

# TOOLKIT FOR INDIGENOUS FOODS IN SCHOOL MEALS

WRITTEN BY MARIAH GLADSTONE

INDIGI  KITCHEN

MONTANA PARTNERSHIP TO  
 **END** CHILDHOOD  
HUNGER

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# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit was created to help food service directors identify, procure, and successfully incorporate traditional, healthy foods into their breakfast and lunch programs. It is also a teaching tool to educate those interested in traditional foods about American Indian nations and tribal communities.

In 2021, Indigikitchen was awarded a grant through Montana No Kid Hungry to develop this toolkit. The grant had two main goals:

1. Increase the incorporation and consumption of traditional foods in USDA
2. School Meals Programs, and Provide hands-on educational opportunities for four reservation schools in Montana to practice incorporating Native foods into their school meal programs.

In developing the original toolkit, Indigikitchen partnered with Hardin Public Schools, St. Ignatius Public Schools, Browning Public Schools, and St. Labre Schools. The partnership resulted in a collaboration on Indigenous recipes and other topics including procurement, USDA Foods, menu planning, recipe development, the USDA Food Buying Guide (FBG), crediting, and standardized recipes. The training highlighted USDA and Office of Public Instruction (OPI) resources and programs to support the inclusion of traditional foods in school meals.

This update, made in partnership with Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger (MT-PECH) includes recent changes to the USDA crediting guidelines with additional school profiles. It also includes information about curriculum, lesson plans, and Indian Education for All programming.

As school meal programs evolve to meet the diverse needs of students, incorporating Indigenous foods offers a powerful opportunity to honor cultural traditions, promote nutrition, and enrich student learning. This toolkit is designed to help food service directors integrate Indigenous foods into their school meal programs in meaningful and practical ways. By embracing Indigenous culinary practices, this resource supports the inclusion of nutrient-rich, culturally significant foods that reflect the history and diversity of Indigenous communities.

This toolkit provides actionable steps, resources, and guidance for food service directors to navigate the complexities of sourcing, preparing, and serving Indigenous foods while fostering an inclusive and educational environment. Whether you are beginning this journey or seeking to expand your offerings, this toolkit aims to empower you to create meals that not only nourish students but also connect them to the rich cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples. By incorporating Indigenous foods, we can celebrate the wisdom of traditional food systems and contribute to the respect for Indigenous cultures within school communities.

## WHAT ARE INDIGENOUS FOODS?



Traditional foods are those that have been traditionally prepared and consumed by American Indian people and nations. The following are examples of common, traditional foods in Montana that may be served in USDA School Meals Programs:

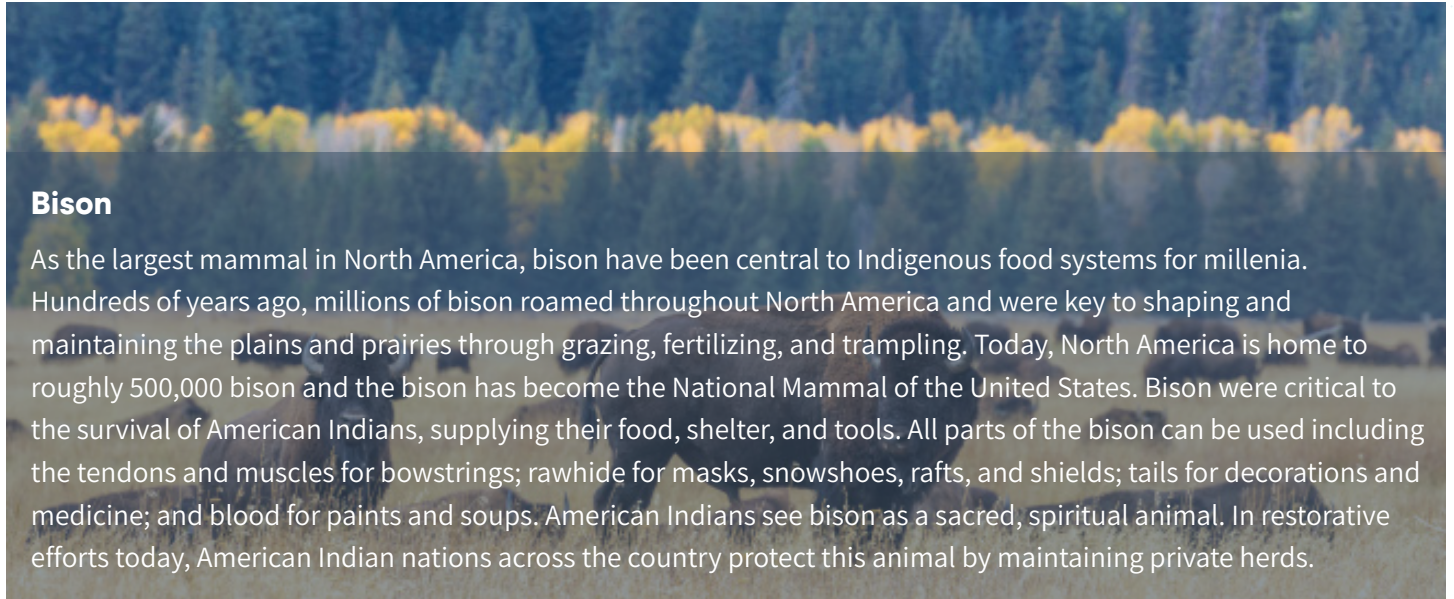
- » Berries (chokecherries, cranberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, huckleberries, serviceberries, strawberries, thimbleberries, rosehips)
- » Bison
- » Fish (walleye, sturgeon, trout, salmon)
- » Prairie turnips, camas, and other root vegetables
- » The Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash)
- » Birds including grouse, duck, and geese
- » Prickly pear cactus
- » Traditional teas and seasonings (Cedar, Yarrow, Peppermint, Bee Balm)

### **Traditional Berries**

Montana is home to over a dozen edible berries. The most famous are huckleberries, serviceberries or juneberries, wild strawberries, thimbleberries, raspberries, and chokecherries. However, gooseberries, currants, buffaloberries, elderberries, and rosehips are also delicious edible berries that you can find across the state. While most berries ripen in the late summer, they can be dried, frozen, or made into jams, jellies, and syrups for use throughout the year. Berries are generally low in calories and high in fiber, vitamin C, and antioxidants.

## Root Vegetables

Native people in Montana traditionally ate a number of root vegetables. These include our state flower, the bitterroot, camas bulbs, prairie turnips, wild onions, fernleaf-biscuitroot, and nine-leaf biscuit root. Some of these can be eaten raw, like prairie turnips, and some require extensive slow cooking or roasting to convert the inulin into edible carbohydrates. Camas is a great example of this. Generally, these roots are starchy but can provide a valuable source of vitamin C, magnesium, and selenium.



### Bison

As the largest mammal in North America, bison have been central to Indigenous food systems for millennia. Hundreds of years ago, millions of bison roamed throughout North America and were key to shaping and maintaining the plains and prairies through grazing, fertilizing, and trampling. Today, North America is home to roughly 500,000 bison and the bison has become the National Mammal of the United States. Bison were critical to the survival of American Indians, supplying their food, shelter, and tools. All parts of the bison can be used including the tendons and muscles for bowstrings; rawhide for masks, snowshoes, rafts, and shields; tails for decorations and medicine; and blood for paints and soups. American Indians see bison as a sacred, spiritual animal. In restorative efforts today, American Indian nations across the country protect this animal by maintaining private herds.

## Fish

Montana is home to 59 native species of fish, many of which have traditionally been eaten by native people. Lake trout, walleye, bull trout, and cutthroat trout are all delicious, though the latter two are suffering declining populations while the first is now considered invasive in watersheds where it has been introduced. Fortunately, Montana fish are readily accessible and are often high in omega-3 fatty acids and provide vitamins such as D and B2 (riboflavin). Fish is rich in calcium and phosphorus and a great source of minerals, such as iron, zinc, iodine, magnesium, and potassium.

## Birds

There are a number of edible birds in Montana, including both waterfowl and upland species. Of course prairie chickens, grouse, pheasant, and wild turkeys are all game birds that have historically been eaten across the continent. Additionally, a number of ducks and geese have also been part of Indigenous culinary traditions.

## Prickly Pear

Prickly Pear is a very flexible food source. Both the pads, sometimes called nopales, and the fruit, called tunas, are edible. However, you must be very careful with both harvesting and preparation. Both the pads and fruit have tiny hair-like barbed thorns that are referred to as thorns or “glochids.” These easily detach and will lodge in skin. You must remove the spines before cooking with the prickly pears.

The fruit is a great source of different vitamins and minerals, depending on the color of the fruit. The most common are the red variety, which have a dark pink color. This type of fruit contains the most ascorbic acid of all the fruit types. This gives the fruit citric qualities and taste.





Prickly pears were used to cure ailments from indigestion to burn wounds, the cactus had all the answers. Both types of fruit have high counts in vitamin C and calcium. They are also high in dietary fiber, which explains why they helped with indigestion. They also contain a high amount of kaempferol, which is an additional aid against cancer and heart disease, and many antioxidants and proteins that aid the body against infection and other maladies. Beyond that, they are also low in sugars, making the fruit a healthy treat.

## **Birds**

Montana is home to a number of native bird species that have traditionally been used for food. Dusky (Blue) Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, Sage Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Spruce Grouse are all upland species that spend the winters in the state. Migratory birds like ducks and geese have also been eaten and provide a valuable source of fat. Without a doubt, duck and geese meat is high on protein and iron just like chicken. However, it is also rich in other nutrients like niacin and selenium. Both of these provide powerful boosts to your immune system. Duck provides almost three times more vitamin B1 and over two times more vitamin K than chicken. Other vitamins found in higher amounts in duck meat include vitamin B2, vitamin E, vitamin A, and folate. Duck also contains vitamin D, which is absent in chicken.

## **Seasoning and Teas**

It should not be a surprise that several native species of plants can be used to make tea or season food. These include a number of coniferous trees like western red cedar, lodgepole pine, juniper, douglas fir, and subalpine fir. Peppermint and bee balm (wild bergamot) make flavorful teas but can also be used in the spice cabinet. Common yarrow, found in almost every location across the state, is a tea, a spice that tastes similar to tarragon, and a blood clotting agent useful in field medicine. While not typically treated as a tea, juniper berries are both spicy with pine notes and pair well with caraway, garlic, marjoram, pepper, and rosemary. Smooth sumac, *Rhus glabra*, has berries which can be ground down into a spice or used to make a lemonade-like drink.

Raspberry plants can be used for more than just the fresh berries as their leaves make a delicious tea that Native people have long used. Similarly, elderberries themselves can be brewed into a tea that is both flavorful and has antiviral properties. This tea is especially nice during flu season.

# INCORPORATING TRADITIONAL FOODS

Each American Indian nation in Montana has its distinctive traditions surrounding food. These customs and practices can be integrated into USDA School Meals Programs using the examples, lessons, and menu planning tools which follow. This portion of the tool kit provides the basics on the breakfast and lunch meal patterns, crediting, and menu planning tools to aid in the introduction of the previously-mentioned traditional foods into school meal programs.

## MEAL PATTERN AND CREDITING

Designed to encourage healthy food choices by children, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns are based on the latest nutrition science. Found on [OPI's NSLP Menu Planning webpage](#), the meal patterns focus on including whole grains, offering more fresh fruits and vegetables, reducing sodium, restricting saturated fat and calories, and eliminating trans-fats in all products served to students.

REQUIRED FOOD COMPONENTS	
BREAKFAST	LUNCH
Grain, Fruit, Milk	Meat/Meat Alternate, Grain, Fruit, Vegetable, Milk

The [Food Buying Guide \(FBG\)](#) is the indispensable tool for food yield information for all child nutrition programs (CNPs). While the FBG provides a fairly comprehensive list of products regularly served in CNPs, it does not provide data on every possible food served in reimbursable meals. However, foods not listed in the FBG may still be served in CNPs. In that case, the yield information of a similar food or in-house yield may be used to determine the contribution towards meal pattern requirements. The USDA has continued to update the guidelines for traditional food crediting, including putting out a [memo on November 1, 2023](#), adding to the clarification. Traditional Indigenous foods can credit like similar products found in the FBG, as demonstrated in the following table.

TRADITIONAL FOODS	CREDITING IN THE FOOD BUYING GUIDE 1
Wild Rice (sprouted, pugged, flour) Blue Cornmeal (mush) Native Whole Blue Corn Kernel (ground into a flour)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credits the same as other grain items</li> <li>• Grain contributions may be calculated using grains of creditable grains (16g) or Exhibit A 2</li> <li>• Sprouted or puff forms of wild rice belong in Exhibit A Group H 2</li> </ul>
Native Whole Blue Corn Kernel (not ground into a flour) Native White Corn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credits as a starchy vegetable</li> <li>• Yield information for regular corn may be used to determine the credit.</li> </ul>



TRADITIONAL FOODS	CREDITING IN THE FOOD BUYING GUIDE 1
Ground Bison/Buffalo Ground Venison (elk or deer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FBG contains yield information for ground buffalo, the same yield may be used to determine the credit. 3</li> </ul>
Wild Plums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credits the same as whole stone fruit items.</li> <li>• FBG contains yield information for plums, the same yield may be used to determine the credit.</li> </ul>
Beaked Hazelnuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credits the same as whole nuts.</li> <li>• FBG contains yield information for hazelnuts, the same yield may be used to determine the credit.</li> </ul>
Venison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FBG contains yield information for ground venison, the same yield may be used to determine the credit. 3</li> </ul>

1. All crediting guidance is applicable to all items listed under the Traditional Foods column.
2. See Memo SP 30-2012 Grain Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Programs.
3. Whole cuts are used instead of ground meat, the yield information for a similar beef cut may be used to calculate crediting.

Instructions for developing yields are available in the introduction section of the FBG, [page I-3](#).

### MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE (M/MA)

The M/MA component allows for a variety of protein options, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Typically, meat, fish, and poultry in their natural states (i.e. unbreaded, no fillers or additives) will credit ounce-for-ounce. This means that one ounce by weight will credit as one ounce equivalent (oz eq) M/MA. Common M/MA in Native communities that may be served at breakfast or lunch are listed in the table below.



#### **Bison**

Bison is an excellent food source and is low in fat and high in protein. According to the USDA Nutrient Database bison that is cooked, ground, and grass-fed is lower in calories, fat, saturated fat, and sodium, compared to cooked, ground beef. Bison is a leaner protein option that will help menu planners stay within the weekly dietary specifications of fat, saturated fat, and calories, while incorporating a traditional food.

Bison may be incorporated into menus in a variety of ways. It can be substituted for ground beef or turkey, or used as a 50/50 blend of bison and beef in meat sauces, soups, or chili recipes. One ounce of cooked bison by weight will credit 1.0 oz eq M/MA. To view information, such as the yield of raw-to-cooked bison, use the Game, Buffalo, Ground entry of the FBG. For more information on incorporating bison into school meals, visit the Intertribal Buffalo Council's Incorporating Bison Meat into the Schools' Lunch Menu.



### ***Fish***

Fish is a significant protein source consumed by tribal communities in Montana. Different types of freshwater fish such as sturgeon, salmon, steelheads, walleye, and trout are common in Montana and may be served in USDA School Meals Programs. Typically, one ounce of cooked fish in its natural state (i.e., unbreaded, no fillers or additives) will credit as 1.0 oz eq M/MA. Other fish products that are processed or breaded require additional crediting documentation, such as a Child Nutrition (CN) Label or a Product Formulation Statement (PFS). Fish can be incorporated into menus as either baked, broiled, grilled, or roasted. It can be served by itself or in a mixed dish like fish stew, fish wraps, or fish tacos.

### ***Beans***

Legumes include cooked dry beans and peas, such as black beans, black-eyed peas (mature, dry), edamame (soybeans), garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, soybeans, split peas, and white beans. Legumes may credit as either meat/meat alternates component or the vegetables component, but one serving cannot credit as both components in the same meal or snack.

## **WHOLE GRAINS**

USDA School Meals Programs require schools to serve whole grain-rich products. This means 51 percent or more of the grain in the product is whole grain. There are different ways to determine whether a product is whole grain-rich:

- The product label includes a Whole Grain Stamp indicating a whole grain content of at least 8.0 grams per oz eq.
- The product packaging includes the following Food and Drug Administration (FDA) whole grain health claim: “Diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods and low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers.”
- The product's first ingredient (or second, after water) on the ingredient list is a whole grain.

If the product is whole grain-rich using any of the methods above, it may be credited using Exhibit A: School Lunch and Breakfast. This is a table that separates commonly used grains into groups based on how much creditable grain they contain per serving, on average. Exhibit A provides information regarding the grams or ounces per 1.0 oz eq for each specific group. The table below shows how some traditional grains credit toward the meal pattern.

### **Wild Rice**

While wild rice is not considered native to Montana, it has been eaten by Native people in the Great Lakes region for thousands of years and can be procured from Native suppliers. Wild rice by itself is a whole grain and has numerous health benefits. It is a rich source of dietary fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals. In addition, wild rice is higher in protein than other whole grains and is an excellent source of B vitamins.

Wild rice credits the same as any other grain. It may be calculated using grams of creditable grains by weight; one ounce of dry wild rice or one-half cup serving of cooked wild rice credits as 1.0 oz eq grain.

### **Corn**

Hominy is whole, dried corn kernels treated with a high-alkaline solution (lye, ash) to soften the kernels' skin. It is traditionally served as a vegetable or as a milled grain product (e.g., hominy grits). Masa is ground hominy made into flour, which can be used to make tortillas. According to USDA policy memo SP 34-2019 these ingredients may credit towards the vegetable or grain component.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Crediting**

- ¼ cup canned, drained or cooked, whole hominy (from dried) credits as ¼ cup starchy vegetable.
- ½ cup cooked or 1 ounce (28 grams) of dry hominy grits credits as 1 oz eq whole grain.
- Corn masa, masa harina, and nixtamalized corn flour/cornmeal is determined by weight as listed in Exhibit A or by grams of creditable grain per portion.

### **Fruit**

The allowable types of fruit are fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100 percent pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice. Dried fruit credits as double the volume served (e.g., one-quarter cup of dried cranberries credits as one-half cup of fruit). The following shows traditional fruits, which credit by volume served. Many of the fruits listed below have been wild-harvested by American Indian nations. Most varieties eaten today are farmed, which are different than the varieties tribal communities ate in the past.

Gooseberries Blueberries Serviceberries Blackberries Chokecherries Cranberries Huckleberries Raspberries Strawberries Buffaloberries Currants

### **Vegetables**

The allowable types of vegetables are fresh, frozen, canned, and 100 percent pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice. There are five vegetable subgroups that must be offered weekly at lunch: dark green, red/orange, beans/peas (legumes), starchy, and other vegetables. Uncooked, leafy green vegetables credit as half the volume served (e.g., one cup of romaine lettuce credits as one-half cup dark green vegetable). The following table shows examples of Indigenous vegetables in their respective subgroups.

Dark Green	Fireweed shoots Nettles Lambsquarter (Goosefoot)
Starchy	Corn (all varieties) Prairie turnips Yellow Water Lily
Red/Orange	Winter Squash (butternut, acorn, or Hubbard) Tomatoes Pumpkin
Beans/Peas (Legumes)	Black Beans
Other	Green Beans Ramps Onions

## **Milk**

Although not a traditional food, milk is one of the required components at both breakfast and lunch and must be offered daily in a variety.

### ***FOODS THAT DO NOT COUNT TOWARDS MEAL CREDITING***

Not all traditional foods meet the nutrition standards and contribute towards a reimbursable meal. Indigenous foods that do not contribute to a specific meal pattern requirement (i.e., meats/meat alternatives, grains, fruits, or vegetables component) may be served, but will not credit toward a reimbursable meal. When served, these foods must be accounted for when assessing compliance in the weekly nutrient analysis and count toward dietary specifications (limits on calories, saturated fat, sodium, and trans fat). For example, acorns do not credit due to their low protein content. The acorns may be served with a reimbursable meal, but will not contribute towards meal pattern requirements, and would be included in the nutrient analysis. Similarly, maple syrup is a traditional food which is allowable in meals but does not credit.

Traditional foods may also be used during taste tests or other educational opportunities outside of the meal programs. To help children learn more about where their food comes from, USDA encourages schools to provide agriculture, agroforestry, and nutrition education.



## MENU PLANNING WITH TRADITIONAL FOODS

After reviewing the five food components of the USDA School Meals Programs and the breakfast and lunch meal patterns, use the following information to create flavorful, fresh, standardized recipes and menus that incorporate traditional ingredients. These recipes and menus can be used to build reimbursable meals that students will enjoy. What menu items do you currently offer? Traditional foods may already be on your menu! Promote those items that feature traditional foods like corn, beans, squash, local berries, trout, and buffalo. Are there any menu items you could incorporate that are traditional? Maybe there are menu items that could be substituted for a traditional food option. Substitute brown rice on the menu with wild rice, or add ground bison to a mixed dish in place of ground beef.

### Standardizing Recipes with Traditional Ingredients

A standardized recipe is required for anything that is prepared with more than one ingredient. A standardized recipe is one that is made specifically for your food service operation. A quantity recipe is any recipe that makes twenty-five or more portions, and may be used as a basis for a recipe standardized to your operation. A quantity recipe becomes a standardized recipe when it has been tested, adapted, and evaluated so that it is specific to your kitchen.

#### Steps to create a standardized recipe:

- Choose a quantity recipe using traditional ingredients. Depending on the number of portions the recipe makes, you may have to increase or decrease the ingredients to serve the appropriate number of students eating the school meal.
- Prepare the recipe and make adjustments until a suitable dish is made that students enjoy. This may not happen on the first try and adjustments may need to be made.
- Determine the portion size of the recipe, or how much each student will be served. If serving multiple grade groups, determine if there will be more than one portion size. Remember, altering the ingredients or their quantities may alter the dietary specifications, crediting, and quality of the product.
- Determine how this portion size credits toward the meal pattern. Check out the menu planning tools below to help with the crediting and dietary specifications of your recipe.
- Once the recipe is perfected and students enjoy the product, develop a written, standardized recipe.

### Menu Planning

After standardized recipes have been created, you must create a menu that meets meal pattern requirements. When planning your menu, ensure the dietary specifications are within limits for the appropriate grade group and that proper portion control is being practiced. After creating a quality menu, consider adding a la carte items that meet USDA Smart Snacks requirements using traditional ingredients. These a la carte items may help increase participation.

The intent of the USDA School Meals Programs is to provide nutrient-rich meals that support the healthy development of children. By using healthy cooking techniques, such as baking, broiling, grilling, or roasting, and traditional foods, you can create menus that support the nutrition guidelines. When creating a menu, menu planners must consider the dietary specifications. These include the calories, saturated fats, sodium, and trans fats of each menu item. The dietary specifications are assessed as a daily average over the course of one week; this means the amount of calories offered on some days can be higher or lower than the allowable range, as long as the average over the course of the week falls within the specifications.



## Cycle Menus



Planning menu options that taste good, are healthy, and meet meal pattern requirements can be challenging. Cycle menus make it easier for menu planners by establishing a rotating 3-, 4-, or even 5-week menu cycle. They can also help menu planners save time with meal planning and placing food orders. An [example of a cycle menu](#) can be found on the OPI website.

### Two Week Indigenous Cycle Menu



This menu reflects Indigenous food traditions while meeting school nutrition standards. It emphasizes whole, minimally processed foods, seasonality, and cultural significance. Adjustments can be made based on local ingredient availability and student preferences. These recipes can be found in the recipe appendix and the recipe scaling spreadsheet.

#### WEEK 1



##### Monday

-  Breakfast: Blue Corn Pancakes with Maple Syrup, Scrambled Eggs, Fresh Berries, Milk
-  Lunch: Bison and Bean Chili, Roasted Squash, Whole Grain Rolls, Apple Slices, Water



##### Tuesday

-  Breakfast: Wild Rice Porridge with Cranberries and Honey, Yogurt, Milk
-  Lunch: Grilled Salmon, Steamed Wild Rice, Roasted Brussels Sprouts, Cornbread, Fresh Melon, Water



##### Wednesday

-  Breakfast: Cornmeal Mush with Chokecherry Sauce, Hard-Boiled Egg, Milk
-  Lunch: Turkey and Wild Rice Soup, Three Sisters Salad (Corn, Beans, Squash), Whole Grain Crackers, Fresh Orange Slices, Water

##### Thursday



-  Breakfast: Pumpkin and Amaranth Muffins, Yogurt with Berries, Milk
-  Lunch: Venison Tacos on Blue Corn Tortillas, Shredded Cabbage, Salsa, Pinto Beans, Mixed Berries, Water

##### Friday



-  Breakfast: Scrambled Eggs with Green Chiles and Cheese, Whole Wheat Toast, Fresh Grapes, Milk
-  Lunch: Baked Whitefish with Lemon, Quinoa and Roasted Vegetables, Cranberry Sauce, Wild Rice Crackers, Water

## WEEK 2



### Monday

-  Breakfast: Baked Sweet Potato and Apple Hash, Boiled Egg, Milk
-  Lunch: Bison Meatballs with Tomato Sauce, Roasted Corn, Whole Grain Bread, Fresh Strawberries, Water



### Tuesday

-  Breakfast: Warm Millet Cereal with Maple Syrup, Yogurt, Nuts/Seeds, Milk
-  Lunch: Elk Stew with Root Vegetables, Whole Grain Rolls, Roasted Squash, Fresh Pineapple, Water



### Wednesday

-  Breakfast: Blue Corn Waffles with Berry Compote, Scrambled Eggs, Milk
-  Lunch: Grilled Chicken with Wild Rice Pilaf, Steamed Green Beans, Fresh Peaches, Water

### Thursday

-  Breakfast: Cranberry and Sunflower Seed Granola with Yogurt, Fresh Orange Slices, Milk
-  Lunch: Bison Burgers on Whole Wheat Buns, Roasted Sweet Potato Wedges, Mixed Greens Salad, Watermelon Slices, Water

### Friday

-  Breakfast: Scrambled Eggs with Wild Herbs, Whole Grain Toast, Fresh Blueberries, Milk
-  Lunch: Stuffed Bell Peppers with Quinoa, Beans, and Corn, Steamed Broccoli, Whole Wheat Crackers, Fresh Apple, Water

## Smart Snacks

Although not part of a reimbursable meal, incorporating Smart Snacks into the cafeteria may help with participation. Smart Snacks in schools refer to all food and beverages sold to students on the school campus during the school day, outside of reimbursable meals. A la carte items made with traditional ingredients may be sold to students as long as they meet the Smart Snacks requirements. The Iowa Department of Education's [Smart Snacks in School webpage](#) has Smart Snacks recipes, some of which incorporate traditional ingredients. These include Maple Muffins, Smart Cranberry Cookie, Mexican Sweet Potato Bowl, and Pumpkin Smoothie in a Cup

## Making Reimbursable Meals

Menu planners can prepare traditional foods offered as part of a reimbursable meal that meet meal pattern requirements. Under [Offer versus Serve \(OVS\)](#), students are allowed to decline some of the food offered, while still making a reimbursable meal. This reduces food waste as students choose the foods they are more likely to eat and decline the foods they are less likely to eat. At breakfast, a student must select at least three food items, one of which is one-half cup fruit or vegetable, or a combination. A food item at breakfast is defined as 1.0 oz eq grain, one-half cup of fruit and/or vegetable, or one cup of milk. At lunch, a student must select at least three full, different food components, one of which is one-half cup of fruit or vegetable, or a combination.

## Menu Planning Tools

The following USDA menu planning tools can help develop menus for students that use traditional foods and that are delicious, healthy, and meet meal pattern requirements.

USDA Menu Planning Tools

[Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs Interactive Web-Based Tool](#)

This interactive tool contains yield and crediting information for foods with a standard of identity (in large part, unprocessed foods). Traditional foods like cranberries, buffalo, pumpkin, and wild rice can be found in the FBG.

[Certification of Compliance Worksheets: 5-Day Schedule](#)

This tool determines if the meal pattern requirements are met for the day and week. It also determines if the whole grain-rich requirement, juice limits, and vegetable subgroups have been met.



# PROCURING TRADITIONAL AND LOCAL FOODS

Procurement is the sourcing and purchasing of goods or services, often through a competitive bidding process. Schools can procure a variety of traditional and local foods using proper procurement methods.

This toolkit cannot possibly cover all the laws and rules governing purchasing and school meal requirements. For those, you can refer to the [Montana Office of Public Instruction \(OPI\)](#) and [USDA's Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\)](#) websites.

As per [OPI's website](#), "SFAs must follow procurement procedures for all purchases for goods or services that are supported in whole or in part with non-profit food service account funds. Following proper procurement procedures helps ensure that procurements are fair, open, and competitive.

The OPI School Nutrition Program conducts procurement monitoring and training to assist districts with compliance of the rules.

## All procurement in the Child Nutrition Programs must comply with:

- » 2 CFR 200;
- » USDA Program regulations (7 CFR Part 210, Part 215, Part 220, Part 225, Part 226, Part 245, and Part 250 as applicable);
- » State law, regulations, and policies that are not in conflict with Federal requirements; and
- » Local law, regulations, and policies that are not in conflict with Federal requirements.

There are links on the OPI website to procurement [FAQs](#), [requirements](#), [methods](#), as well as [resources and policies](#).

Among the various procurement methods, micro-purchase will often be the method used when sourcing indigenous and local foods. Micro-purchase means a purchase of products or services where the total does not exceed \$10,000 per transaction.

To the extent practicable, purchases must be distributed equitably among qualified suppliers with reasonable prices.

You can identify if a price is reasonable by comparing prices from previous purchases, if you have personal knowledge of the item being purchased, or by comparing prices to similar items being purchased.

Montana requires the following records for micro-purchases.

- Receipts documenting when the total amount purchased falls below \$10,000;
- Documentation showing how purchases are being distributed equitably among qualified suppliers; and
- Documentation stating why there is only one qualified supplier, if that is the case. This should include the reasons, such as labor and mileage cost for driving to another location.

Another important resource for incorporating local and Indigenous foods into your program is FNS's [Office of Community Food Systems \(OCFS\)](#).

This agency helps child nutrition program operators incorporate local foods in the [National School Lunch Program](#) and its associated programs, as well as the **Summer Food Service Program** and **Child and Adult Care Food Program**. In addition, OCFS staff works with tribal communities to respond to their desire to better incorporate traditional foods into our meal programs. OCFS accomplishes this through their [Farm to School Grant Program](#), **training and technical assistance** and **research**.



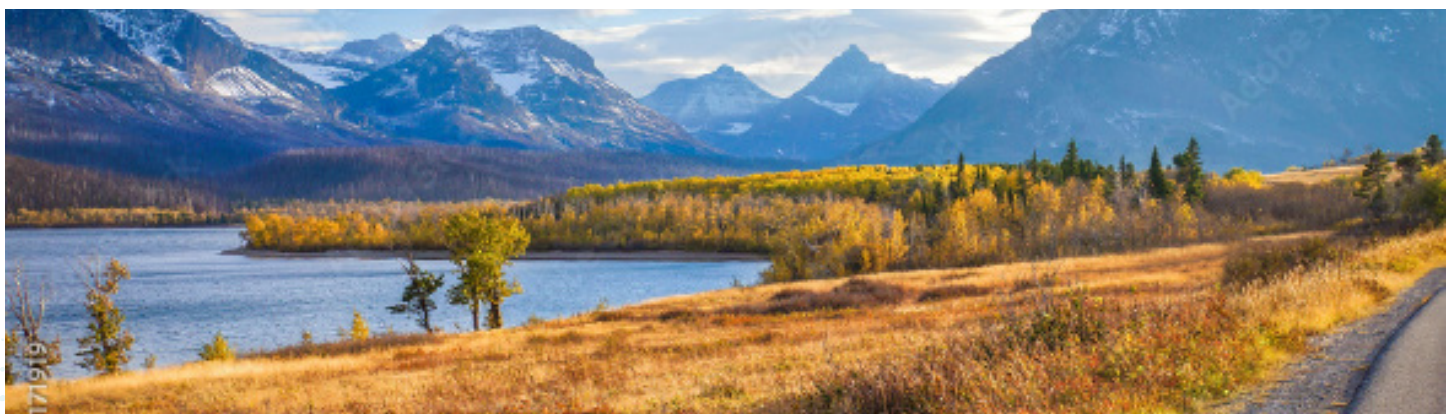
For example, two 2021 Farm to School grant awardees in Montana included:

- The Boys & Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation and Lake County for their implementation of edible gardens at the Polson and Ronan Clubhouses; and
- Farm Hands–Nourish the Flathead for their implementation of the Wildcat Farm to School Program done in partnership with Columbia Falls School District – featuring agricultural education, an edible school garden classroom, and local procurement for Fresh Snack Fridays.

Other Montana organizations that can assist you with incorporating local and traditional foods into your meal programs are [Montana Farm to School](#) and [Abundant Montana](#).

## DEFINING “LOCAL”

There is no single definition for the word “local.” Your school can define “local” however it wants. Whether local is within 50 miles of your school, within the state of Montana, or within the surrounding states, “local” can differ from district to district. Determine what grows locally in your area. The Montana Farm to School Program has a chart on [Montana Seasonal Foods](#) that helps determine which traditional foods to purchase throughout the year. By identifying the values, needs, and wants of your school district and community, you can better define what local means in order to build a comprehensive program that supports children and the community.





## Montana's Geographic Preference

Montana law allows public institutions the option to prioritize “local” over “lowest bid” by taking advantage of an optional exemption from the Montana Procurement Act in the purchasing of Montana-produced food. This optional exemption, enacted in 2007, gives public institutions more flexibility to buy Montana-produced food, unless the purchases are made using federal dollars. The law requires that food purchasers stay within their current budgets. This means an institution may pay more for Montana-produced food items as long as the extra cost can be made up on other less expensive items or substitutions. “Montana-produced” is defined broadly in the law to mean products that were “planted, cultivated, grown, harvested, raised, collected, or manufactured” in Montana.

## Local Meat

Animals slaughtered and processed in a “custom exempt” plant may not be sold; that meat is for consumption by the owner(s) of the animal, which cannot include schools. However, retail meat establishments can further process state- or federally-inspected product for sale to schools. Less than 25% of their sales can be to hotels, restaurants, and institutions limited to \$76,500 of their total sales. Further, custom exempt facilities have additional regulations limiting ingredients in processed products (e.g., they cannot add fillers like soy to hamburger patties). Livestock raised in Montana and offered for sale within Montana must be slaughtered and processed in either an official Montana Department of Livestock-inspected (state-inspected) or a USDA-inspected (federally-inspected) facility. If that meat is bought or sold across state lines, it must be processed in a federal USDA-inspected facility.



Looking for a local meat processor?

- » [State-Inspected Facilities Directory](#)
- » [Federally-Inspected Facilities Directory](#)

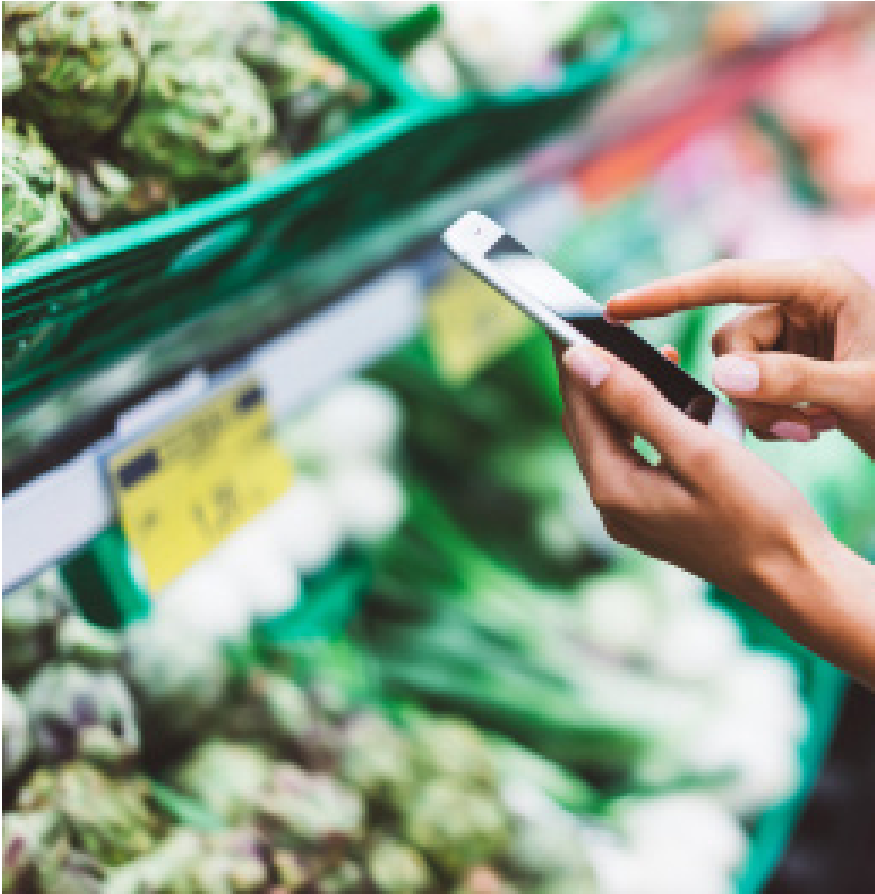
## Eggs

Grade B or better eggs are required to be used in food service establishments, including school food service programs. Fresh shell eggs (Grade B or better) may be purchased from local farmers if the farmer holds an Egg Grader License from the Montana Department of Livestock.

## Produce (Fruit and Vegetables)

Raw, unprocessed produce

Generally, no licenses, formal inspections or regulatory oversight are required of any food in its raw, unaltered state, including fruits, vegetables, raw honey, and grains for very small producers. Raw and unprocessed fruits and vegetables cannot be:

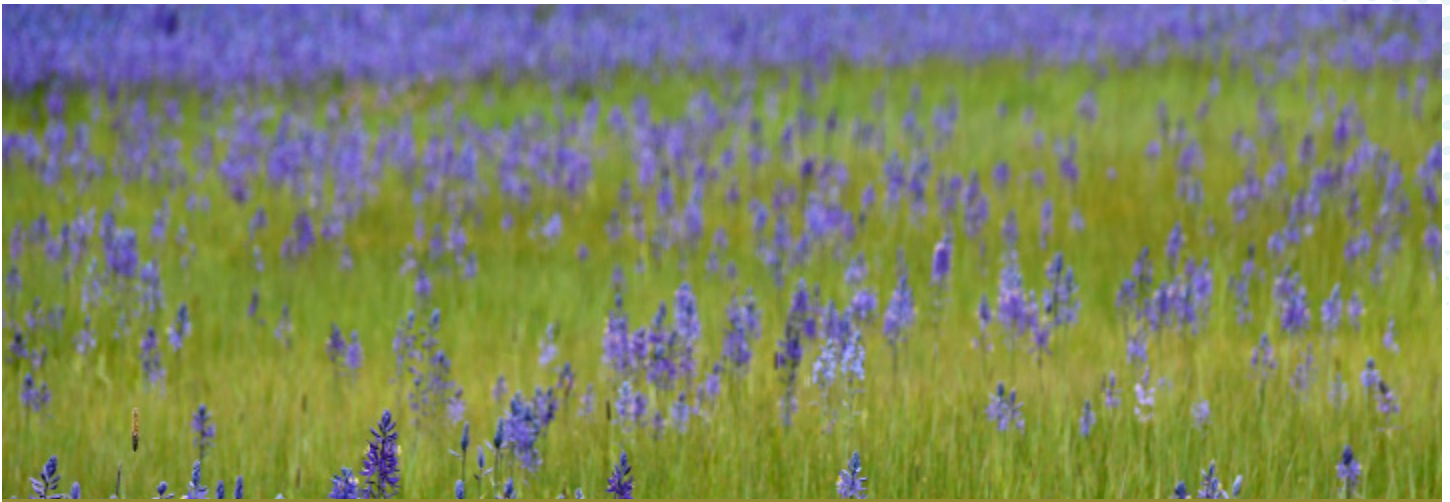


1. Cooked
2. Canned
3. Preserved, except for drying
4. Combined with other food products
5. Peeled, diced, cut, or blanched

A Produce Dealer License is required for any person who wholesales produce in the state, transports produce from out of state into this state for retail sales, or retails produce grown by the produce dealer in this state when gross annual retail sales exceed \$25,000. For more information visit the Montana Department of Agriculture's Produce site.

The [Local Produce Procurement Checklist](#) serves to guide your procurement conversations with local farmers and food producers and provides a formal mechanism for tracking local produce purchases. It is recommended, but not required, that you complete this checklist for each farmer from whom you purchase produce and keep a copy of this checklist within your records as part of your food safety plan documentation.

Some farmers may be [GAP Certified](#). GAP stands for Good Agricultural Practices and is a certification program that many farms that sell to larger food distributors participate in. GAP is not required by law for farms to sell their products to schools. However, if a farm you are purchasing product from is GAP Certified, you probably do not need to fill out your own food safety checklist. Many small farmers may not be GAP Certified—audits are expensive and there is no federal or state GAP mandate for small farmers—but they may have an on-farm food safety plan. Ask your farmer vendors if they have implemented a GAP or on-farm food safety plan, and if so for a copy. If they don't have a written plan, you may request they develop one, but give them several weeks to complete it. [Montana Food and Agriculture Development Centers](#) provide training on food safety and GAPs.



### Processed produce and other food items

Processed items (including minimally processed such as sliced, chopped or peeled) must follow food safety and licensure requirements established by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and the local Board of Health. Sanitarians do not establish requirements, they only enforce them. The basic question to ask if you are purchasing any processed products is, “Are you a licensed food manufacturer through Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services?”

### Grains and Pulse Crops

Grade B or better eggs are required to be used in food service establishments, including school food service programs. Fresh shell eggs (Grade B or better) may be purchased from local farmers if the farmer holds an Egg Grader License from the Montana Department of Livestock.

1. Cooked
2. Canned
3. Preserved, except for drying
4. Combined with other food products
5. Peeled, diced, cut, or blanched

A **Commodity Dealers License** is required if a person engages in a business involving or, as part of the business, participates in buying, exchanging, negotiating, or soliciting the sale, resale, exchange, bailment, or transfer of any agricultural commodity in the state of Montana valuing \$30,000 annually. While this probably does not apply to most farm to school transactions, [learn more here](#).

## NATIVE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS AND PROCESSORS

According to USDA’s 2012 Census of Agriculture, there are more than 46,000 American Indian or Alaska Native farms and more than 2,000 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander farms in operation in the United States. When CNP operators purchase traditional foods from these farms, everyone wins. Kids have an opportunity to eat nutritious, local, traditional foods, while producers get an economic boost, and tribal communities enjoy more food sovereignty.

The number of Native producers and food processors is growing constantly. This toolkit will be updated as new suppliers reach the capacity to provide bulk products for school lunch programs.

Several organizations are working on expanding and sustaining farm to school in Native communities across the country and assisting Native agriculture and food producers to become better able to produce at a commercial scale in order to have enough volume to supply schools and other institutions with bulk products. These groups include the [First Nations Development Institute \(FNDI\)](#) through their Native Farm to School project, and the [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#), through their American Indian Foods program.

### **Intertribal Buffalo Council**

For nearly 30 years, the Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) has worked to restore buffalo to Tribal lands in an environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate way. Their membership has grown to 69 Native Nations who have restored more than 20,000 buffalo to their lands. Many of ITBC's member Tribes offer buffalo meat and products for sale. The list of resources for buffalo meat continues to grow, so check back often for updates.

### **Blackfeet Nation Buffalo Program**

The Blackfeet Nation, in conjunction with their business operation, Siyeh Corporation, manage a bison herd of over 800 animals. Their work includes bison restoration, wildlife habitat conservation, food sovereignty, ecotourism, cultural revitalization, and more. Contact the programs at 406-338-7521.

Animals from the Blackfeet herd are currently being processed at Superior Meats in Superior, Montana while the tribe explores options for their own processing facility.

### **Native Fish Keepers**

Owned and operated by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Native Fish Keepers Inc offers the highest quality lake trout and whitefish filets. The fish are harvested from the cold, clear waters of Flathead Lake as a means to protect native cutthroat and bull trout from predation. Purchase of their products support ongoing native trout conservation.

### **Red Lake Nation Foods**

Located on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota, Red Lake Nation Foods produces unique specialty products which represent their cultural heritage for the benefit of over 10,000 members of the Red Lake Nation. These products include wild rice and wild rice blends, maple syrup, and jams and syrups made with wild harvested berries.

### **Lakota Foods**

Nestled on the fertile banks of the Missouri River in Lower Brule Country, Lakota Foods grows and processes non-GMO popcorn. The Lakota people invite you to experience a richly unique taste and flavor of popcorn. This delicacy is descended from the very corn grown and popped around Tribal campfires for generations.

### **Ramona Farms**

Ramona's American Indian Foods, LLC is a Akimel O'Odham-owned business in Sacaton, Arizona. They specialize in cultivating drought-resistant tepary beans and heritage corn products.

## MAKING TRADITIONAL FOODS AFFORDABLE

Due to systemic challenges in the food system, it can sometimes be challenging to source high-quality foods at an affordable price. However, there are several creative ways to make foods affordable to your school.

### Incorporate Donated Wild Game Meat

While Montana requires that Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) purchase meat processed from a state-inspected or USDA-inspected facility, Section 4033 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) allows for the use of donated traditional Indigenous foods, including wild game, at public and nonprofit facilities that primarily serve Native Americans. As allowed by this provision, wild game may be donated and served in CNPs. Let students and their parents know that your school accepts legally harvested wild game for school lunches. Not only does it allow hunters (sometimes students themselves), to positively contribute to the nutrition program, but it reduces one of the highest priced ingredients in most menus to zero.



The Farm Bill provision requires that program operators that choose to accept the donation of traditional food must: ensure that the food is received whole, gutted, gilled, as quarters, or as a roast, without further processing;

- ensure that the food is received whole, gutted, gilled, as quarters, or as a roast, without further processing;
- make a reasonable determination that
  - the animal was not diseased;
  - the food was appropriately butchered, dressed, transported, and stored to prevent contamination, undesirable microbial growth, or deterioration; and
  - the food will not cause a significant health hazard or potential for human illness;
- carry out any further preparation or processing of the food at a different time or in a different space from the preparation or processing of other food for the applicable program to prevent cross-contamination;
- clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces of equipment and utensils after processing the traditional food;
- label donated traditional food with the name of the food;
- store the traditional food separately from other food for the applicable program, including through storage in a separate freezer or refrigerator or in a separate compartment or shelf in the freezer or refrigerator;
- follow federal, state, local, county, Tribal, or other non-Federal law regarding the safe preparation and service of food in public or nonprofit facilities; and
- follow other such criteria as established by the Secretary of Agriculture and Commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



## Integrate Commodity Programs with Local Foods

Commodity programs like [USDA Foods in Schools](#) and the [USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program](#) can save your district a lot on food costs. Many commodity items are already inherently Indigenous foods that you may not have realized. USDA Foods in Schools features blueberries, mixed berries, strawberries, beans, corn, peppers/onion strips, potatoes, salsa, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and tomato sauce, turkey, peanut butter, sunflower seed butter, pollock, and catfish, ALL of which can be counted as Indigenous foods. The DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program may have different foods available depending on the season but features avocados, corn, tomatoes, summer and winter squash, green peppers, cranberries, and cherries.

When possible, food service directors may choose to purchase partially from a local or Indigenous producer but save costs by mixing the product with a commodity. For example, sloppy joes may be prepared using a mixture of half ground beef from the USDA Foods in Schools program and half ground bison purchased from a local tribe.

## Cycle Menus

A cycle menu is a series of menus that repeat for a specific period of time (e.g., 4 weeks). Each day of the cycle is different. When the cycle ends, the menus repeat in the same daily order. Cycle menus save time, help manage inventory, and allow you to purchase and store repeat food items in bulk. An example of a cycle menu is provided on page \_\_\_.

### Additional Resources

[Farm-to-Cafeteria Initiatives: Connections with the Tribal Food Sovereignty Movement](#)

[Nourish Native Foods & Health Program Brochure](#)

[Native Food Systems Resource Center: Farm to School](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Traditional Foods Project](#)

[Farm to School: Our Work in Native Communities](#)

[Indigikitchen's Mountains to Oceans: Kids' Recipes from Native Land](#)

# EXPANDING TRADITIONAL FOODS IN THE CLASSROOM

In the 1972 Constitution (Article X, Section 1(2)) the State of Montana recognized the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and committed to provide education preserving the cultural integrity of each Montana tribe. Twenty-seven years later in 1999, the Legislature passed House Bill 528 into the law we now call Indian Education for All (MCA 20-1-501). In part, the law reads as follows.

“Every Montanan ... whether Indian or non-Indian, be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner... All school personnel should have an understanding and awareness of Indian tribes to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents. ... Every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes ... when providing instruction and implementing an educational goal.”

In 2005, the Legislature provided the first funding to support the efforts of Montana schools in fulfillment of this long-standing promise. Today, in schools and classrooms across the state, teachers, curriculum directors, administrators, and community members are working to implement both the letter and the spirit of Indian Education for All (IEFA).

While the Montana Office of Public Instruction offers a variety of resources for educators on their [website](#), it is also possible to create lesson plans in the classroom featuring Native foods.

## IDEAS FOR INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS FOOD LESSONS INTO SCHOOL SUBJECTS

Due to systemic challenges in the food system, it can sometimes be challenging to source high-quality foods at an affordable price. However, there are several creative ways to make foods affordable to your school.

### 1. Science

- **Botany and Ethnobotany:** Teach students about native plants used by Indigenous peoples for food, medicine, and tools. Include hands-on activities like plant identification and seed saving.
- **Biology and Ecology:** Explore sustainable harvesting practices, food chains, and the ecological role of keystone species like bison in maintaining healthy ecosystems.
- **Chemistry:** Analyze the nutritional content of traditional foods, comparing them to processed alternatives, and discuss the chemical changes during cooking or fermentation.

### 2. Social Studies

- **History:** Discuss the impact of colonization on Indigenous food systems, including policies like the displacement of tribes and loss of access to traditional lands.
- **Cultural Studies:** Highlight the role of food in ceremonies and cultural identity, using case studies from different Indigenous nations.
- **Geography:** Map traditional food sources, trade routes, and how regional climates influenced Indigenous diets.

### 3. Language Arts

- **Literature and Storytelling:** Read and analyze traditional Indigenous stories that incorporate themes of food, land, and community.
- **Creative Writing:** Have students write reflective essays or short stories about their experiences with Indigenous foods or the importance of food sovereignty.
- **Vocabulary Building:** Teach Indigenous language terms for native plants, animals, and dishes, incorporating them into language learning exercises.

### 4. Math

- **Measurement and Ratios:** Use traditional recipes to teach fractions, ratios, and conversions between units.
- **Data Analysis:** Analyze data related to food sovereignty, such as changes in food access or nutritional outcomes in Indigenous communities over time.
- **Geometry:** Explore geometric patterns in traditional food storage and preparation methods, like basket weaving or the construction of drying racks.

### 5. Art

- **Visual Arts:** Create projects inspired by the aesthetics of traditional food preparation and presentation, such as pottery, basketry, or beadwork related to food gathering.
- **Photography:** Document food preparation, foraging, or gardening projects, creating a visual narrative of Indigenous food traditions.
- **Performance Arts:** Reenact traditional food ceremonies or create skits about the historical significance of specific foods.

### 6. Physical Education

- **Traditional Games and Activities:** Teach Indigenous games that emphasize endurance, strength, and coordination, which were traditionally linked to food gathering or preparation.
- **Outdoor Skills:** Include foraging, fishing, or hunting techniques as part of outdoor education, emphasizing respect for the environment and sustainable practices.

### 7. Health and Nutrition

- **Dietary Education:** Compare traditional Indigenous diets with modern diets, emphasizing the health benefits of whole, unprocessed foods.
- **Cooking Classes:** Teach students how to prepare traditional dishes, integrating lessons on food safety and preservation techniques like smoking or drying.
- **Mental and Emotional Wellness:** Explore the connection between traditional foods, land stewardship, and holistic wellness in Indigenous cultures.

### 8. Technology

- **Digital Storytelling:** Create videos or podcasts about the significance of Indigenous foods in different communities.
- **Data Visualization:** Use technology to chart the availability of traditional food sources or track the growth of community gardens.
- **Food Innovation:** Explore modern adaptations of traditional recipes using contemporary tools and techniques.

By incorporating Indigenous food lessons across subjects, schools can provide students with a richer, more interconnected understanding of history, science, and culture while promoting respect for Indigenous knowledge systems.

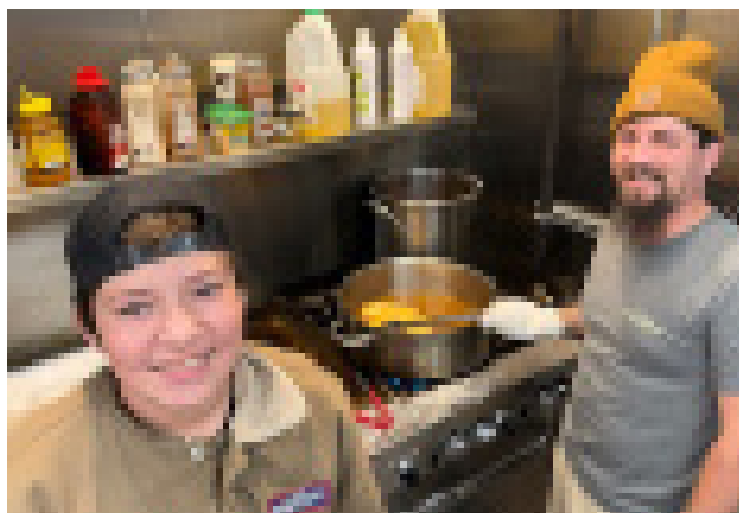
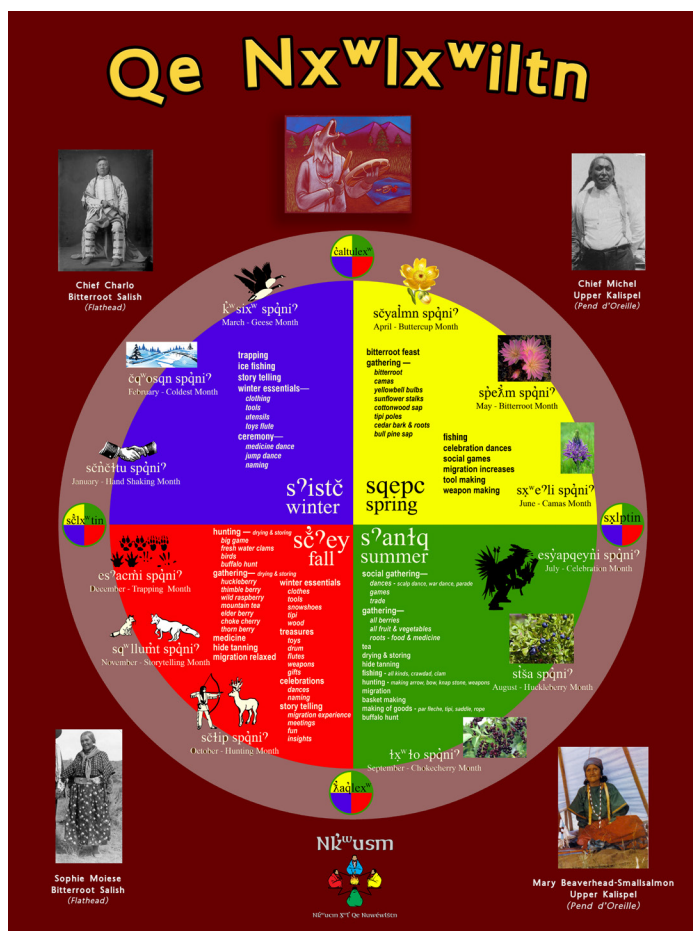
# MONTANA SCHOOLS

## NKWUSM SCHOOL: REVITALIZING NATIVE FOOD TRADITIONS IN EDUCATION

Nkwusm, a Salish language immersion school, integrates Indigenous food traditions into daily meals, education, and cultural experiences for its 60 students and staff. Led by dedicated staff like Frances Brown, who has been with the school for over 11 years, Nkwusm emphasizes the use of wild game (85-90%), incorporating bison, grouse, and other traditional foods into their meals. While some modern items like chicken nuggets appear on the menu, dishes such as bison sloppy joes, wild rice soup, and bison goulash with pan bread reflect a commitment to culturally significant foods.

The school goes beyond serving Indigenous foods—it actively involves students in hunting, butchering, and preparing meat, ensuring they understand the origins and significance of their meals. Students participate in foraging trips to gather seasonal roots and medicines, reinforcing a deep connection to the land. The seasonal round curriculum ties food traditions to hunting, storytelling, clothing, and traditional tools, providing a holistic learning experience.

Nkwusm also hosts overnight camps, where students help prepare meals, including cooking salmon over open fires and using fish for sustenance during trips. Elders, teachers, and food service staff collaborate closely, ensuring that food remains a living part of language and culture, not just sustenance. Through these practices, Nkwusm strengthens Salish traditions and empowers students to carry their ancestral knowledge forward.





## INDIGENOUS FOODS IN GREAT FALLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) actively integrates Native food knowledge into its curriculum, embodying the principles of Indian Education for All (IEFA). Leveraging the rich ethnobotanical diversity of their region, GFPS takes students on immersive nature walks to explore edible plants and their medicinal uses. These hands-on experiences help students connect with Indigenous food traditions and gain a deeper understanding of their historical significance.

One of GFPS's central educational goals is to teach students about the impact of colonization on Native food systems. Lessons on food sovereignty highlight how Federal Indian Policies disrupted the health and well-being of Native communities. By situating food within broader scientific, social, and historical contexts, GFPS emphasizes its interdisciplinary value beyond traditional culinary arts.



A standout aspect of GFPS's program is the bison harvest. This multifaceted activity combines biology, cultural heritage, and culinary education. Students not only witness the harvest process but also prepare and sample bison meat on-site. The remaining meat is brought back to the community, where students continue cooking and share it with families in need. These events foster a sense of community while deepening students' respect for traditional Indigenous practices.

Students especially enjoy sampling Native foods, which often introduce them to bold, unfamiliar flavors. Foraging activities further enhance their connection to the land, blending education with physical activity.

GFPS encourages other school districts to explore Native food lessons, emphasizing their cross-curricular potential. They advocate for creativity, suggesting substitutions like wild rice for white rice, and recommend Indigenous recipe books that enrich lessons with cultural backstories.



## FARM TO SCHOOL AND INDIGENOUS FOOD INTEGRATION AT HARDIN SCHOOLS

Hardin Public Schools, located just outside the Crow Reservation, have cultivated a strong Farm to School program that deeply connects students with their Apsáalooke (Crow) heritage. Under the leadership of Elle Ross, this program not only promotes health and sustainability but also honors the cultural and historical significance of Indigenous foodways.

Hardin Schools has prioritized the integration of Indigenous foods into the IEFA curriculum through their coordinator, Bianka RockAbove. The schools regularly works to bring students on bison harvests, including exercising treaty rights to hunt outside of Yellowstone National Park. Recently, the Hardin Academy students assisted with butchering a buffalo from the Crow tribal herd. Through Keianna Cachora, the Traditional and Nutritional Food Specialist, this meat was then used in their cooking classes, making bison kabobs, chokecherry sloppy joes and bison meatballs and spaghetti. The remainder of the meat was brought home by students, helping them share their culinary knowledge with their families.



Bison meat is also incorporated in the school meal program through the local state-inspected facility. Meals like bison mac and cheese are regularly featured on the menu. By pairing experiences in the classroom with the lunch program, the school provides students with nutritious, culturally relevant education while supporting local food sovereignty.

The school also emphasizes learning through gardening and foraging projects, constructing a greenhouse and garden full of traditional foods like chokecherries and juneberries. This farm will continue to grow, allowing new generations of students to tend to and learn from the land. These activities instill an appreciation for the land and its resources, reinforcing the Apsáalooke principle of living in harmony with nature.



Educational components of the program include lessons on the impact of colonization on Indigenous food systems and the importance of reclaiming traditional practices. Hardin schools integrate these teachings into science, social studies, and health curricula, helping students understand the vital role of food in Apsáalooke history, wellness, and cultural identity.

Hardin Schools are creating a model for cultural education and food sovereignty. The program empowers students to embrace their Apsáalooke identity while building a healthier and more sustainable future.

# COLLABORATING ON INDIGENOUS FOOD PROJECTS IN SCHOOLS: BRIDGING FOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION

Indigenous food projects in schools offer an incredible opportunity to integrate cultural education, promote health and wellness, and honor Indigenous traditions. Collaboration between food service professionals and teachers can create meaningful, interdisciplinary learning experiences for students. Here's how they can work together:

## 1. BUILDING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

To collaborate effectively, food service staff and teachers must share a foundational understanding of Indigenous food systems, cultural significance, and the goals of the project. Professional development sessions, workshops, or guest speakers from local Indigenous communities can help build this knowledge base.

- **Teachers** can learn about traditional Indigenous foods and their historical and cultural importance, incorporating these themes into lessons.
- **Food service staff** can explore how to source, prepare, and serve Indigenous foods while honoring their cultural roots.

## 2. INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS FOODS INTO SCHOOL MENUS

Food service professionals can partner with teachers to introduce Indigenous foods in school cafeterias. Teachers can support this effort by integrating lessons about these foods into classroom activities.

- **Menu Ideas:** Bison stew, wild rice pilaf, Three Sisters soup (corn, beans, and squash), or berry-based desserts.
- **Classroom Tie-Ins:** Teachers can incorporate lessons on agriculture, history, or science by exploring how these foods were traditionally grown, harvested, and prepared.

## 3. COORDINATING HANDS-ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Collaborating on hands-on projects allows students to engage with Indigenous food systems in practical ways. Teachers and food service staff can work together to create activities that combine cooking, gardening, and cultural education.

- **Cooking Classes:** Food service professionals can lead workshops where students prepare Indigenous recipes, while teachers provide historical or cultural context.
- **Gardening Projects:** Schools can establish Indigenous gardens featuring traditional crops like corn, beans, and squash. Teachers can incorporate lessons on sustainable agriculture and traditional ecological knowledge, while food service staff use the harvest in meals.

## 4. PARTNERING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Collaboration with Indigenous leaders and community members ensures authenticity and cultural sensitivity in food projects. Food service staff and teachers can invite Indigenous chefs, farmers, and storytellers to participate in events or lead activities.

- **Cultural Enrichment Days:** Host school-wide events featuring Indigenous foods, traditional music, and storytelling.
- **Guest Speakers:** Invite community members to share their knowledge about traditional food practices and their significance.

## 5. CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS FOOD CULTURE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Teachers can connect Indigenous food projects to various subjects:

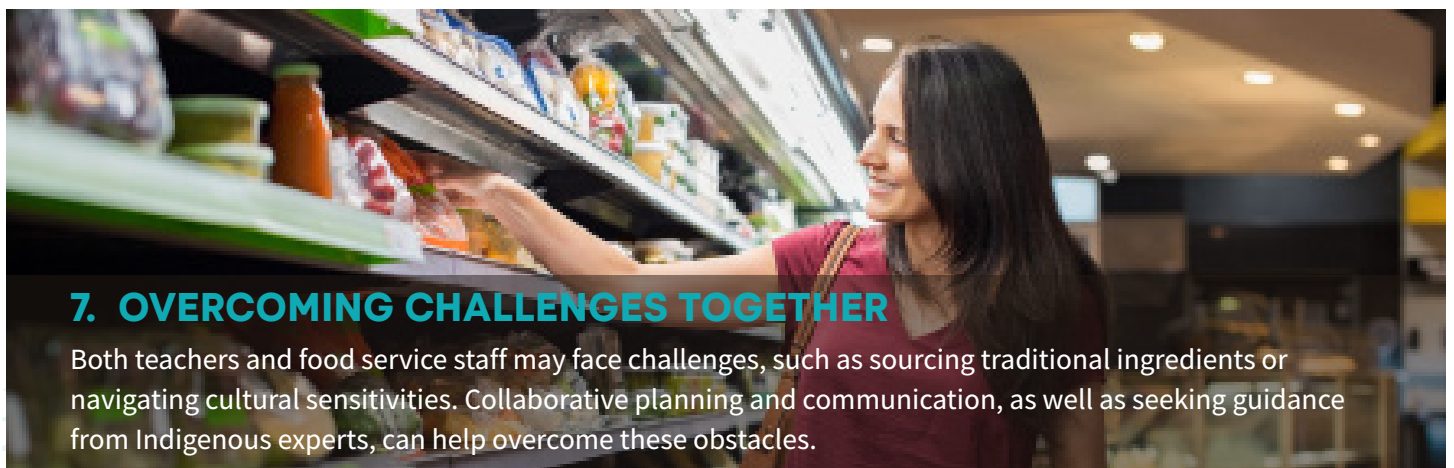
- **History:** Explore the role of Indigenous foods in the survival and culture of Native peoples.
- **Science:** Study the nutritional benefits of traditional foods or Indigenous agricultural methods.
- **Art:** Create artwork inspired by Indigenous food traditions or food preparation tools.
- **Language Arts:** Read stories or poetry about food and community from Indigenous authors.

Food service professionals can enhance these lessons by ensuring students have opportunities to taste the foods they are learning about, bringing the curriculum to life.

## 6. PROMOTING STUDENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Indigenous food projects can extend beyond the classroom and cafeteria to engage families and the broader community.

- **Family Nights:** Host evenings where students and families can sample Indigenous dishes and learn about their history.
- **Student-Led Projects:** Encourage students to share what they've learned by creating presentations, cookbooks, or videos highlighting Indigenous foods.




## 7. OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Both teachers and food service staff may face challenges, such as sourcing traditional ingredients or navigating cultural sensitivities. Collaborative planning and communication, as well as seeking guidance from Indigenous experts, can help overcome these obstacles.

# RECIPES

## BREAKFAST

### *Blue Corn Pancakes with Maple Syrup*

 **Servings:** 4 servings (2 pancakes per person)

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup blue cornmeal
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp honey or maple syrup
- 1 egg
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tbsp melted butter or oil

#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a bowl, mix the dry ingredients.
2. Whisk the wet ingredients and combine with the dry.
3. Heat a skillet and pour batter to make pancakes. Cook 2-3 minutes per side.
4. Serve with maple syrup and fresh berries.

### *Cornmeal Mush with Raspberry Sauce*

 **Servings:** 4

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup cornmeal
- 3 cups water
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ cup raspberries (or other berries)
- 1 tbsp honey

#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil water and salt, then whisk in cornmeal.
2. Cook, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes.
3. Mash raspberries and mix with honey for sauce.
4. Serve mush with berry sauce.

# Wild Rice Porridge with Cranberries

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup cooked wild rice
- 1 ½ cups milk (or plant-based milk)
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- 1 tbsp honey or maple syrup

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine ingredients in a saucepan over medium heat.
2. Stir and cook until creamy (about 10 minutes).
3. Serve warm.

# Pumpkin and Amaranth Muffins

 Servings: 6 muffins (1 per serving)

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup pumpkin puree
- ½ cup cooked amaranth
- 1 ½ cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ cup honey
- 1 egg
- ½ cup milk

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Mix dry ingredients. In a separate bowl, mix wet ingredients.
3. Combine and pour into muffin tins.
4. Bake for 20 minutes.

# Scrambled Eggs with Green Chiles

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 eggs
- 2 tbsp cold water
- ¼ cup chopped green chiles
- ¼ tsp salt

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk eggs, water, and salt.
2. Cook in a skillet over low heat, stirring occasionally.
3. Add green chiles and serve with whole wheat toast.



# Baked Sweet Potato and Apple Hash

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium sweet potatoes, diced
- 1 apple, diced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp salt

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Toss sweet potatoes and apples with olive oil, cinnamon, and salt.
3. Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 20-25 minutes.
4. Serve warm.

# Warm Millet Cereal with Maple Syrup

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup millet
- 3 cups water
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- ¼ cup mixed nuts or seeds

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse millet and cook in water over medium heat for 20 minutes.
2. Stir in maple syrup and top with nuts/seeds.

# Blue Corn Waffles with Berry Compote

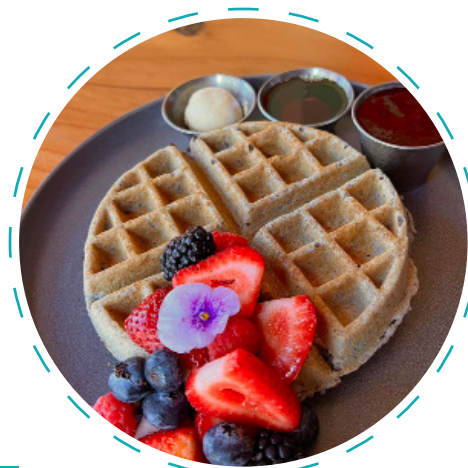
 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup blue cornmeal
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 egg
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 cup mixed berries

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix dry ingredients in a bowl.
2. Whisk wet ingredients and combine.
3. Pour batter into a waffle iron. Cook until golden brown.
4. Heat berries in a pan for 5 minutes to create a compote. Serve on waffles.



# Cranberry and Sunflower Seed Granola

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups rolled oats
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp oil

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 300°F.
2. Mix all ingredients and spread on a baking sheet.
3. Bake for 20 minutes, stirring halfway.
4. Serve with yogurt.

# Scrambled Eggs with Wild Herbs

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 eggs
- 2 tbsp cold water
- 1 tbsp chopped wild herbs  
(dandelion greens, sage,  
chives)
- ¼ tsp salt

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk eggs, water, and salt.
2. Cook in a skillet over low heat, stirring occasionally.
3. Stir in herbs before serving.

## Lunch

# Bison Meatballs with Tomato Sauce

 Servings: 6

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb ground bison
- ½ cup fine ground cornmeal
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 cups tomato sauce

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Mix bison, cornmeal, egg, garlic powder, and salt. Form into meatballs.
3. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 15-18 minutes.
4. Heat tomato sauce and serve over meatballs with roasted corn and whole grain bread.

## LUNCH

# Bison and Bean Chili

 Servings: 6

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb ground bison
- 1 can (15 oz) pinto beans, drained
- 1 can (15 oz) kidney beans, drained
- 1 can (28 oz) diced tomatoes
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp salt

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown bison in a large pot. Drain excess fat.
2. Add onions and garlic, cooking until softened.
3. Stir in beans, tomatoes, and spices. Simmer for 30 minutes.
4. Serve with roasted squash and whole grain rolls.

# Elk Stew with Root Vegetables

 Servings: 6

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb elk meat, cubed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 potato, diced
- 6 cups broth
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp thyme

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown elk meat in a large pot.
2. Add onions, carrots, potatoes, broth, and seasonings.
3. Simmer for 45-60 minutes.
4. Serve with whole grain rolls and roasted squash.



# Grilled Chicken with Wild Rice Pilaf

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 chicken breasts, sliced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup cooked wild rice
- ½ cup diced bell peppers
- ½ cup green beans

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grill chicken with olive oil and salt.
2. In a pan, sauté bell peppers and green beans.
3. Stir into wild rice and serve with chicken.

# Bison Burgers on Whole Wheat Buns

 Servings: 6

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb ground bison
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 6 whole wheat buns
- 1 cup shredded lettuce
- ½ cup sliced tomatoes

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Form bison into patties and season.
2. Grill for 4-5 minutes per side.
3. Serve on buns with lettuce and tomatoes, alongside roasted sweet potato wedges.

# Stuffed Bell Peppers with Quinoa, Beans, and Corn

 Servings: 6

## INGREDIENTS

- 3 large bell peppers, halved
- 1 cup cooked quinoa
- 1 cup black beans
- ½ cup cooked corn
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp cumin

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Mix quinoa, beans, corn, salt, and cumin.
3. Fill bell pepper halves with mixture and bake for 20 minutes.
4. Serve with steamed broccoli.

# Grilled Salmon with Wild Rice

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 salmon fillets
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 cups cooked wild rice
- 1 cup roasted Brussels sprouts

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat grill to medium heat. Brush salmon with oil, salt, and pepper.
2. Grill 4-5 minutes per side.
3. Serve with wild rice and Brussels sprouts.

# Turkey and Wild Rice Soup

 Servings: 6

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb cooked turkey, shredded
- 1 cup cooked wild rice
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp thyme



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a pot, sauté onion, carrots, and celery.
2. Add broth, turkey, wild rice, and seasonings.
3. Simmer for 20 minutes.
4. Serve with Three Sisters Salad.

# Baked Whitefish with Lemon

 Servings: 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 whitefish fillets
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 lemon, sliced
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Place fillets on a baking sheet, drizzle with oil, and season.
3. Top with lemon slices and bake for 15-20 minutes.
4. Serve with quinoa and roasted vegetables.



## Three Sisters Salad

 Servings: 6


### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup cooked corn
- 1 cup cooked black beans
- 1 cup roasted squash
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp lime juice
- Salt to taste

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix all ingredients and serve.

## Venison Tacos on Blue Corn Tortillas

 Servings: 6 (2 tacos per serving)

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb ground venison
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp cumin
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 8 blue corn tortillas
- 1 cup shredded cabbage
- ½ cup salsa

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook venison in a skillet with seasonings.
2. Warm tortillas and fill with venison, cabbage, and salsa.
3. Serve with pinto beans and mixed berries.

## Scrambled Eggs with Green Chiles

 Servings: 4


### INGREDIENTS

- 4 eggs
- 2 tbsp cold water
- ¼ cup chopped green chiles
- ¼ tsp salt

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk eggs, water, and salt.
2. Cook in a skillet over low heat, stirring occasionally.
3. Add green chiles and serve with whole wheat toast.

# Turkey Nuggets

 **Servings:** 5 (5 nuggets per kid)



## INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb turkey tenderloins or breasts
- 1 ½ cups blue cornmeal
- 1 tsp smoked salt
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 egg whisked
- 1/4 cup sunflower or other mild oil

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the turkey tenderloins into 1-2 inch bites sized pieces and set aside
2. In a shallow dish, combine the cornmeal, salt, smoked paprika, onion powder, and black pepper and mix well to combine the flavors
3. In another shallow dish, whisk the egg. Heat a large cast iron pan over medium heat and add the coconut oil or tallow.
4. Tip: drop a bit of cornmeal into the oil; if it sizzles, it's ready
5. Take the turkey and first coat in egg, then coat with cornmeal mixture shaking off extra. Immediately add to the hot pan. Be careful of hot oil!
6. Let the turkey cook about 3-6 minutes on each side, or until just cooked through. You will have to fry in 2 batches most likely. Adjust the heat to avoid burning the outside and add more cooking fat to the pan if you need to for the second batch.
7. Transfer to a paper towel lined dish to drain excess oil, then serve hot! Enjoy!

# Layered Enchilada Bake

 Servings: 9

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 + 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 medium onion, diced
- 1/2 cup mushroom, chopped
- 1 can (15 oz.) stewed OR diced tomatoes
- 1 can (15 oz.) kidney beans or black beans, drained OR 1 1/2 cups cooked beans
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 8 corn tortillas
- 1 cup Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
- Optional: 1/2 cup jalapeño, chopped
- Optional: Add cooked shredded chicken or ground meat into the filling

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 350°F.
2. Heat oil in frying pan on medium heat. Add onion, mushroom and green pepper. Cook 2-4 minutes or until tender.
3. Add tomatoes and spices and cook for 2 more minutes
4. Add beans. Stir to combine.
5. Tear tortillas into bite-size pieces.
6. Layer 1/2 tortillas, 1/2 filling and 1/2 cheese in 8-inch baking pan that has been coated with 1 Tbsp of olive oil. Repeat layers, ending with cheese.
7. Bake uncovered for 20 minutes

# Green Bean Bison Bowl

 Servings: 4




## INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. bison or other game meat, lean and cut into strips
- 2 cups fresh green beans, trimmed and halved
- 1 cup quinoa (or rice)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Lemon vinaigrette for dressing

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook quinoa or rice according to package instructions.
2. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat.
3. Add the bison strips and cook until browned, about 3-4 minutes per side. Remove the bison from the skillet and set aside.
4. In the same skillet, add the green beans and cook for 4-5 minutes until crispy-tender.
5. Sprinkle paprika, cumin, garlic powder, chili powder, salt, and pepper over the green beans, stirring to evenly coat.
6. Return the bison strips to the skillet with the green beans and cook for an additional 2-3 minutes to blend flavors.
7. To assemble, divide the cooked quinoa among four bowls.
8. Top each bowl with the bison and green bean mixture. Drizzle with lemon vinaigrette. Serve hot and enjoy!

# Zucchini Pizza Bites

 Servings: 5 (6 bites per serving)

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 large zucchini, cut into 1/4-inch thick rounds
- Salt and freshly cracked pepper
- 1/4 cup pizza sauce
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella
- 1/4 cup pepperoni pieces or cooked wild game sausage, optional
- Oregano or dried bee balm, for sprinkling

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Spray both sides of zucchini rounds brush lightly with avocado or olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Broil or grill the zucchini rounds (I used a grill pan set to medium-high) for 2 minutes on each side.
2. Place cooked zucchini rounds on a large lined baking sheet. Top with small amounts of sauce, cheese and pepperoni pieces, if desired. Broil for an additional 1-3 minutes, or until cheese is melted, careful not to burn. Sprinkle with Italian seasoning and serve warm.

# Pumpkin Lentil Stew

 Servings: 7

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium onion, minced
- 2 garlic cloves, pressed
- 1 inch piece ginger root, grated
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground cumin (adjust according to taste)
- 1 (13 oz) can full fat coconut milk
- 1 carton (32 oz) vegetable stock (or chicken broth)
- 3/4 cup lentils, washed and drained (split red lentils work best)
- 1 sweet potato, peeled and cut into chunks
- 1 (15 oz) can pumpkin puree

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make a thick paste by mashing ginger and garlic together using a pestle and mortar or a small bowl and the heel of a wooden spoon.
2. Heat olive oil over medium heat in a large saucepan, add the onion and saute until transparent.
3. Add the garlic ginger paste and saute another 2 minutes until fragrant; lower heat and stir constantly to avoid burning the paste.
4. Add the spices and saute for a minute more.
5. Stir in the milk, stock, lentils, sweet potato and pumpkin puree.
6. Simmer over medium - low heat for 40 - 50 minutes or until sweet potato is soft. Stir occasionally.