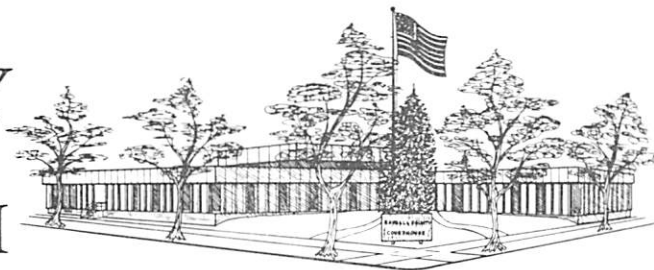


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



Ravalli County Commissioners
215 South 4th Street, Suite A
Hamilton, MT 59840
406-375-6500 • 406-375-6507 fax
commissioners@ravallcounty.mt.gov

July 6, 2017

Nicole Orta
Montana Department of Agriculture
Food and Agriculture Development Center

Re: AGR-RFP-2017-0004N

Dear Nicole,

The Ravalli County Board of Commissioners (BCC) encourage the Montana Department of Agriculture to fund the application from the Ravalli County Economic Development Authority (RCEDA) for the Food & Agriculture Development Center. The BCC and our community would like to see the RCEDA have an opportunity to develop Food & Ag Center services in Ravalli County and in the western counties of Montana.

Ravalli County is often included in the service area of those who receive funding from state or federal sources. Although regional services are intended for smaller surrounding counties, many times, Ravalli County citizens do not receive those promised services. RCEDA is providing the Department of Agriculture with an application and work plan that enables local technical assistance providers in Western Montana Counties to engage face to face with their local producers. We have learned that there is no substitute for readily available, locally provided capacity in business development, including food and agriculture. RCEDA is highly capable of coordinating and providing local technical assistance needed to the counties and partners in their application.

As shown in the table below, there is significant poverty in the cities and counties of Western Montana. One way to mitigate this issue is to provide local capacity for economic development. Ravalli County Commissioners have seen firsthand the difference that a hard working local economic development organization can make. RCEDA does not receive any Federal or State capacity building funds. The Commissioners are requesting that an opportunity be given to RCEDA to build capacity,

not only in Ravalli County but in the other western counties. This can be accomplished by using a model of sharing funds and resources through partnerships.

The BCC understand that Lake County Economic Development and Mission Mountain Cooperative have enjoyed these funds since 2009 and have been able to build their capacity to assist neighbor counties as well. We also understand that the four centers were not designed to be permanently funded thereby precluding the opportunity of others. We were disappointed to learn that one of RCEDA's partners in this application was pressured by one of the existing Food and Ag Centers to withdraw from the partnership. We hope this behavior will not be tolerated or rewarded by the Montana Department of Agriculture.

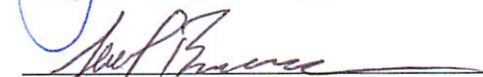
The USDA and Ravalli County Commissioners funded a 2016 feasibility study for a Food Processing Center. The results demonstrated the need for a processing center in Ravalli County. RCEDA has informed the BCC that it has the land and 50% of the funding in place to begin construction. The food processing center is included in the Comprehensive Development Plan for the County's Targeted Economic Development District. We are committed to supporting the local development of food and agriculture and to sharing our resources, and lessons learned with our Western Montana neighbors and with others in the state.

Area	Poverty in City	Poverty in County
Missoula	16 %	19.5 %
Ravalli (Hamilton)	24.3 %	18 %
Lincoln (Eureka)	37.7 % (Libby - 24.2%)	18.6 %
Mineral (Superior)	17.2 %	25.5 %
Sanders (Thompson Falls)	20.6%	22.4 %
Lake (Polson)	21.2 %	22.6 %


Sincerely,
RAVALLI COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Greg Chilcott, Chairman



Jeff Burrows, Vice-Chairman



Doug Schallenberger, Member



Ray Hawk, Member



Chris Hoffman, Member