

BUILDING EQUITY IN RURAL MONTANA FOOD SYSTEMS THROUGH RURAL GROCERY STORES AS LOCAL FOOD ACCESS POINTS



Maura Henn, Local Food System Specialist



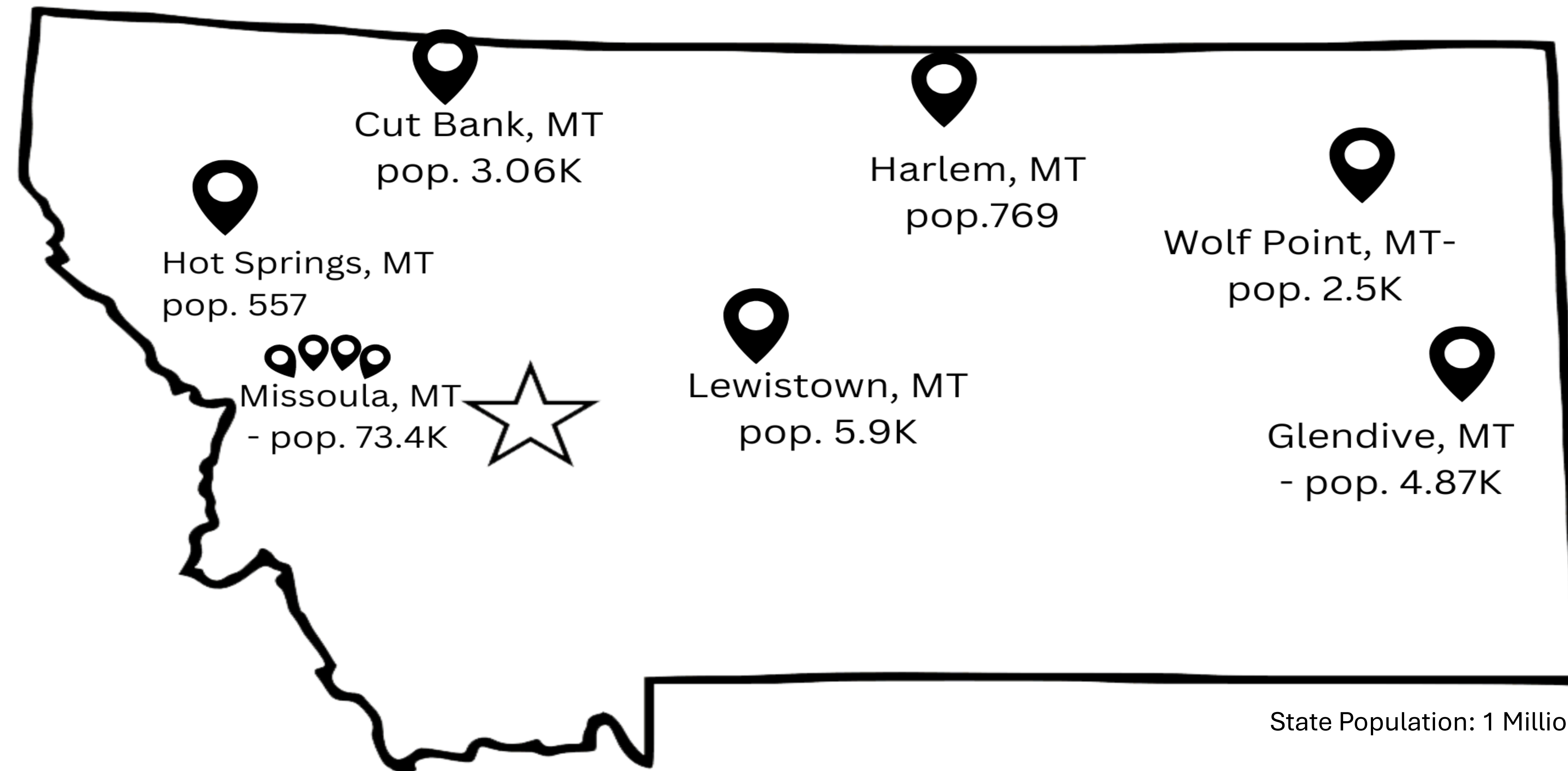
PROJECT BACKGROUND

Montana is a rural state where the most populated cities are surrounded by open plains or forested mountain ranges. Access to nutritious, fresh, and culturally relevant foods can be a challenge.

The Double SNAP Dollars (DSD) which has recently launched a promising partnership with Albertsons Grocery Stores, is working to diversify the communities the program serves, including more sites in Native American and rural low-income communities. Additional support from Montana Harvest of the Month (HOM) and Grow Montana Food Policy Coalition (GMT) are providing nutrition education and advocacy to advance the goal of building equity across the state

PROJECT TIMELINE

- 2015** – Program pilot launches at 4 farmers markets
- 2019** – First brick and mortar grocery store begins offering DSD (Hot Springs, MT – pop. 557)
- 2020** – Project receives a federal grant to expand project, with focus on Equity & Food Access in Rural Communities
- 2023** – Partnership with Albertsons begins, DSD offered at 3 MT stores
- 2024** – DSD expands to 6 additional Albertsons stores



PROJECT IMPACTS

- **44** participating sites across **32** communities
- **7** locations serve **5** Native American reservation communities
- Over **12,000** Montanans have accessed DSD
- **\$1.2 million** spent with local farmers
- **\$1.8 million** created in economic impact supporting direct market farmers and beginning farmers and ranchers.

GROWTH THROUGH BUILDING EQUITY

- Equity committee formed
- Equity matrix used to determine growth
- 9 of 31 locations identified possible DSD sites
- 4 sites are on, or border reservations that serve Native American communities
- DSD partners participate in a cultural immersion to enhance cultural competency
- First Native American non-profit organization joins hub & spoke network in early 2024

INTERESTING FACT

There have been higher redemption rates where customers earn and redeem incentives through the Albertsons Just4U Loyalty App compared to stores where customers redeem incentives through paper receipts.

KEY STATE PARTNERS



Advocates for policies to strengthen state food and agriculture economies. The coalition has lobbied for SNAP & DSD funding at state & federal level.



A framework showcasing Montana-grown foods with ready to use materials to be used in classrooms, cafeterias, farmers markets and grocery stores.

EQUITY MATRIX

This matrix was used to determine which food access sites should be considered for the DSD program. Locations with scores 15 or higher (max. 26), located near or on Native American reservations, and east of the Continental Divide were given priority.

Factor/ Criterion	Site Name	County	Food insecurity rates	SNAP usage	Opportunity Zone	Rural	Tribally Owned/Operated	Central or Eastern Montana	Location accepts SNAP?	Total Score
Factor Definition			Every 5% above 0% is a point	% of population, interval of 5%		USDA def of rural: pop 2,500 people or less	Tribally owned score of 1, Not tribal owned score of 0	Is market east of continental divide?		
			1-5%=1, 5-10%=2, etc	1-5%=1, 5-10%=2, etc						
Weight			1	1	2	3	4	4	3	
Max Score			5	5	2	3	4	4	3	26
Min Score			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

PARTNERSHIP NEXT STEPS

GMT is partnering with HOM on a series of listening session in reservation communities to learn how both initiatives could better serve indigenous food systems.

GOALS:

- Develop a suite of culturally relevant materials that showcase indigenous foods in classrooms, communities, and grocery stores
- Develop culturally responsive in-store marketing materials.
- Onboard more independent retailers to serving Native & rural communities to the HOM & DSD Programs
- Increase local food sourcing in these communities.

Thank you to the following people and organizations who make this work possible: Community Food & Agriculture Coalition, DSD Network Steering Committee, Grow Montana Food Policy Coalition, Cheyenne Robinson – Indigenous consultant, Blakely Brown – project evaluator, Land to Hand-Montana, FAST Blackfeet, and Montana Cooperative Development Center.