EXHIBIT 10
DATE 3/21/13
HB 471

Nourishing Kids and Communities

March 19, 2013

Chairman Duane Ankney
House Appropriations Committee
63rd Montana Legislature

Dear Chairman Ankney and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

I respectfully submit this letter as written testimony in support of **House Bill 471- Provide for Farm to School Programs**. The grant funding provided through this bill will allow schools to direct food purchasing dollars toward Montana-produced foods, keeping economic resources in our state while supporting Montana farmers and ranchers. Farm to School initiatives, including the purchasing of locally produced food by schools, are good for farmers and ranchers, benefit local food processors, distributors and packers, support Montana jobs for Montanans and support the development of healthy eating habits for our children.

HB 471 is a smart and responsible first step in reconnecting Montana's agricultural products to Montana consumers and deserving of inclusion within appropriations priorities. Schools are a dependable market for Montana farmers and ranchers, and can serve as the cornerstone in rebuilding a vibrant statewide food system - a food system in which Montanans have access to Montana grown foods and food sector jobs are created as a result of keeping Montanan's food dollars circulating in state.

Other states have demonstrated the benefits of investing state dollars for the purchase of state agricultural products in dependable and predictable food markets such as K-12 Schools. Oregon, Alaska, and Vermont, among others, have directed state resources toward local food purchasing for K-12 schools and have shown that such targeted spending on local agricultural products results in local economic development, improved participation in school meal programs (which often makes the difference between a school meal program operating in the black or in the red), and improved nutrition behaviors in school children.

Montana has a lengthy and proud agricultural history. Yet, over the past 50 year, a disconnect has developed between the food produced in a Montana and the food that Montanans eat. HB471 will be a sensible investment in Montana's agricultural and economic future. We will always be an agricultural state – let's regain our ability to be a state that feeds its own as well. I would be happy to discuss this letter, or Farm to School initiatives in general, at any time. Please don't hesitate to contact me.

With gratitude for your service to the citizens of Montana,

Mary Stein

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