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Fat Toads Farm Pantry

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Carly Brief welcomes vendors into Fat Toads Farm Pantry, a new farm stop grocery store in Bozeman's northeast neighborhood. Here, she sells an array of Montana products, including eggs from Chaos Farms, located in Whitehall, and flowers grown by a variety of vendors including Bozeman's Kokoro Farm.

Montana's First Grocery Farm Stop is an Avenue for Supporting Montana Producers

Walking into Fat Toads Farm Pantry feels like stepping into a 1970s neighborhood corner store. The shelves are packed with artisan cheeses, freshly baked bread, seasonal vegetables, and an assortment of Montana- raised meats. Sunlight streams through the east-side windows, highlighting colorful flower bouquets. Sitting behind the register is Carly Brief, local resident and store owner. She can often be found talking with customers about the farmers she sources products from, chatting with vendors, or taking a few quiet minutes to work on her latest knitting project.

While Fat Toads Farm Pantry is new to Bozeman, Brief has worked in the food system for over a decade. In 2020, she moved to the area and took a job at Gallatin Valley Botanical, a diversified farm in the Gallatin Valley that raises animals and grows a wide array of vegetables. She began working in the fields on their vegetable crew and quickly transitioned into a managerial role.

That winter, she ran the Bozeman Winter Farmers' Market, a position she held for three years that allowed her to build strong connections with local producers. During her time as market manager, she recognized both the demand for local food and issues with the current market structure, including increasing rental prices.

Brief went on to work at a local food wholesaler, where she identified barriers to local food purchasing for restaurants and chefs. After 12 years working throughout the food supply chain, she was ready to address these challenges and launch her own venture.

Brief opened Fat Toads Farm Pantry at 521 E. Peach St., Ste. C, north of downtown, in February 2026, offering the Bozeman community a permanent farmers market option.

She operates the store utilizing a farm stop model. Farm stops are retail outlets that sell food on consignment from local producers. This structure allows producers to set their own prices and easily adjust pricing. Farmers drop off their products at the store, and store staff handles merchandising, inventory, sales, and marketing.

For each item sold, farmers receive a return of 70 cents to the dollar, a marked improvement to the 16-cent return farmers receive on average for their produce, according to the National Farmers Union. Brief says that she aims to create alternative outlets for farmers to sell their goods year-round and she seeks to address the larger barriers farmers are struggling with in the grocery sector.



Selling products in traditional grocery stores, particularly chain stores, is increasingly difficult for small, local producers. Over the last two centuries, the grocery market has become progressively more consolidated, with five corporations now owning over 60 percent of the food retail market share, according to the analytical tool Grocery Gap Atlas. In a 2021 report by Food & Water Watch, Walmart alone was found to capture one out of every three grocery dollars spent in the country. Larger stores that used to pride themselves on supporting local farmers, such as Whole Foods, often change their food acquisition strategies when they are purchased by bigger corporations like Amazon. As dominant companies have bought out small retailers, trends show that food access has decreased in many areas of the country, with rural areas disproportionately affected.

In many cases, grocery stores, particularly large chains, are unwilling to purchase products from farmers unless they can guarantee consistently high volumes year-round. As a result, grocery stores may transition to purchasing produce from abroad. Often, it is difficult for domestic producers to compete on price point with foreign growers who may have different labor and food safety standards, lowering their overall cost of production.

Farmers are now relying more heavily on independent grocery stores and direct-to-consumer sales. However, even some independent grocery stores are struggling to purchase local goods due to limitations from broadline distributors. Broadliners, such as Sysco and C&S Wholesale Grocers, are largescale food service suppliers that carry a full array of products, from frozen goods to fresh produce.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, purchases made through broadliners account for approximately half of U.S. food service distribution sales, though the exact percentage is unknown. These distributors will often offer independent grocery stores less favorable pricing than their larger counterparts and may require that grocery stores purchase at least 70 percent of their total inventory exclusively from them. This leaves grocery outlets with a much smaller percentage of goods that can potentially be purchased from local producers.

The broadlining industry is also becoming increasingly consolidated, with Sysco holding around 20 percent of the overall delivery market and completing at least 27 different acquisitions since 2009, as reported in an April 17, 2026, article in Restaurant Business. This decrease in competition has led to a decrease in negotiation power for grocery outlets.

Buying food directly from producers at farmers markets is a workaround that helps increase profit margins for farmers and ranchers. However, this style of food outlet comes with its own set of challenges. Markets are often seasonal and only open for a day or two each week. During long Montana winters, it can be difficult for farmers to safely commute to markets. Brief experienced these impacts first-hand during her time as a market manager and describes how “these disturbances would really be detrimental to a farmer’s income. If they had a slow week at the market, it could severely impact their profits.” Opening a brick-and-mortar location where farmers can deliver produce on their own schedule is one way Brief is addressing these issues.

Prior to opening the store, Brief spent time connecting with farmers, which helped inform the store’s design and layout. Many farmers were unfamiliar with the farm stop sales model. Brief says it took a lot of personal conversations over the phone or meeting in person.

“I really had to explain [the farm stop model] and show the proof of concept.” Everything sold in Fat Toads Farm Pantry is grown, raised, or processed in Montana. Brief is already selling products from 45 vendors and hopes to increase this number as the store expands.

The store has received an outpouring of support from both producers and consumers, with Brief returning \$20,000 back to Montana producers in her first month. Many of the customers are health-conscious eaters looking for pesticide-free products with simple ingredient lists. They appreciate the level of transparency Brief provides about the products in her store, including where the food is grown and the production practices used for cultivation.

The store works with the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps), making local food more accessible for everyone. Brief plans to host community events in the shared building space and dreams of opening a second location that incorporates affordable commercial kitchen space for food processors.

While Brief’s store is the first grocery outlet in the state operating as a farm stop, the model has proven successful in other communities around the country. According to a 2025 article published in the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, as of 2025, there are at least 19 farm



stops operating in 13 states across the country. Argus Farm Stop is a well-regarded outlet located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that has returned over \$30 million statewide to food producers since opening in 2014. Staff at Argus provided Brief with guidance as she worked on the logistics of opening her store. Brief is now working with other start-up farm stops in the state, such as Helena Farm Stop, to share resources like insurance options and navigating liability concerns.

To address local food access issues, changes must occur throughout the supply chain. These will involve implementing more aggressive antitrust regulations, creating funding opportunities to support food processing infrastructure, increasing food distribution options, and thinking up creative alternatives to the modern grocery store model. Fat Toads Farm Pantry is offering consumers a way to more directly support farmers in their state and community while providing an alternative for those who want to more consciously engage with grocery purchasing.

Fat Toads Farm Pantry is open every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Visit fattoadsfarmpantry.com (<http://fattoadsfarmpantry.com>) to learn more.

Ali Moxley has her master's degree in Sustainable Food Systems. She is a part-time farmer, part-time journalist, and runs A.Moxley Consulting, a company that assists food and agriculture businesses with applying for grant funding.

Photography By Paige Southwood. Paige Southwood works at Rathvinden and is a Bozeman-based journalist who photographs and writes about women in the Mountain West. Her work has spanned several continents, but she's proud to call Montana home.

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