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**MISSOULA COUNTY IS LOSING FERTILE GROUND –
LOCAL GROUP CALLS ON COMMUNITY TO TAKE ACTION**

In the last 25 years, Missoula County has lost 29,000 acres of working farm and ranchlands – along with the agricultural heritage and opportunity for regional self-reliance they support. A window remains, however, to create a legacy of thriving farms and ranches while keeping alive the chance for Missoulians to choose a diet of healthy, local food.

That’s the message of *Losing Ground: The Future of Farms and Food in Missoula County*, a report released today by the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition (CFAC) and co-authored by Paul Hubbard and Neva Hassanein.

As vegetable farmer, Josh Slotnick, said, “Missoula County has lost much of its fertile lands, but I believe that if we work together, we can create a vibrant future for local agriculture and a local economy.”

CFAC maintains that the time is right for the City and County of Missoula to prepare today for future population growth and the increasing demands on both houses and food. Don MacArthur of MMW Architects said, “The question is not ‘to build or not to build houses?’ The question is where are we going to put houses so that we maintain a great quality of life.” MacArthur added that the best farmlands are rapidly disappearing due to a pattern of poorly managed development that undermines the integrity of working farms and ranches.

Jason Wiener of Missoula’s City Council agreed. “Council and the County Commissioners are required to evaluate and mitigate impacts to agriculture when reviewing subdivisions and have been taking on that task piecemeal in the context of individual land-use decisions. To take the issue seriously – and deliver predictability for developers, planners and elected officials – we need a coherent policy that protects irreplaceable resources and honors landowners’ equity. I’m grateful to CFAC for recommendations that do that.”

In addition to continuing CFAC’s current work helping beginning farmers get started and expanding Missoula’s market capacity for local food, *Losing Ground* recommends establishing Agricultural Cornerstones in Missoula County’s Growth Policy and including Agricultural Resource Standards in local zoning codes and subdivision regulations. Agricultural Cornerstones would identify areas where it makes the most sense to protect and promote agriculture based on existing resources and economic activity. Resource standards would provide standard mitigation guidelines to restore predictability to development impacting important farm and ranchlands.

“I’m excited and optimistic about these recommendations,” reflected Slotnick, “because they speak to the common ground we all share and value about this magical place.”

To download the *Losing Ground* executive summary or full report, visit www.MissoulaCFAC.org.