

# MISSION WEST

Community Development Partners

Serving Lake, Sanders, Mineral Counties and Beyond

2024 Annual Report



MISSION WEST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

## ***Our Sincerest Gratitude***

**We sincerely thank the following state and federal agencies for their continued trust and partnership:**

- Montana Department of Agriculture (MDOA)
- Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC)
- United States Department of Agriculture: Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA AMS); Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS); Rural Development (USDA RD)
- United States Department of Treasury (USDT)
- United States Economic Development Administration

**We also extend our gratitude to the following community foundations and organizations for their generous support and collaboration:**

- Headwaters Foundation
- Hopa Mountain
- Montana Community Foundation
- Oro y Plata Foundation
- Western Extension Risk Management Education

**Our work to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of our communities is made possible through the management and implementation of the following state and federal programs:**

- MDOA: Montana Food and Agriculture Development Center Network
- MDOC: Certified Regional Development Corporations Program; Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program
- USDA-AMS: Local Food Promotion Program; Regional Food Systems Partnerships; Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
- USDA-RD: America's Healthy Food Finance Initiative; Rural Energy for America Program; Rural Cooperative Development Grant; Rural Community Development Initiative Grant; Rural Microentrepreneurship Assistance Program
- USDA-FNS: Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant
- USDT: Community Development Financial Institutions Fund

*Mission West Community Development Partners is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.*

*Enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of all residents in Lake, Sanders, and Mineral Counties and the Flathead Indian Reservation.*

~ THE MISSION OF MISSION WEST CDP

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## *Friends of Mission West,*

This annual report is your invitation to celebrate a year of remarkable achievements at Mission West Community Development Partners. We've witnessed significant growth and transition, but through it all, our commitment to empowering communities has only grown stronger. This success wouldn't have been possible without the exceptional leadership of our Executive Director and dedication of the entire Mission West team. Their hard work and expertise remain the driving force behind our success.

One of the highlights was our Board's participation in a valuable training program offered by the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust in Vancouver, Washington. This training provided us with essential tools and best practices for governance and leadership that will ensure we offer the best possible guidance and support to Mission West.

On the ground, our staff facilitated Western Montana's first cooperative conversion of an existing business with Glacier Processing Cooperative, a producer-owned meat processing co-op. We're proud to be a part of their success story. Additionally, the Ronan Revitalization project reached a significant milestone with the adoption of both the Downtown Master Plan and the Economic Development Strategic Plan. With the infusion of a recently awarded \$1.2 million tourism grant from the Montana Department of Commerce, this collaborative effort with the City of Ronan promises a bright future for the city's core.

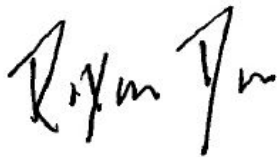
We are also excited to launch the Montana Local Food Financing Fund Partnership this year in cooperation with Hopa Mountain and Montana Department of Agriculture. These new capacity-building technical assistance and credit enhancement services will address key barriers facing local food businesses, improving access to nutritious foods while creating and preserving high quality jobs.

And of course, Montana Marinara—our picky-eater approved farm-to-school sauce made in partnership with Montana Office of Public Instruction and Northwest Food Hub Network—continues to be a beloved staple, proving once again that delicious locally grown product can be a powerful economic driver.

Looking ahead, we are energized by the momentum we've built and the opportunities before us. With a strong team, a dedicated board, and unwavering support from our partners, we're confident that Mission West will continue to make a positive impact on the communities we serve.

I encourage you to delve deeper into this report and discover the scope of Mission West's accomplishments. We are grateful for your continued support, and we look forward to an even brighter future together.

Sincerely,



Roxanne Duckworth, *Board Chair*



# The People of Mission West

## Staff

**Jan Tusick** *Executive Director; Food and Agriculture Development Center (FADC) Director*

**Brenna Fulks** *Deputy Executive Director; Community Economic Development (CED) Director*

**John Whitworth** *Loan Portfolio Manager*

**Westyn Kiehn** *Business Development Program Manager*

**Charlie Michel** *Cooperative Development Director*

**Blake Lineweaver** *Cooperative Development Program Manager*

**Joel Carlson** *Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) Facilities Manager*

**Jennifer Ruggless** *Tourism Program Coordinator*

**Deserae Morrison** *Processing Assistant*

**Tynneal Flammond-Onesalt** *Processing Assistant*

**Kaylese Wilson** *Processing Assistant*

**Jennifer Beh** *Office Manager*

**Susan Misgen** *Bookkeeper*

## 2023-2024 Board of Directors

**Roxanne Duckworth** *President* | Glacier Bank

**Carissa McNamara** *Vice President* | Farmer

**Jay Preston** *Past President* | Access Montana

**Kimberly Sassaman** *Secretary/Treasurer* | Retired City Government

**Jim Debree** | Mineral County Economic Development Corporation

**Mike Dolson** | Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

**Landon Godfrey** | Logan Health

**Moriah Lundeen** | Eagle Bank

**Dan Rowan** | Sanders County Commissioner

**Steve Stanley** | Lake County Commissioner

**Mike Thilmony** | First Security Bank; Sanders County Community Development Corporation

**Sjaan Vincent** | Facilities & Fair Manager for the Lake County Fair

**Roman Zylawy** | Mineral County Commissioner

A photograph of two women in a food processing facility, overlaid with a teal color. The woman on the left is wearing a hairnet and a dark shirt, smiling as she holds a tray of dark cherries. The woman on the right is wearing a hairnet, glasses, and a dark jacket, laughing joyfully. In the background, there is a metal shelving unit with several empty trays. The overall scene is brightly lit and clean.

# Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center

## GROWING MONTANA'S LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

*Pitting Flathead Cherries*

**Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC)** is a USDA Meat inspected, Certified Organic, and FDA-registered shared-used food processing facility and Food and Agriculture Development Center for Montana. We've had an exciting year of developments with our clients and the Montana-made products we produce.

**From Field to Fork**

**Farmers to Families Food Box Program:** Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center continues to partner with CSKT Food Sovereignty Program to provide local food to Tribal families within the Flathead Reservation. Over 10,000 food boxes filled with local food procured from our area farms will be distributed next year.

📄 **SCAN THE QR CODE OR CLICK THE LINK TO VIEW THE VIDEO!**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QRo3ZT014E>

**Montana Lentil Burger:** The Montana Lentil Burger has seen a surge of popularity in local markets, such as Xanterra, who are serving the burger in their dining services. Look for our new Lentil Burger packaging in the upcoming year.

*PHOTOS: Top - Packing Farmers to Families Food Boxes; Bottom - Montana Lentil Burger*



# 137

- Food and Value-Added Ag businesses were
- assisted in their business capitalization, planning,
- and manufacturing licensing

**Montana Marinara:** In the video “Montana Marinara – Collaborative Partnerships for Successful Local Food Procurement in MT Schools,” Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, Montana Office of Public Instruction, and Northwest Food Hub Network share how they have collaborated to produce Montana Marinara—a value-added product that combines USDA canned tomatoes with Montana grown produce! This collaboration makes local food more accessible and affordable for school districts across the state and supports Montana farmers. Montana Marinara continues to be a popular Farm to School product for Montana schools with a 25% increase in the 2024-2025 order through the OPI Cooperative Procurement Program. We have seen an increase in direct sales of the product outside of the procurement process so the team of Mission West are gearing up an increased production this upcoming year.



**SCAN THE QR CODE OR CLICK THE LINK  
TO VIEW THE VIDEO!**

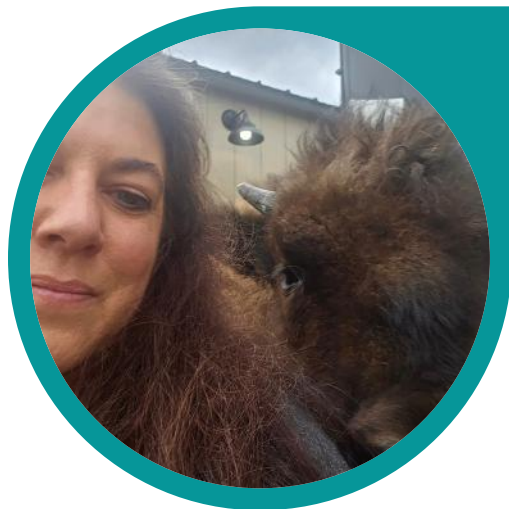
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YD-IgEcUr9Q>

## Client Success Story

Wild Oasis Bison began its journey in Medford, Oregon, before establishing itself as a family-owned bison ranch operating in Dixon and Ronan, Montana. Wild Oasis Bison has garnered a reputation for delivering top-quality meat, jerky, and snack sticks. Embracing ethical farming practices and sustainability, Wild Oasis Bison stands as a beacon of success in the region's agricultural sector.

Central to Wild Oasis Bison's accomplishments is its partnership with Mission West Community Development Partners (MWCDP). Through MWCDP's Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC), Wild Oasis Bison has streamlined production processes and controlled costs.

Reflecting on what she enjoys about owning a business in Western Montana, Lori Moore remarks, "It is the perfect place for our animals to thrive, plus with Mission West it just puts the icing on the cake." This sentiment underscores the pivotal role MWCDP plays in supporting local businesses like Wild Oasis Bison, facilitating growth and resilience within the regional economy.



***"[Montana] is the perfect place for our animals to thrive, plus with Mission West it just puts the icing on the cake."***

*~ Lori Moore, Wild Oasis Bison*

*PHOTO LEFT ABOVE - Montana Marinara;  
PHOTO LEFT BELOW - "Marinara Madness" sticker commemorating  
Mission West's spring farm-to-school campaign"*



# Community Economic Development

## PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

*Micky Zurcher (Montana Main Street) tours Ronan*

Mission West's **Community Economic Development** program serves as the designated Economic Development District (EDD) for Montana's Lake, Mineral, and Sanders Counties. We function as the central hub for regional economic growth, managing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and providing technical assistance and resources to empower communities with their downtown revitalization projects and other economic development initiatives.

### **Building Momentum in Ronan and Sparking Regional Growth**

Mission West Community Development Partners is proud to highlight its collaborative work with the City of Ronan, the Ronan Revitalization subcommittee of the Ronan Chamber of Commerce, and the Montana Department of Commerce, along with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in revitalizing Ronan's downtown core and fostering regional tourism development.

From the very beginning, it was clear that the Ronan community was highly invested in its future. We provided technical assistance to the Ronan Revitalization team and the City of Ronan as they successfully secured designation through the Montana Main Street program in 2022. This designation unlocked a \$50,000 grant from the state to develop a comprehensive downtown master plan. Mission West then joined forces with the community by leveraging USDA RCDI funds to contribute an additional \$40,000. These combined resources allowed for the creation of not just a master plan, but also a robust economic development strategic plan. Following a collaborative and engaging process with Ronan residents, both plans were finalized in July 2024.

Recognizing the momentum and enthusiasm in Ronan, Mission West worked alongside the community to develop a strategic approach. We submitted a compelling proposal for a \$1.25 million tourism grant through the MT Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program. This proposal, focusing on Ronan as a launchpad for regional tourism development, was successfully awarded. The funding will provide support for wayfinding improvements, street and sidewalk upgrades, and downtown beautification projects in Ronan.

These improvements will enhance Ronan's appeal and serve as a springboard for similar projects throughout the region. The grant will directly support other communities by providing funding for planning initiatives. This will empower local communities to develop their own tourism development strategies, fostering a more resilient and interconnected regional tourism ecosystem that prioritizes the revitalization and redevelopment of our downtowns, while preserving their unique character and cultural heritage.



*PHOTOS: Above - Brenna (MWCDP), Whitney (Ronan Revitalization), Katie Elliot (Ronan Chamber) in front of Ronan sign.; Right - Bison*

# \$1.6 MM

\$1.6 million in funding has been secured in the past year for regional projects

*“Ronan Revitalization has been incredibly fortunate to have the support of Mission West throughout the process of becoming a Montana Main Street Community, leveraging grants, and identifying new funding sources to help bolster our beautiful town. Their talented and experienced staff help maximize volunteer efforts by supporting without stifling a group’s efforts. We appreciate their guidance and we move from planning to completing larger-scale revitalization projects.”*

*~ Whitney Liegakos, Ronan Revitalization Chair*





# Business Development

## CULTIVATING BUSINESS AND CAPITALIZING GROWTH

*Mission West staff meet with business owners at a 'Coffee Hour' hosted in Polson*

Mission West’s **Business Development** program, serving Lake, Mineral, and Sanders Counties, empowers businesses to thrive by providing a variety of financing options, technical assistance, and workshops to help them grow and develop sustainably.

**Loan Department:** Currently, the Loan Department has a total of \$6,204,927.25 distributed across 76 loans. This year, 14 new loans have been issued, totaling \$2,033,828.25.

**Coffee Hours:** The events provided a venue for community members and small businesses to network and meet the Mission West team. Mission West held two Coffee Hour events in Ronan and Polson as pilots with 31 attendees. While the first two were held in Lake County, we’re anticipating region wide coffee hours held in fall 2024 and spring 2025!

**Workshops:** Mission West facilitates small business workshops designed to provide local entrepreneurs with the resources they need to develop, sustain, and grow their business. In the last year, MWCDP facilitated 21 workshops that 99 people attended

*PHOTOS: Mission West staff meet with business owners at a ‘Coffee Hour’ in Ronan*



# 886



## Hours of technical assistance provided to 165 clients

in total, covering topics from Excel Essentials and Human Resources Do's and Don'ts to Social Media Marketing Strategies and a wide variety of other small business-related topics.

**Technical Assistance:** Mission West provides Technical Assistance to local entrepreneurs in areas like business planning, financial projections, succession planning, HR, and a variety of other subject areas. In the last year Mission West and its TA Network have provided 886.69 hours of technical assistance to 165 different clients.

**Montana Local Food Financing Fund Partnership (MLFFFP):** In April, Mission West in cooperation with Montana Department of Agriculture and Hopa Mountain was one of 16 public-private partnerships selected by the Reinvestment Fund's Healthy Food Financing Initiative to improve access to nutritious food in underserved communities, create and preserve high quality jobs, and revitalize low-income areas. Local food businesses frequently face barriers to accessing financial capital including lack of collateral, high interest rates on commercial loans, and insufficient cash capacity to provide a match for grant-funded projects. To mitigate these barriers, Mission West will purchase Certified Deposits as loan guarantees, buy down interest rates, and issue grant awards to emerging enterprises.

*“I received help from MWCDP to create a business plan and eventually received two essential loans to complement our Glacier Bank Loan to reopen in our own location rather than a leased facility. I am grateful for the ways in which our community has supported Head Over Heels, and for all the people at MWCDP and others throughout the valley who have helped us succeed.”*

*~ Jessica Edwards, Owner/Operator  
Head Over Heels LLC., Polson, MT*



**\$2MM**



\$2 million in loans issued this year  
to 14 businesses



# Cooperative Development

## OWN IT TOGETHER, SHARE THE BENEFITS

*Cooperative Development Center Director Charlie Michel and board development consultant Ned Cooney facilitate the 2024 Spring Governance Workshop series for co-op staff and board members with Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, Western Montana Growers Cooperative, and Ronan Cooperative Brewery.*

Over the past year, Mission West's **Cooperative Development Center** has emerged as a nationally recognized leader in food hub network development while bringing innovative approaches like cooperative business conversions and community-based investment to revitalize rural communities throughout our region.

**Celebrating 25 Years of Cooperation:** Established in 1999 under funding from USDA-Rural Development, Mission West's Cooperative Development Center serves as a catalyst and connector for the cooperative community in Montana, the Northwest region, and beyond. Our cooperative development center provides technical assistance to start-up and growing cooperatives from business planning and feasibility studies to capitalization strategies, membership development, and board governance. Through cooperation, member-owned businesses offer innovative solutions to addressing unmet needs in our rural communities like housing, utilities, food access, childcare, and more.

**310** : Cooperative jobs were  
: created or saved over  
: the past year

*PHOTO: Western Montana Growers Cooperative staff pack veggie boxes with locally sourced food from their 40+ producer-members*



**Growing a Regional Food System:** Mission West continues its development of the Northwest Food Hub Network, a pathbreaking collaboration among our region’s leading farmer-owned food hubs — Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative (Mount Vernon, WA), Local Inland Northwest Cooperative (Spokane, WA), and Western Montana Growers Cooperative (Missoula, MT). Under Mission West’s leadership, the Network facilitated nearly 100 hub-to-hub inventory trading transactions in 2024, expanding local food access for consumers while supporting 400+ jobs for local farms and food hubs and generating over \$2 million in new sales to community institutions.

**Completing the Conversion:** Alongside the inspired and passionate leadership of local ranchers, Mission West continues to assist Glacier Processing Cooperative (GPC) deliver on its objective to acquire, operate, and expand Vandevanter Meats, a family-owned business providing slaughter and processing services in the Flathead region since 1945. The co-op successfully purchased the facility in April 2024 from its retiring owner and has been awarded \$300,000 in state and federal grant funding for critical equipment upgrades that will improve processing efficiency, capacity, and product diversity of local meat for over 300+ ranchers in the region.

*ABOVE - Ranchers discuss membership in GPC at a public meeting in fall 2023; BELOW – The 2023/2024 Board of Directors for GPC from left to right: Chris Fritz, Lisa Wade Mayorga, Casey Olson, Toby Hook, and Mark Siderius*



# 200+

- Local farmers and ranchers provided with access
- to new markets through the Northwest Food Hub
- Network's regional supply chain



*“The Northwest Food Hub Network is making it possible for us to embrace the sixth cooperative principle, staying true to our mission and protecting our brand while creating a larger, broader cooperative economy—we are creating a structure that can be adopted throughout the country.”*

*~ Andrew Yokum, Executive Director,  
Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative*

# \$123k

- In accessible financing delivered through Mission West's
- Cooperative Revolving Loan Fund – the only lending
- program in Montana dedicated exclusively to serving
- cooperatively-owned business



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