

March 20, 2013

EXHIBIT 4
DATE 3/21/13
HB 471

PLEASE SUPPORT HB-471, FARM TO SCHOOL

Honorable Chairman Ankney and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

As the food service director of Kalispell Public Schools I am inspired to work in a state that is considering a bill that would support the growth of Farm to School. I believe there is no better investment for our state than initiating programs that help Montana kids consume Montana foods. I hope that my personal experience can serve as an example to how this bill could work for schools around that state.

We have purchased a number of local products, including beef, pork, lentils, bread, and seasonal produce. We have found specific products that we can incorporate regularly as staples, and ones that we can serve only sometimes as a treat – as we balance creating a kid-friendly meals, meeting USDA meal pattern guidelines, and balancing our budget. One of the products that we piloted last year was Montana Beef Patties, which we purchased as ¼ lb patties – for a special “Farm to School” meal in October. We also served local roasted root vegetables, local pumpkin cake, MT apples, and Wheat MT Bread. Originally, the cost of the burgers was too expensive (\$0.75/patty). We would never have been able to serve this meal on a regular basis. However, the pilot helped us to establish a relationship with Lower Valley Processing, and later in the year they developed a smaller portion patty that was within our price range (\$0.49/patty). This year, we have spent over \$14,000 on local beef patties that we would have spent on an inferior product from an out-of-state producer. That pilot gave us and our producers the confidence and experience to move forward with a mutually beneficial relationship. This has been the case for every local product that we now use regularly. We need to support our schools to make these changes, which can seem risky at first but can be integrated sustainably over time.

Let me also point out that I manage one of the 7 AA School districts in the state. Larger school districts operate more efficiently because of the scale of production, therefore I have more flexibility to try new products and manipulate my budget and meal pattern with less financial risk. At least 50% of the students in our state attend the smaller school districts. I believe it is extremely important for us to provide this financial support so that other school districts can identify and develop purchasing relationships with MT food producers that work for them. In addition to decreasing the financial risk of piloting farm to school – this bill will send the message to Food Service Managers and School Administrators that Farm to School is something that our government supports – and I think that is as important as any financial contribution.

Thank you for your time,

Jenny Montague
Food Service Director
Kalispell Public Schools
233 1st Avenue East
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-751-3646