



# Montana Food Bank Network

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To Whom It May Concern:

Ravalli County Commissioners

Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN) works in partnership with the Montana Office of Public Instruction and Montana No Kid Hungry to increase access to meals among children at risk of hunger through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). SFSP is a program that provides meals to all children age 18 and under during the summer months at approved meal sites. While summer may seem a long way away, I am writing to you in hopes that you may be interested in starting a conversation about how the SFSP could fit into your county.

Did you know?

- In Montana, approximately 1 out of 5 children live in households that struggle with hunger.
- Hungry children often experience impairments in physical, intellectual, and emotional development.
- Poor and inconsistent nutrition leads to inadequacy of vital nutrients, reduced immunity, increased risk of infections, morbidity, incidence of chronic diseases, and poor eating behaviors.
- Increased absenteeism from school due to illness results not only in academic consequences for children, but also causes decreased work productivity and potential job loss for parents.
- Hungry children often perform more poorly academically than their peers. Poor academic outcomes lead to high school dropout, lack of higher education, lack of skills to seek better employment and gain economic self-sufficiency in adulthood.

During the school year, many families rely on Free and Reduced-Price (FRP) school meals to help feed their children nutritious food and stretch their food budgets. During the summer, these families often find it difficult to pay for additional meal costs which can mean hungry bellies and inadequate nutrition for many kids across Montana. SFSP is designed to help fill the summer nutrition gap and ensure that children return to school in the fall ready to learn.

There are currently 3 SFSP sites in Ravalli County. However, the Hamilton community is eligible to participate in this program. As a community leader, MFBN would like to enlist your help in being an advocate for local children by supporting SFSP. You can spread the word to communities in your county and encourage local schools, non-profits, or civic organizations to sponsor a local food site. Sites can be located in any low-income area where 50% or more of the children are eligible for FRP meals such as schools, local parks, community swimming pools, churches, or apartment complexes. Ideally, SFSP sites are easily accessible and provide opportunities for educational or recreational activities. We are happy to help you identify some potential sites in your county.

**Would you be interested in helping facilitate the start-up of a SFSP site in Ravalli County and/or know some key community members that might also be interested?**

I have included the Montana Summer Food Service Program Report Card from summer 2013 as well as a brochure on the SFSP for you to look over. Both documents give a more detailed look at how the SFSP works and how effective the program was in Montana last summer. If starting a summer food site is something you wish to pursue check out this link to the USDA's Summer Meal Toolkit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>. Applications for new sponsors are due by May 19<sup>th</sup>, please feel free to call or e-mail me with any comments, questions, or ideas. Together, we can ensure that kids in Montana have a happy and productive summer free from the pangs of hunger.

Thank you for being an advocate for children in your community.

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