

Red Lodge Area Food Partnership Council

“Everything we’ve done in modern industrialized agriculture is to grow it faster, fatter, bigger, cheaper. Nobody is thinking about e coli, Type 2 Diabetes and the ecological health of the whole system” *Joel Salatin, owner of Polyface Farms in Swoope, VA*

Red Lodge Farmers’ Market Holiday Gift Baskets

The Red Lodge Farmers’ Market is excited to offer their first annual “Holiday Gift Baskets”. These beautiful gift baskets will be brimming full of delicious meats, vegetables, greens, herbed butters, fresh breads and holiday pastries, all offered by your local hometown producers. Purchase a basket for your holiday dinner or give a gift to someone in need this holiday season. There will be three holiday baskets to choose from so you’re sure to find the perfect gift for someone on your shopping list.

To purchase a basket, visit the Red Lodge Winter Farmer’s Market on December 6th, 3:30-6:30 p.m., at the Red Lodge Elks Club or contact das Kuchenhaus Bakery at 117 South Main St., Bridger, MT. 59014, 406-662-1406. Please make checks payable to Red Lodge Farmer’s Market. All major credit cards are accepted. Deadline to order is December 15, 2012 and baskets may be picked up at the Farmer’s Market on December 20, 3:30-6:30 p.m., Elks Club. Local delivery may be available if needed. Happy Holidays from your hometown producers!

Montana Restaurant Rewards Program

Are you a restaurant that uses Montana specialty crops on your menus? Would you like to be reimbursed for advertising that you incorporate those local ingredients? The [Montana Restaurant Rewards program](#) can help!

Specialty crops are defined as “fruits and vegetables, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture).” Examples include pumpkins, potatoes, spinach, onion, tomatoes, and more. You can download the complete list of specialty crops by clicking [here](#).

If you’re already using Montana specialty crops on your menu, then the Montana Restaurant Rewards program can reimburse you with up to \$1,000 for advertising these local ingredients. The reimbursement for advertising is calculated as up to 50% of eligible Montana specialty crop purchases, up to \$1,000.

And if you’re not yet using Montana specialty crops, you can look into purchasing directly from a grower (individual deliveries or coordinate with the farmers’ market), or wholesale- from distributors or grocery stores, as long as the source can be verified as a Montana specialty crop grower.

This is a great opportunity to support local agriculture AND to get paid for it. What could be better? Grant funds are limited, so find out more about the [Montana Restaurant Rewards program](#) and get started!

What's Happening at School?

By Alyssa Charney

“But what do you do all day now that it’s snowy, cold and gray?”

Recently it feels like a day doesn’t go by when I’m not asked some version of that question. Walking to work. In line at the grocery store. Running into parents and friends around town.

After being in Red Lodge as a FoodCorps member for over a year now, I’ve become known as “the garden girl.” Which is great. There is really no other title I’d rather wear. I worked for months to find land for the Youth Garden, and then I got to spend all summer hanging out with kids in the newly established garden, so it does make sense that people would assume that I too must rest when the garden is put to bed.

But getting kids excited about good food doesn’t stop when the ground freezes and the snow falls, because if the season for healthy eating and learning were really as short as the official “growing season” around here, we’d be in big trouble.

So what do we do all winter long?

Well, to begin with, despite the appearance of complete dormancy when one drives by the Red Lodge Youth Garden, our snow covered hoop house is actually full of life. Kale, chard, lettuce, and spinach planted by elementary school students continue to grow, now with extra protection from the row cover that was lent to me by a local farmer.

When my four regular 1st and 3rd grade classes aren’t trekking a few blocks through the snow to the garden to plant rows of garlic or to investigate what’s growing in the hoop house, we’re inside having fun in the classroom.

We recently learned about reasons to LOVE legumes (They’re protein and vegetables, make food for the soil, and can be planted again as seeds!) We then sprouted black beluga lentils to watch them grow and enjoy a delicious snack. We learned the story of the three sisters crops (corn, squash, and beans) that the Native Americans shared when the Pilgrims first arrived. And we ground corn with mortar and pestles, to connect with the corn bread muffins we later baked and enjoyed.

And when I’m not in the garden, classroom, or kitchen, I’m dreaming up a new youth camp out on a local farm, plotting summer evening activities for the garden, or seeking new partners in town for future projects.

As I continue on with these winter activities, new surprises inspire me each day. I’m inspired by the kids who tell me the corn bread muffins we baked are better than any cupcake they’d ever had. I’m inspired by the spinach that finally germinated in the hoop house in spite of cold days outside. And I’m inspired by the persistence of community to continue to build our food system, even when the earth seems so very at rest.

Local Producer Spotlight

In late September, the Atkinson family, of [Coon's Age Farm](#), traveled to Salina, Kansas for [The Land Institute's](#) annual Prairie Festival. For the past thirty-four years the Land Institute has held the festival to investigate and celebrate ways to improve the way the world grows most of its food.

The Land Institute is a nonprofit research organization whose mission is to develop an agricultural system that mimics the natural ecological stability of the prairie, with a perennial grain yield that is comparable to that of our current annual crops. They work "to improve the security of our food and fiber source by reducing soil erosion, decreasing dependency upon petroleum and natural gas, and relieving the agriculture-related chemical contamination of our land and water."

This was the Atkinsons' second year attending the festival, where speakers included author Wendell Berry, Land Institute President Wes Jackson, environmental scholar and other, David Orr, physicist Eric Gimon, P.Sainath, who writes about the impact of globalization on India's rural poor, and Michelle Mack, who studies the relationship between ecosystems and global warming.

"The festival brings together science, farming, music, art, literature, and education in an event that fosters camaraderie between over 1,200 people who care about the future of sustainable agriculture and the health of our planet," Eric Atkinson explained. Eric pointed out that you wouldn't expect an event that digs deep into the sobering effects of climate change, the degradation of our natural resources, and the struggles to hold onto sustainable agricultural practices to be so full of hope. But it is.

Eric says that hope is the most important thing they bring back to Coon's Age Farm. Because in addition to new books by Wendell Berry and CD recordings of the festival's speakers, they return home rejuvenated with the knowledge that there are others throughout the country, even throughout the world, embarking on paths very similar to their own.

Eric and Melonie Atkinson bought their place in Belfry in 2003. "As practicing ecologists, we both had ideas about how to get started, but admittedly, really didn't know what we were doing." It came about organically, meaning they didn't learn what to do "in a cookbook," but rather followed agricultural practices that they believed could restore and preserve the land, all the while learning along the way.

At the Prairie Festival they met people from all over who also got started on "shoestring budgets," who followed their instincts, not exactly knowing what they were doing, but living sustainably and working to do what they knew to be right. These attendees and speakers they met were passionate, humble, and spoke with humor. There was a barn dance on the first evening, and prairie walks in the mornings. They enjoyed delicious, local food throughout the weekend.

The Prairie Festival connects the Land Institute's scientific research with farmers, ranchers, students, writers, artists and musicians. This combination of learning and doing is illustrated so well by the Atkinson family, and combining our research, values, and livelihoods is absolutely essential to build food systems that can sustain our communities for generations to come.

Edible Aesthetics Translated

by Deborah Muth

Fabulous locally grown produce plus talented potters plus community camaraderie equaled a winning formula in Red Lodge on Friday, November 2, Well - where there is good food, they will come, and come they came. None were disappointed. Even the vegetarians had plenty of choices.

On both sides of Broadway, starting at The Bridge Creek Backcountry Kitchen and Wine Bar party room, foodies arrived in droves to sample the creations of local chefs using produce from regional growers on first class pottery by The Red Lodge Clay Center artists.

The task for the chefs and restaurateurs was to create dishes inspired by and plated on the pottery they were matched with. For instance, my favorite menu item was Martha Young's patriotic red fresh tomato red pepper coulee sauce topped by blue mashed potatoes on a white plate with a parade of ants marching across the whole scene.

Other favorites were spiced greens, Wagyu beef (which is a Kobe beef breed), the creamiest corn meal stuffed tamales, brilliant beet risotto, luscious pork and vegetable terrine. After rhubarb compote and pumpkin flan, we wandered across the street to The Red Lodge Clay Center to be greeted at the door with flutes of champagne and chocolate truffles so rich that one bite might bring you to your knees!

The temptations continued with gorgeous pottery of all styles, shapes and sizes displayed in profusion in the gallery; a special discount was given to all those who participated in the event toward purchase of serving vessels crafted by the talented potters.

My husband and I fell in love with a black and white plate and bowl. We went home clutching our prizes to our chests feeling very full from a thoroughly satisfying evening of community feasting. I'd say the evening of plated edible aesthetics was a successful formula. *Bravo and Here's to To Our Health!*

AERO Annual Meeting

By Robin Taylor

Six individuals from the Red Lodge area attended the AERO (Alternative Energy Resources Organization) Annual Meeting in October. We asked Robin Taylor to share her thoughts about the conference.

From a producer's perspective the 38th annual AERO Conference was enlightening, inspirational and encouraging. We toured Negaard's Farm in Grass Range Friday afternoon and were amazed at the innovative ways in which they heat their greenhouse (old coal engine that was found in a ditch), store their onions (a huge newly dug root cellar), store their potatoes (an old fish storage house hauled from Fort Peck Reservoir) and process their jams and jellies (a certified kitchen made from a burned down, gutted, mobile home).

The conference itself was attended by gold mine of diverse farmers willing to pass on tips about greenhouse management, seed saving, pest management, best selling crops and ways to find good labor help. I came home feeling like I was a part of an important, vital piece of Montana's sustainable food movement. Thanks, AERO, for who you are and what you represent.

Want to get More Involved?

Join FPC or attend our meetings as a guest if you're interested in learning more. The next meeting is November 15 at 4 p.m. We meet once per month at the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation, 24 West 13th Street in Red Lodge. Meetings include discussion and progress reports on subjects such as gardening, producer/consumer coordination, composting, and school food programs. Contact Martha Brown at mbrown.mt@gmail.com or call (406) 445-7214.

Suggested Reading

The Mad Farmer Poems; *Wendell Berry*

What Are People For?: Essays; *Wendell Berry*