

**Rural Food Access Working Group Monthly Call – Meeting Minutes  
April 2016**

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Presenter: **Tara Ray, RD** is a School Nutrition Specialist for the state of Montana. She presented on innovative nutrition programs in rural Montana schools, and on current challenges these schools face to offering healthier foods.
  - a. Tara described Montana’s unique geographic, social, and political contexts that affect how school nutrition programs operate. For example, many high schools have open-campus policies and it is the norm that students drive off-campus for lunch. In small school districts, food service staff often have multiple roles in the school system, making it difficult to train them or ask them to take on more work. There are only 2 food distributor companies that serve Montana schools.
  - b. Tara shared several goals for the future of school cafeterias: that balance be sought between encouraging kids to eat healthy foods and giving kids autonomy, to do “nudge” style behavioral economics interventions such as moving healthy items to more prominent locations, and using the cafeteria as a learning lab and not “just lunch.” She suggested orienting parents to how the cafeteria works and what foods are served (through a video or presentation at a meeting?) because many parents only know the cafeterias they grew up with.
  - c. Small school districts all operate separately, and Tara has to communicate with each of them, often repeating her messages to each. They have low buying power, and lack of training for healthy school nutrition. There are challenges to doing scratch-made food, whether the school district is small or large. The plus-side of small size is that one individual who’s inspired to make changes can implement them without much red tape. For example, a rural school nutrition director decided to change the serving line to allow students to self-serve fruits and vegetables before the entrée. This resulted in less food waste.
  - d. Beef To School program (led by Carmen Byker Shanks) is a Montana program to procure local beef for school cafeterias. There are also small grants to train staff on cooking and equipment purchases.
  - e. Some Montana schools have misconceptions about Farm To School programs and how they would participate. In some communities, locally produced food is expensive and low quality.
  - f. Systems to increase collective food buying include food hubs, which can save labor for school staff needing to find local farms to buy from, and can facilitate cooperative purchasing and delivery. There is

resistance to consolidation of school districts. However, Tara said that some school districts have agreed to consolidate their food service operations while keeping other management separate.

- g. Discussion: in Minnesota, there are food-buying consortiums of 50-60 school districts. GAP certification (Good Agricultural Practices) for producers is also important to participate in farm to school programs.
3. Discussion: Topic change for NOPREN-funded pilot study. The proposed new topic is to assess potential impact to rural food retailers from proposed changes to SNAP stocking requirements (Stephanie)
- a. Jane K. brought up past experiences where researchers studied healthy retail policies but then the money for the policy/study was suddenly withdrawn, causing problems for the researchers. Perhaps this was the Community Transformations Grant?
    - i. Lindsey replied that so far there is no funding to implement or study effects of the proposed SNAP stocking rules. Another unfunded mandate.
  - b. There is interest by people on the call to interview stores in their local areas. This will be great for having a nationwide perspective.
4. Update: RWJF Building a Culture of Health proposal (Marilyn)
- a. Marilyn is almost ready to send the letter of intent to RWJF. The PI and other lead investigators is still not finalized, but getting close.
5. Other announcements and updates (all)
- a. Rural Grocery Summit (see attached agenda). If going to this summit, be aware that flights in and out of Wichita are limited, especially on Sundays. From CDC, Tim Lang will attend this meeting.
  - b. USDA will host a webinar on The Economics of Local Food Systems today (April 28) at 3pm. They will introduce a toolkit to guide community discussions, assessments, and choices. To register for the webinar, please use this link: <http://goo.gl/forms/JIOrvfQiMM>