



Alternative Energy Resources Organization
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March 20, 2013

Representative Duane Ankney, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Montana State Capitol, 1301 E. 6th Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Please fund HB 471

Dear Representative Ankney and House Appropriation Committee Members,

AERO is a statewide grassroots organization committed to renewable energy and sustainable agriculture solutions for Montana. Many of our members are diversified farmers that market their agricultural products directly to consumers in Montana communities. On behalf of our members, I urge you to fund HB 471, which creates a state-administered grant program to foster more *Farm to School* programs across the state in which school foodservices purchase fresh, healthy food directly from Montana farmers. *Farm to School* has two primary benefits including opening a new market for local farmers and ranchers, and improving child nutrition by serving wholesome food in schools, but its economic multiplying effects benefit our communities significantly.

Montana farmers are often subject to the whims of fluctuating global price structures that are far beyond their control. *Farm to School* is a stable and high-volume market for farm-fresh foods that can be an important piece of a diversified marketing portfolio, but the process of selling to schools can take time. Examples across the state have shown that in the first year contacts between foodservice directors and growers are made, and some products are purchased. Then farmers can incorporate this new market's purchasing needs into their growing plan, and foodservice directors can tailor menus to include local foods, including doing business with processors that can provide value-added products such as chopped and bagged vegetables, or pre-patty Montana burgers. This grant program creates one-time seed money that helps schools and their area farmers establish lasting business relationships that will flourish.

Farm to School is also a proven effective strategy in improving child nutrition by providing fresh and healthy foods – which students need in order to thrive in school. The education that accompanies *Farm to School*, such as classroom or cafeteria farmer visits, farm field trips, or hands-on garden based curriculum bolsters existing ag-in-schools programs, and teaches children to appreciate the values of agriculture.

This request for funding stands out in that it is an investment with incredible leverage. A similar program in Oregon found that for every dollar spent on unprocessed *Farm to School* products, it generated an additional \$0.86 in spending, and for every dollar spent on value-added *Farm to School* products, an additional \$2.82 was spent in the local economy. Quick math tells us this program can return over \$700,000 to Montana farmers and processors, making this program a wise investment in securing jobs in Montana's food and agricultural sector, with a return on investment that Montana farmers cannot afford for you to pass up. Thank you for your consideration of this written testimony, and please prioritize funding HB 471 – the Montana *Farm to School* grant program.

Sincerely,

Kevin Moore
Food & Agriculture Program Manager