In the 1950s Montana farmers, ranchers, and food businesses supplied over 70% of the food consumed in Montana. By 2007 that number was down to less than 10%. Even though we are an agricultural state, money leaves the state every day when we feed our families.

Our goal is to rebuild our regional food infrastructure in order to:

- Expand Montana producers’ local markets;
- Keep more of our food dollars in-state;
- Create new jobs in the community;
- Increase the amount of fresh, local food being served in our institutions.
One of the primary services of existing food hubs, such as Mission Mountain in Ronan, is food enterprise development, including: recipe testing, nutrition facts, and label design.

**STORAGE**

Storage is the second biggest challenge for producers getting product to institutional markets. Large amounts of cold and dry storage will enable ranchers, for instance, to store a whole head of beef for a restaurant.

**ADDRESSING FOOD ACCESS**

Yellowstone County has a large percentage of families in poverty who are food insecure. A food hub can serve as a facility for training and job creation in the food industry.

In order to get good food where most people shop and eat (grocery stores, institutions, restaurants), food must be collected from many different producers. Quality and packing standards must be met, and then food is stored and distributed to points of sale. While there is a corporate system already in place to accomplish this (e.g. Sysco), there is a need for an alternative system that offers more economic opportunities for regional farms and ranches.

Food hubs are an emerging model for healthy, local food collection and distribution. A regional food hub is a business or organization that actively manages the collection, processing, marketing, and distribution of food products from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.

**WHAT SERVICES SHOULD A YELLOWSTONE COUNTY FOOD HUB OFFER?**

To answer this question, YVCC is conducting a community assessment of the following stakeholders within a two-hour radius:

- Producers
- Community partners
- Consumers (general public)
- Institutions (schools, hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants, grocery stores)

To share your ideas, contact Cori Hart, our Food Hub Organizer. (see back panel for info.)