

When Jessica Wilcox, MS, RD, LN, was hired to take over the food and nutrition services at Livingston HealthCare, she hit the kitchen like a hurricane. In just two years, she has completely turned the traditional model of hospital food around. “I knew from the start that I wanted to make healthy, fresh meals for our patients and staff,” she recalls. “And I wanted to use local and regional food, both for the freshness and to support local businesses.”

Little did Jessica know that she would find herself in the middle of food system change at the local and regional levels as well. It all started with a call to the Western Sustainability Exchange (formerly the Corporation for the Northern Rockies). They were able to provide her with a list of local and regional food producers and sign Livingston HealthCare up as the first hospital to participate in their Farm to Restaurant campaign.

Jessica’s changes were a breath of fresh air, bringing local produce, meats, and even flour, sugar, milk, and eggs into the kitchen. She set up a salad bar and began offering a wide range of foods made fresh from scratch. “We’re putting our emphasis on food that promotes healing,” says Jessica. “It also happens to taste good,” she adds, “and I think patients notice the difference.”



Taking the Montana Food System by Storm

A colleague of Jessica’s from the Montana Dietetic Association also noticed and encouraged her to apply for the Montana Food Systems Council. This group of 18 citizens is charged with the task of reorganizing the food system in Montana. “The state has been losing its agricultural market share, processing facilities, and jobs for some time, and we aren’t really food self-reliant anymore,” explains Jessica. “The Montana Food Systems Council is charged with looking for ways to change that.”

“Helping to change the local and state food system for the better has really become my passion,” she adds. “In this group, I represent not only institutional food service, but also the local, sustainable food model in institutional food service.”

Jessica is also involved in many local efforts at food system change. She is a member of the Steering Committee of the Park County Food Assessment, serves on the Board of the Livingston Food Pantry, is a member of Eat Right Montana, and teaches at Montana State University, Bozeman.

Her passion and experience are part of the reason she was also asked to present at the Montana Hospital Association (MHA) annual conference this year. “I would love to see other hospitals across the state do what we are doing at Livingston

HealthCare, and I want to be a resource for them,” says Jessica. “This is why I agreed to do a presentation to my peers at the MHA conference. I want to show them that it’s worthwhile to make these changes because even if you start small, you can have a big impact on your local community.”



Care Closer to Home

Did you know that Livingston HealthCare has outreach clinics in Gardiner, White Sulphur Springs, Big Timber, and Bozeman? You may be able to access orthopedic, OB/Gyn, pediatric, and physical therapy services closer to home. Find out more at www.livingstonhealthcare.org.