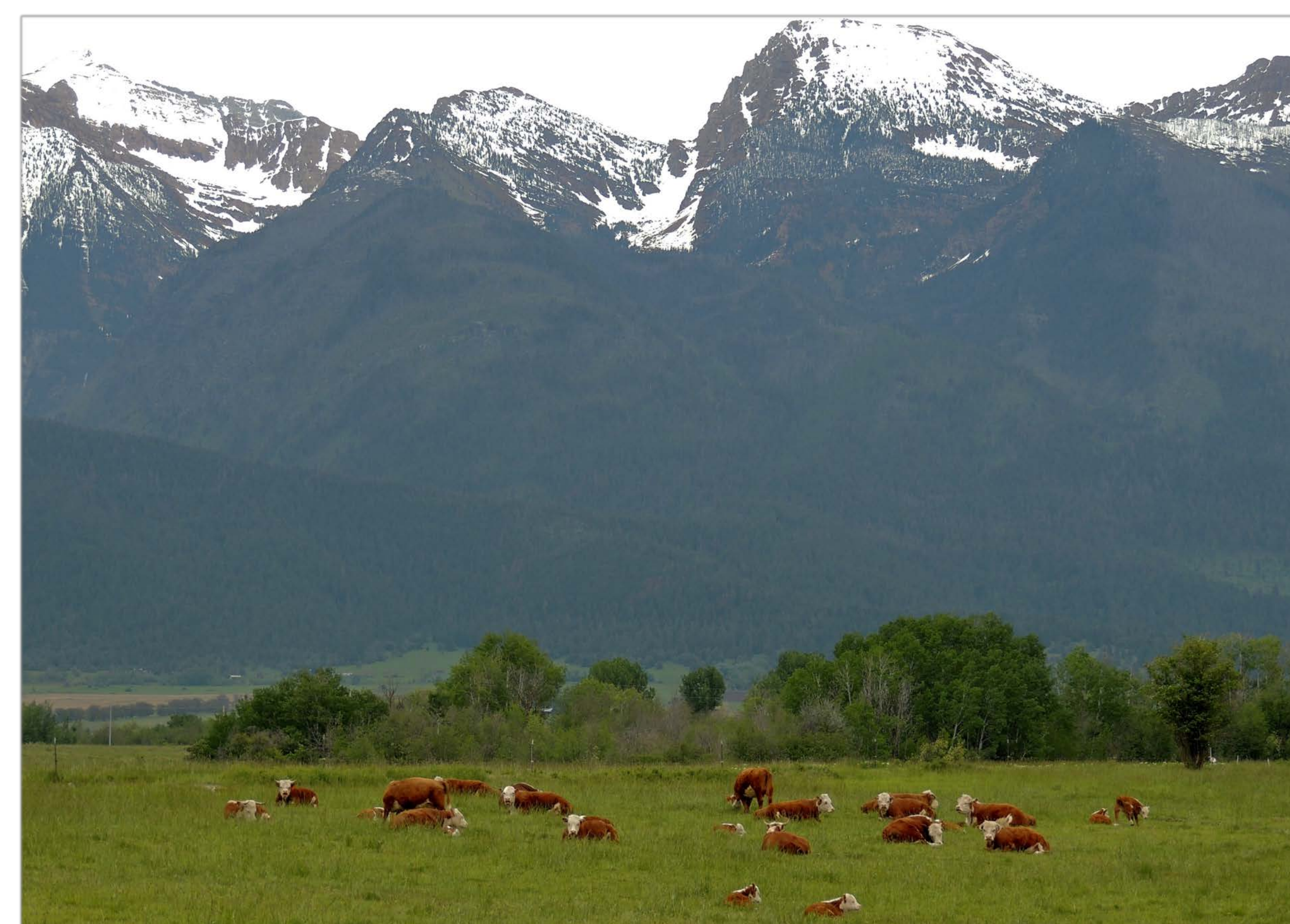
# Examining, Optimizing, and Building Capacity for Montana's Local Beef to School Supply Chain (SW15-028)

Thomas Bass<sup>1</sup>, Carmen Byker-Shanks (P.I.)<sup>2</sup>, Demetrius Fassas<sup>3</sup>, Janet Gamble<sup>2</sup>, Katie Halloran<sup>3</sup>, Aubree Roth<sup>2</sup>, Joel Schumacher<sup>4</sup>, Mallory Stefan<sup>3</sup> (authors alphabetical)



## BACKGROUND

Montana has approximately 2.5 million cattle, roughly 20 state and federally inspected beef processors, and about 145,000 students across 821 public schools, making it an ideal location to implement and evaluate local beef to school (B2S) procurement programs. Community interest in providing local agricultural products, including beef, to students is strong.



## INFORMAL RESEARCH QUESTION

While some school foodservice, rancher, and processor partnerships have developed B2S programs that are mutually beneficial, others have struggled. Therefore, what variables most influence success of Montana B2S programs?

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

1. Conduct comprehensive case study research to identify the benefits, challenges, and best practices that exist for B2S procurement models.
2. Further identify logistical issues that influence B2S supply chain performance.
3. Obtain student acceptance data about local beef in comparison with commercial beef.
4. Create research informed B2S educational materials, tools, and scholarly publications.
5. Conduct virtual and face-to-face outreach for producers, processors, and school food services.

## PROJECT PERIOD

Summer 2015 to Fall 2018

## MOTIVATIONS

Surveys and interviews of Montana B2S stakeholders revealed a variety of *perceptions* and *beliefs* that motivated interest in B2S programs.

- Perception that local beef was higher quality and/or more nutritious than conventional beef
- B2S could improve food literacy and make connections between Montana's landscape, culture, and food
- B2S could enhance community spirit and pride for participating in the local food system
- Perception of "better" animal welfare and environmental practices associated with local beef production

## MONTANA B2S PROCUREMENT MODELS

Case studies and additional engagement with stakeholders revealed four primary procurement models, though other models and arrangements exist.

Vertically Integrated: Bear Paw Meats of Chinook, Montana, is a family-owned vertically integrated cattle, feeding, auction, processing and retail meat enterprise that sells to schools. Schools are an important market in their comprehensive business enterprises.

Processor-Based: Lower Valley Processing of Montana's Flathead Valley sells fresh beef to area schools weekly, from local cattle that they source from different ranchers for B2S programs.

Producer or Ranch Branded: Brands of local beef, such as Muddy Creek Ranch and Lazy SR, have sold directly to local schools. In this model, processing is an outside service and the beef company raises cattle and markets the beef.

Donation Model: Beaverhead School District of Dillon, Montana receives cattle donated from ranchers and buyers at 4H auctions. They work with Ranchland Packing of Butte to have the cattle processed. The cost to the district is only for processing, unless there are also cash donations.

Place-based solutions are represented in each of these models; however, a common component of all models studied was *strong relationship building at the most local level.*



## SELECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Barriers	Solutions
Cost	Focus on affordable cuts and products (ex. ground, burger patties, roasts...) Consider and seek local cull cows. Investigate donation potentials
Prep-only kitchens	Use wholesome extenders in recipes (ex. lentils, mushrooms, pureed vegetables) Budget local beef over greater time, not the meal
Creating and sustaining interest	Seek an inspected kitchen to brown or pre-cook as appropriate for further distribution in district Educate, advertise, promote and give credit to producers, processors or other relevant partners on signs and menus
Kitchen convenience	Clearly communicate processing preferences and package quantities
Storage	Plan ahead for receiving product and designating freezer space, particularly if a whole animal is involved
Making connections	Consult local food directories, interview restaurant and grocers about local suppliers, and check government listings for inspected processors

## SELECT OUTREACH METHODS

- Social Media and Web Presence
- Extension Publications
- National and Regional Webinars
- Face-to-face trainings and presentations
- Consulting and technical assistance
- Forthcoming chapter in institutional purchasing book

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team is grateful to our advisors, producers, processors, schools, and participating state agencies for their input and sound guidance.



<sup>1</sup>MSU Extension Animal and Range Sciences; <sup>2</sup>MSU Education, Health and Human Development; <sup>3</sup>NCAT-ATTRA; <sup>4</sup>MSU Extension Agricultural Economics and Economics

"This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under sub-award number SW15-028. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider."