

# + Montana Farm to School Successes



## Beef to School Month in Ennis

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The hum of happily chewing mouths filled the Ennis School lunchroom on January 15 as students enjoyed beef stroganoff prepared with local Montana

beef. Not only is this type of beef purchase good for the local economy, but it has tremendous environmental benefits. This beef was born, raised, and processed right here in Montana, delivering a monumental decrease in the miles that the product had to travel from field to fork. The students and staff that ate this new preparation of an old lunchroom favorite had a chance to cast their vote about the beef. With a declaration of "Tried it," "Liked it," or "Loved it", a resounding 94% voted that they "Loved it!" With a reception like that, it is safe to say that this is not the last time local beef will appear on the school's menu.

Following the local lunch, Brett & Rita Owens graced the elementary grades with a ranching perspective right from the Madison Valley. These students may have understood

where beef comes from, but did they realize just how much energy is put into the processes, from field to fork? Certainly after hearing from the Owens family, these students gained a bigger view on how beef typically moves around this country before reaching their plate, and not only that, but they got to enjoy the zeal and humor of Brett and Rita as they shared their experiences with the classes. A public thanks is very much due to this wonderful couple and their willingness to answer every question and hear every story that the kids had to share.

The rest of the month held exciting events galore as Rachel Endecott, the Montana State University Extension Beef Specialist, came in on January 21st to talk with the Junior High and High School students about the history of ranching in the country and in Montana specifically. Students brainstormed the requirements for different methods of beef production (grain-finished, grass-fed, naturally raised, and certified organic,) then discussed how these methods can fit into our local and



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global food systems. Discussions like these provide a springboard for students to consider the energy that goes into food production and distribution around the world, and an opportunity to discover that some foods simply make more sense to purchase locally.

On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, students were able to compare grass-fed to conventional, grain-finished beef and give their feedback to the chef during a blind lunchroom taste test. After tallying the 207 votes that were received, it seems that the school was nearly evenly split, with grass-fed beef barely winning with 51% of the votes. Whatever the results, these were arguably some of the best burgers ever to reach the lunchroom. All of the patties were prepared fresh, never frozen, right in the Madison Valley by Meat Montana. This event was followed up by classroom visits in the elementary school by Garl Germann of Montana Meat Co., a collaborative between seven ranches that are working to provide Montana grown meat straight to Montanans. Garl, whose family raised the grass-fed beef that was served, facilitated discussion about the beef taste test and spoke to the differences between eating and producing these two varieties of beef.

To finish out the month, on January 31<sup>st</sup>, not only did the Ennis Mustangs basketball team defeat their rival, Twin Bridges, but fans in attendance were able to eat a delicious steak dinner to support the student organizations BPA, FCCLA, and SkillsUSA. The students were pleased to announce that the funds didn't just help to support their clubs, but also went to provide a nutritious Montana raised steak for



those partaking in the meal! The nearly 320 people in attendance at the steak dinner were given the opportunity to learn about and discuss the Beef to School efforts that had taken place over the month.

The discussion this month has generated within our school and community is gaining in strength. Support from local organizations such as the Madison Valley Cattle Women's Association, Madison Farm to Fork, and the Madison Conservation District will be voiced at our upcoming School Board meeting and further local substitutions in our schools menu are in the works. With continued education and participation of beef growers in the valley, as well as support from the community, it is safe to assume that this momentum will carry the Ennis School District into a new era of local procurement.

More information on Montana FoodCorps at [www.montanafoodcorps.org](http://www.montanafoodcorps.org)

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