

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

November 8, 2004

CONTACTS:

Neva Hassanein 243-6271

Maxine Jacobson 243-6384

**UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY ALLIANCE CALLS ON
LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO PUT FOOD AND FARMING ON ITS AGENDA**

Comprehensive Study of Local Food System Released

A report released this week by a university-community collaboration, which has studied the Missoula County food system for the last two years, recommends that local government and non-profit groups organize a food policy coalition that addresses community needs related to food and agriculture in an integrated way.

Food Matters: Farm Viability and Food Consumption in Missoula County is the third and final report of the community food assessment. The project is a collaboration among a steering committee representing 15 local organizations and UM faculty and students in the Environmental Studies Program and the Department of Social Work. The public is invited to learn about the research results on **Wednesday, November 10, from 7-8:30 pm, at the UM University Center, Room 330**. A brief presentation will be followed by discussion about next steps. Posters summarizing the findings will be displayed, and they will be exhibited around the County in coming months.

“The questions we asked were pretty simple. What will it take to keep farms and ranches viable in Missoula County? And, what concerns do area residents have about food?” explained Neva Hassanein, a faculty member in environmental studies and co-facilitator of the project.

“We really tried to hear what is on the minds of farmers and consumers in Missoula County,” added Maxine Jacobson, a professor of Social Work who also facilitated the project. “Over 700 residents participated in interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Some 50 students, both graduate and undergraduate, gathered the data under faculty supervision.”

“Basically, we found that we are losing our working farms, and the vast majority of farmers and ranchers surveyed think agriculture is ‘struggling’ here,” said Jacobson. “At the other end of the food chain, consumers are very worried about the safety of the food supply, as well as the price of food. What is interesting is that both farmers and consumers share the goal of more local food. But a major challenge will be to come up with strategies that meet the economic needs of both of these groups.”

Developing a strong community-based food system should be the aim of a new food policy coalition, according to the report. “A number of other cities, counties and state governments have established food policy councils or coalitions to develop solutions to local food system problems,” Hassanein said.

“It’s time we faced up to some of the issues around loss of working farms and food insecurity here in Missoula County,” she added. “Right now, no entity takes an integrated approach to developing community food solutions. We need to get everyone interested in food and farming to come up with creative ideas and work with local government to put those in place. We need to shine a spotlight on building a strong community-based food system.”

The steering committee, which has guided the project since its inception, and the UM faculty and students generated the six major recommendations in the report. *Food Matters* and other parts of the food assessment are available at: www.umt.edu/cfa

###