



Farmers Markets Implementation Guide

About Montana Harvest of the Month

Thank you for choosing Harvest of the Month to promote Montana grown food at your farmers market!

The Montana Harvest of the Month (HOM) program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana schools, institutions, and communities, and now farmers markets! HOM is a fantastic way to encourage customers to purchase and try different, Montana-grown foods through nutrition-education because it provides an easy framework to follow and ready-to-use materials. Farmers markets can access these materials at:

Research has shown that children (and adults!) need to try new foods multiple times (up to twelve times or more) before deciding that they like them. Farmers markets are a perfect place to implement HOM because Montana-grown foods are a cornerstone of most farmers markets. There are also benefits to vendors, including the potential of increased sales at vendor booths. Implementing HOM at Farmers Markets can help customers understand how to cook and use the Montana grown food they purchase at the Farmers Market. Finally, HOM is a wonderful way to promote farmers markets and attract customers through engaging educational activities.

How HOM Can Work at Farmers Markets

The HOM program is highly customizable and farmers market managers can choose from several different implementation strategies. Farmers markets are expected to highlight one or more HOM foods each month. There are dozens of ways markets can highlight HOM foods.

Examples include:

- Having a taste test event for customers.

- Provide vendors with recipe cards for the market's featured HOM item to be distributed to customers.
- Hand out the HOM Farmers Market Passport and stamp it for customers each week they participate.
- Displaying HOM posters at the market information booth.
- Use digital HOM files in social media posts.
- Have a cooking demonstration utilizing a HOM recipe using ingredients at the market.
- Have a painting contest utilizing dyes made from HOM vegetables (like beets!)

These are just a few examples and markets are encouraged to try innovative ideas.

Farmers Market Specialty Crops

Specialty crops are "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)." To be considered a specialty crop, plants must be cultivated or managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetics.

Most HOM items are designated as specialty crops, except for beef, pulses (lentils), dairy, and grain which are classified as commodity crops.

HOM at farmers markets is a great tool to educate customers and to encourage them to purchase specialty crops, which in turn increases sales and success for the market and local vendors. It is a win-win!

Though everyone is welcome to utilize the HOM framework, it is recommended that participating farmers markets vendors have at least one HOM item available per market day.

Register Your Farmers Market

Registering is a simple one-time process which can be completed at mtharvestofthemonth.org. Registration allows HOM program managers to track which markets are participating. Registering also allows program managers to send the market a free packet of materials while supplies and grant funds last.

Important Note: The Montana Harvest of the Month program does NOT provide the local food items for meals and taste tests, so you must be able to plan for and purchase food for your market if you plan on implementing the program through taste tests and/or cooking demonstrations.

Communicating with Stakeholders and Vendors

Input and cooperation of farmers market stakeholders is important to ensure the program is successful. This can include farmers market administrative staff, vendors, and market volunteers, as well as MSU Extension Agents, EFNEP or SNAP-Ed Educators, community organizations, and your school-based HOM Team. These folks help with planning, outreach, and implementation of the HOM program and HOM education activities.

After the market has decided to implement HOM, communicate with the market vendors who will be participating in the program. For the program to be a success, you will need to ensure that vendors understand the resources and tools that will be utilized in the market. On the HOM website there is a letter that can be used to communicate the program to your vendors. There are also resources for Vendors including a tipsheet, sales tracking, and HOM marketing materials. It is suggested that the letter be shared with your vendors before the farmers market season begins. If your farmers market holds a pre-season meeting for vendors, that would be an excellent time to share about the HOM program and how it will be implemented at the market this season.

The HOM Calendar

Just like how HOM materials and activities can be adapted for individual farmers markets, so can the HOM Calendar. Each summer, a new HOM calendar is released. This annual calendar is what participating K-12 schools will follow for their programs. However, we know that there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to local food availability and the typical market season operates during a shorter time frame, so farmers markets are encouraged to adapt the calendar to showcase the HOM items that will be available at their market. You might want to consider changing the product weekly instead of monthly since the market season is shorter than the school season.

One suggestion is to plan out a calendar in advance to determine which items your farmers market will feature. This is where communication with vendors will be helpful! Knowing what vendors will have available ahead of time will help your team plan for that week's HOM activities. Also available to your market is a HOM Seasonality Calendar developed for farmers markets, which can be used to guide what is available at markets across Montana. With both the seasonality calendar and input from farmers market vendors, you will have what you need to plan out what HOM item will be featured at each market.

Below is an example of a 12-week planning calendar tool. This calendar resource is available on the HOM website and can be adapted to what is in season at your farmers market:

Harvest of the Month Planning Calendar

HOM Item	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Herbs						
Leafy Greens						
Kale						
Carrots						
Brassicas						
Beets						
Summer Squash						
Cherries						
Potatoes						

Harvest of the Month Planning Calendar

HOM Item	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Apples						
Winter Squash						
Grains						
Beef						
Bison						
Lentils						
Chickpeas						
Dairy						

HOM for Farmers Market Timeline

A key step in deciding how HOM will be used at your farmers market is to develop a timeline for how the HOM program will be implemented. This timeline will look different for each market. A suggested timeline is below.

November – January (or 6-4 months before market begins):

- Register for the program at [Register – Montana Harvest of the Month \(mtharvestofthemonth.org\)](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org)
- Communicate with farmers market team members (board, managers, community outreach volunteers) that the market will be participating in the HOM program.

January – February (or 4 months):

- Using the HOM Calendar, begin planning which HOM items will be showcased at the market each week.
- Begin planning any HOM related activities, such as cooking demonstrations, kid's activities.
- Communicate with county sanitarians to ensure your cooking or sampling demonstrations are following state and county regulations.

February (3 months before market):

- Using the Vendor Outreach Email, communicate with your vendors that your market will be participating in HOM this market season and that will be explained at the annual pre-season farmers market vendor meeting.

March – April (2 months before market)

- Hold Farmers Market Pre-Season Vendor Meeting and share about HOM program and answer vendor questions.
- Share HOM at Farmers Market Training Video with vendors.
- Begin finalizing HOM related activities.
- Begin Promotion of the HOM program through social media and newsletters to generate excitement amongst the market's core shoppers.
- Provide resources for vendors including recipe cards, posters, and shelf tags.

May – October (months the market is active)

- Launch & implement the HOM Program at the Market!
- Track Activities for annual evaluation.

October – November (1-2 months after market season ends)

- Complete Evaluation of the HOM program at the end of the season (contingent on grant requirements).

HOM Resources for Farmers Markets

The HOM website is where all resources for each HOM item will be available to download, which includes:

HOM Farmers Market Passport – This passport is a customizable activity resource to encourage shoppers to return to the market each week a HOM item will be featured.

HOM Farmers Market Seasonality Calendar – An at-a-glance resource to see when HOM items are typically available at Montana Farmers Markets. The calendar can be used to help plan out market HOM activities or printed and shared with customers.

Vendor Outreach Email – a customizable email that can be used to communicate with your vendors ahead of the market season to let them know your market will be implementing the HOM program.

Promotion Newsletter + Social Media Content – Copy and paste verbiage into newsletters, social media posts, and more. This material is available under each HOM Food on the website.

Posters – are available in 18" x 24" and 11" x 17". Smaller sizes can be printed by downloading the 11" x 17" poster, press "print" and select "fit to page." The poster will fit on an 8.5" x 11" piece of paper. Posters can be displayed, mounted on an easel in a market aisle, provided in a swag bag, or sent to customers electronically.

Logos – HOM logos for use on signs, social media, newsletters, etc.

Illustrations – The same beautiful illustrations from the posters that can be used for menus, signs, announcements, social media, etc.

Table Tents – These include fun facts and information about HOM food. These could be displayed at the market information booth or vendor booths.

Recipe Cards – 5"x7" recipe cards with recipes sized for six servings. Printable (2-up) versions available. These can be printed and distributed by vendors when customers purchase the HOM item or displayed at the farmers market information booth.

Videos – 5-minute educational videos feature the farm to plate process for each HOM food which can be shared in newsletters, social media, or embedded on websites.

Shelf Tags – Great for use in the retail setting.

Quicktivity Handout – Includes quick activity suggestions for markets who are interested in hosting educational activities for their younger shoppers!

Harvest at Home are multiple page reference materials on each HOM item. The information on these includes background information, cooking tips, and recipes. These could be printed and handed out to customers at the information booth, vendor booths, on an easel in the farmers market aisle, in a swag bag, or provided electronically.

Participation Letter – A letter that can be sent to community organizations, businesses, and local schools letting them know that your market is a HOM Site.

Taste Test Guide

Cooking with Kids Guide

Cooking Cart Guide

Producer Handout

Food Tracking Sheets

Taste Testing HOM Items

Taste testing is a perfect way to collaborate with vendors to provide samples at their individual booth or at a single market booth that features the HOM item each week. Before conducting a taste test at your market, contact the Sanitarian in the county where your Market is located and review the [Farmers Market Guidelines](#) published annually by the Department of Health and Human Services. If the vendor is "a licensed manufacturer, cottage food operation, or a farmer's market vendor and the samples are exempt from licensure or are non-potentially hazardous, then no retail food license is required..." to provide free samples. Exempt foods include raw agriculture products (like many HOM items), and foods produced under the Cottage Food Act.

Share your plans with the sanitarian and ask for their expectations. Sanitation ideas to keep in mind while collaborating with your county's sanitarians:

- The market manager could provide vendors with a sample cutting kit including a knife, cutting board and single serving containers. The sample kit can be collected by the market manager and sanitized before using it again.
- Vendors who provide samples may also need sanitation for the knife, gloves or deli sheets, and plastic covering for the samples.
- A handwashing station may be necessary.¹
- Once your taste testing plan complies with the applicable rules, have fun with it!



Customers can taste test at a vendor booth and evaluate their reaction by choosing one of three categories, "tried it, liked it, or loved it." A tally can be set up on an easel in the market aisle or at the vendor booth for customers to mark their reaction. If it is windy, provide an empty jar for each category and dry beans for customers to place in the jar.

Measuring the Impact

Evaluation of the HOM program will occur at the beginning and end of each season. An impact evaluation will measure produce sales at vendor booths before and after implementation of HOM. A process evaluation will measure what went well and did not go well in the implementation of HOM. A HOM staff member will be in contact to implement appropriate evaluation measures. **Evaluation is contingent on requirements from grant funding.**

¹ Woods, T. & Hileman, M. (2012). Best Practices for Sampling at Farmers Markets: A practical guide for farmers market vendors. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/cmssubclass/files/extensionpubs/2012-19.pdf>

Take pictures and share success stories! We want to hear about your HOM activities and share your stories with other participating locations on the Montana Farm to School website. Go to <http://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/connect/share-story.html> to submit your stories and pictures. If you are sharing photos, especially those with children, we prefer you send signed [USDA Photo Release Forms](http://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/documents/USDA%20release%20EN%20photo%20release.doc) with them so we can use your photos to inspire others
(<http://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/documents/USDA%20release%20EN%20photo%20release.doc>).