



Sustainable Choices

Spring/Summer 2010 Newsletter

Sustainability is Like a Balanced Meal

Banquets, barbecues, holidays, dinner parties—food is an integral part of our lives. It brings us together. It marks special occasions. It sustains our health. And in an economy based largely in agriculture, food production has far-reaching impacts on this region.

We live in the last intact temperate zone ecosystem remaining on the planet. The fate of the ecosystem largely lies in the agricultural practices of the farmers and ranchers who steward much of this vast area. Two-thirds of Montana's land base is in food production, some 60 million acres. Agriculture is also the state's largest economic sector. What happens on these lands affects more than the farm or ranch families who rely on it for their living. It affects our economy, our rural communities and the unique landscape we call home. The majority of our work at Western Sustainability Exchange focuses on agriculture for these very reasons.

A small but growing number of Montana producers use sustainable agricultural practices that benefit our health, the land, our economy and our communities. These practices reduce chemical use, emphasize low-stress livestock handling, sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and preserve open space and wildlife habitat. To reward this valuable stewardship and to encourage more producers to use sustainable practices, WSE connects these farmers and ranchers to consumers, restaurants and other eateries willing to pay a reasonable premium for sustainably produced, local food.

People gather over food. We go out to dinner with friends and loved ones. Farmers markets bring together people from all walks of life. Food has an amazing ability to enhance our lives. The way in which it's produced has the capacity to sustain the special character of our state. And when consumers choose to purchase local, sustainable foods, they are supporting the economic viability of the primary stewards of Montana's land base.

Sustainability is like a balanced meal. It is good for the environment, good for the economy, and great for dinner!



© Renee' Evanoff - Rock Dog Art

... 2010 MONTANA ... Farm to Restaurant C.O.N.N.E.C.T.I.O.N

A big part of sustaining the region is economically rewarding farmers and ranchers for using sustainable practices. WSE's **Montana Farm to Restaurant Connection** initiative

connects farmers and ranchers, who pass WSE's **Sustainability Criteria**, with culinary and natural food markets. We have recruited over 35 eateries to buy from sustainable producers. In 2009, WSE facilitated over \$550,000 in sales for these local producers. Through the growing participation in WSE's Commerce Day events (see side bar) and other WSE activities, more and more restaurants and producers make the connections necessary to get sustainably produced food onto your plate.

Our Vision is as Big as Montana's Open Space

WSE seeks to conserve that open space, the quality of our rivers, the clarity of our air, the abundance and diversity of our fish and wildlife... The safety and friendliness of our rural communities... A healthy rural economy where people from all income levels can prosper within the carrying capacity of the land... The quality of life that has drawn or kept us here... in this special place that is truly one of a kind.

WSE achieves this vision by pursuing three inseparable goals: a healthy environment, economy and culture. We use educational programs and economic incentives to encourage sustainable behavior.

Achieving this vision won't happen through WSE's efforts alone. We invite you to share your talents, skills and resources with us. By harnessing the creativity and commitment of those who care about this exceptional place, we can pass this legacy on to future generations.



Commerce Day is an integral part of WSE's Montana Farm to Restaurant Connection. The marketing event brings together agriculture producers, food buyers, processors, distributors, and lenders in an effort to increase the availability of sustainably produced, regional foods. This winter WSE organized Commerce Days in Livingston, Billings and Missoula—bringing together over 130 producers, food buyers, distributors, and other players in the food system. The opportunity to have representatives from all facets of the food system in one room commonly results in solutions to problems, and answers to many questions around local food.

This year, Commerce Day facilitated at least 38 sales relationships between producers and buyers. Visit the WSE website to read the *Missoulian* article about the Commerce Day in Missoula.



Sustainable Choices

www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org



OUR MISSION

to advance sustainable choices that enhance economic opportunities which preserve open space, wildlife habitat, farm and ranchlands and quality of life for future generations

Carrots as Currency



A hand-cut ribeye of all natural local beef at Montana Ale Works in Bozeman has always come with a side of the chef's favorite vegetables. Now, thanks to a unique partnership with a nearby farm, those vegetables will more than likely be local as well.

Matt and Jacy Rothschiller, owners of Gallatin Valley Botanical (GVB), have been operating their farm since 2002 and are members of WSE's **Market Connection Program**. While the Rothschillers have been selling produce to Ale Works since 2006 they have never been able to supply large quantities of one of their most sought after products--baby carrots.

One of the biggest constraints leading to this shortage has been the extremely labor intensive harvesting process. That's where Albert McDonald, partner and general manager at Ale Works, comes into the picture.

As speakers on the same panel at WSE's January **Commerce Day** in Livingston, Albert and Matt had the opportunity to discuss Matt's issues with harvesting root crops. This brief discussion set in motion a series of events that led to meetings between the Rothschillers and the rest of the Ale Works partners.

Long story short, the partners ultimately agreed to make a low interest loan to GVB that would allow for the purchase of a specialized harvesting machine known as an under cutter. The new machine, scheduled for a mid-June delivery, will result in significant labor savings and will allow GVB to provide considerably larger quantities of its baby carrots to all its customers. It will also allow the farm staff to give a lot more attention to their other crops including onions and parsnips that occasionally get neglected during the hectic harvest season. Ultimately it's a win-win for both the Rothschillers and Ale Works and an arrangement that Albert says he's "giddy to be a part of."

But the true uniqueness of this agreement is the financing. The currency for the loan payback is not dollars, but carrots!



Matt and Jacy hope that this model will ultimately lead to other equipment loans financed by their customers and allow them to provide more locally and sustainably raised produce.



In January, WSE became the fiscal sponsor for the Bozeman Winter Farmers Market until the group can gain its own nonprofit status. This Market is one of the few winter markets in the state. It proved a great venue for producers and consumers.

With summer on its way, it's time to trade winter hats for baseball caps and focus on our Livingston Market.

To bring out the crowds, we are organizing special event days. On July 28th WSE is combining a locally focused **Sustainability Fair** with the Farmers Market. Check out our calendar for events and dates.

Once again, WSE is offering **Youth Booths** to kids involved in our **Young Entrepreneurial Stewardship (YES) program**. WSE is partnering with local children's organizations to organize a summer camp where kids will learn sustainable entrepreneurship. WSE will bring into the curriculum **Biz in a Boxx™**—an innovative tool designed to teach kids the fundamentals of business ownership.

Look for the innovative Youth Booths when you come out to the Farmers Market, and let the kids know what you think! **Thank you 1st Interstate Bank, Montana Financial Education Coalition and Park County Community Foundation for making this possible!**

Finally, the Livingston Farmers Market is now officially "tobacco-free" thanks to a partnership with Park County Tobacco Use Prevention Program.

We're fortunate to live in such a great community. The Farmers Market showcases the strength of our community week after week. This year, renowned local artist Parks Reese is generously creating original artwork for the Farmers Market. Keep your eye out for this masterpiece!

See you at the Market!





The Local Beef Bermuda Triangle

Ever looked for local beef at your neighborhood grocery store? If available at all, chances are it's in a small freezer separate from the main meat display and certainly not featured prominently. There are lots of reasons why, including a lack of both supply and demand. In Montana, with 2.6 million head of cattle, it seems crazy that there should be a shortage of local beef.

One of the contributing factors is the demise of many in-state meat-processing facilities. Although Montana is lucky to have several top-notch processors, most communities no longer have a local butcher. (Nationwide the USDA estimates 21% of processing facilities closed between 1998 and 2007.) Limited and sometimes costly options for disposal of by-products, and generally low profit margins, are just a few reasons why some butchers are no longer in business. Without a consistent supply of locally processed beef, many retailers find it easier and cheaper to simply buy

wholesale beef from a large food distributor that may be sourcing it from all over the country.

Despite these difficulties there are reasons for optimism. A large facility in south-central Montana may be opening in the near future. Additionally, thriving local butchers are developing quality, value-added products that are beginning to fill menus and meat cases.

At WSE we're working with many of these processors to find markets through our **Montana Farm to Restaurant Connection** and **Steer to Steak** programs as a way to solve the local beef access problem.

As a consumer, you can do your part by asking for local, sustainably-raised beef at restaurants and grocery stores. Let them know it's important to you.

Local Restaurants Feature "Ranch of the Month"

Two WSE Farm to Restaurant members—**The Owl Café**, in Laurel, and **Bridgecreek Back Country Kitchen and Wine Bar** in Red Lodge—have teamed up to launch a "Ranch of the Month" promotion. Their aim is to support local producers and increase public awareness of the quality and availability of local foods.

It is also a means to use a rancher's surplus cuts. The only menu constant being the food's source, the chefs have the freedom to design dishes based on the cuts available. Commonly, when a menu features lamb chops for instance, that restaurant cannot utilize the rest of a lamb carcass, which creates marketing hurdles for local ranchers. Under the Ranch of the Month promotion, one of the restaurants' aims will be to use the whole carcass. It's a win-win-win: local producers find a home for their harder-to-market cuts, chefs have fun with local products, and consumers enjoy the bounty of all-Montana, sustainable meats.



Western Sustainability Exchange is committed to advancing sustainable choices that have many positive effects on our daily lives. But we can't do it without your support! For the price of a latte, a magazine or this rubber chicken you can become a member of WSE's automatic monthly giving program, **Sustaining Circle**, and help us build economic opportunities that preserve open space, wildlife habitat, farm and ranch lands, and quality of life for future generations.

- \$2.92 per month = \$35 per year
- \$8.34 per month = \$150 per year
- \$12.50 per month = \$150 per year
- \$41.00 per month = \$500 per year!

Do you share WSE's mission and value our programs? There are lots of ways to help.

Buy our license plate from your local licensing office (ask for the "Sustaining the Legacy" plate) and/or become a member.

Join through our website:

www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org

To view a list of Farm to Restaurant members and certified sustainable producers, visit us on the web at:
www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org

Visit KitchenTLC.com for information on WSE's "Yum\$Raising" program.



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Upcoming WSE Events

Livingston Farmers Market Wednesdays

**June 2 - September 29, 2010
Sacajawea Park, Livingston**

July 7th – Kids Day
July 21st – Mental Health Awareness Day
July 28th – Sustainability Day, 2-8pm
August 4th – Health Day
August 11th – Arts & Culture Day

Harvest Celebration

Friday, September 24, 2010
Chico Hot Springs Resort

Holiday Farmers Market

Saturday, December 4, 2010
Civic Center, Livingston

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***Power of a Personal Choice* — Inspiring Neighbors and Patrons**

When Holly Heinzmann first came to Montana and discovered hot springs, she was struck by a thought that has driven her vision for the past 30 years. *Wouldn't that be cool if you could have a hot spring to heat your building and heat your greenhouses? Then you could easily survive this beautiful but extreme climate.* The dream became reality in 2004 when she bought Norris Hot Springs and set out to transform it into a model of sustainability.

Holly began by cultivating a diverse customer base. She added a patio and grill to attract summer business. And she built a dome by the pool, providing space for live music during summer and winter.

Food has perhaps been Holly's most significant change to Norris Hot Springs. From her commitment to local and organic food, Holly instituted the "50 Mile Grill" to promote local growers and producers. People have begun to visit for the food—not just the hot springs. Now, says Heinzmann, customers "eat local food whether they mean to or not, and they go away thinking, 'look what can be done, even in a place this remote.'"

The food has inspired other changes. Holly established a garden and a greenhouse to grow as much of the produce on location as possible. Last year all the greens used in the kitchen came from the garden. "I'm all about food and I'm all about food as health because that's our fuel. This is the project. Just learn how to grow it so we can serve it."

It's a challenging project. It's complicated, time-consuming, and expensive. She could buy conventionally produced food for less money than local and organic, but she submits that price doesn't

represent the true cost. The sound economics, she says, is to make the healthy choice. "It's hard to have integrity. But once things come into your awareness, you have no choice, you have to be true."

True to her dream, Holly has harnessed the geothermal waters to heat her additions to the property. Solar panels power the kitchen. A current project will plumb hot water to the greenhouse. She has planted a variety of trees and bushes, not only for shade, shelter, and carbon sequestration, but also for wildlife habitat.

Why does she go to so many lengths? It's simple, really. "To do the right thing," she says. "I'm in this for the long-haul. Here's my chance to do what I think is the right thing, with an interesting bunch of projects to keep me busy for the rest of my life. If I don't stand up with my own integrity, I won't enjoy it."

She exercises her personal choice in every way she can, and serves as a model and inspiration to all her patrons.

But even without a hot spring, we can exercise the power of our own choice: by planting a garden, shopping at farmers markets, and supporting the restaurateurs who, like Ms. Heinzmann, walk the walk of sustainability.

