Welcome to Beaverhead County

Beaverhead County is the largest county in Montana with an area of 5,571 square miles encompassing 3.56 million acres of land, with approximately 69% under public ownership. Beaverhead County’s economy is driven by agriculture, tourism, and recreation. The county is number one in cattle production and perennial and annual forage production. MSU Extension is funded by a three-way partnership between Beaverhead County, Montana State University, and the United States Department of Agriculture. Beaverhead County 4-H has 230 members involved in 10 4-H Clubs. Members explore interests, participate in educational programming and build positive relationships with interested adults. Beaverhead County 4-H has 82 volunteer adult and youth leaders. 4-H empowers youth to take on leadership roles, speak in front of a group, run a public meeting, and engage in community service and service learning.

Adding value for agricultural producers in Beaverhead County:
The MSU Extension agent worked with a new cattle producer on a synchronization program of their calf crop to help realize $6,000 savings in bull costs. Cattle calved in a 56-day window, and synchronized calves sold a month early with 75 additional pounds of weight. A calf crop of similar age and weight can provide feeding, management and market advantages.
Mental Health First Aid program

In 2016, Montana led the nation in suicides per capita and has been ranked in the top five states for the past 30 years, with over twice the national average for the past decade. Beaverhead County, with neighboring counties Madison, Butte-Silver Bow, and Deer Lodge rank in the top 10 counties for suicides per capita. Suicide is the number one preventable cause of death in Montana children ages 10-14, and the number two cause of death in children ages 11-14, youth aged 15-24, and in young adults aged 25-44. Montana's highest rate occurs in our Native American population and adults ages 45-64. Montana veterans have a suicide rate that is three times the national average. Montana recorded 518 suicides in the past two years, with 61 confirmed deaths during the first quarter of 2016. Over 90% of suicides in the state of Montana have been linked to mental illness. Major depression is at the top of the list; depression is treatable, and manifests itself in recognizable symptoms. In rural Montana, where healthcare services are scarce, mental health literacy is critical as family members and friends may be the first to identify changes in a loved one needing professional services.

In January 2017, Jackie Sutton became a certified MHFA instructor, she has co-taught 5 courses statewide with 117 participants, across four counties, and two of these courses were taught in Beaverhead County, reaching 68 participants. Participants in Beaverhead County scored an average of 68% on pre-class evaluations and improved to 99.8% in the post-class evaluation quiz. Sanders County participants scored a 65% pre-class and 100% post class, and Powder River County started at 62% and ended at 100%. One participant from the May class in Beaverhead County called in to report that she had been able to help a young adult seek immediate professional help a few days after completing class. She stated “Without the additional background this class provided me to help, I believe this young lady may have attempted suicide. You gave me tools to recognize and intervene on her behalf.” She went on to state that she was able to help get some additional counseling for the young woman’s boyfriend and younger sister. Participants trained in Mental Health First Aid have greater confidence in providing help to others and directing them to appropriate professional help. Ultimately anyone can make a difference in the life of someone with a mental health or substance use challenge, if they know what to say and what to do. Mental Health First Aid helps participants communicate with people in need, and provides direct mental health support in our communities.
Carcass Quality Improvement

In an effort to improve carcass quality and literacy in Beaverhead County youth livestock exhibitors and their parents, MSU Extension agent Jackie Sutton hosted a series of carcass quality workshops. Sutton visited each 4-H club and presented an educational program outlining animal selection, housing requirements, proper worming, vaccination, and antibiotic administration, feed quality considerations, and carcass quality. The carcass evaluation criteria were explored and members and parents participated in a hands-on demonstration measuring loin eye area, back fat measurements, and evaluating internal marbling. Beef, pork, and lamb ribeye and loin eye steaks were evaluated. Members learned to measure area with standard grids, to measure back fat and to evaluate color and marbling against standardized color guides. The class was presented 11 times to 168 4-H members and 69 adult participants. One parent stated, “I wish I would have had this information before we purchased our hogs, we would have gone a different direction.” Another 4-H family came into the office a week later to discuss proper nutrition strategies for their market hogs. Upon review of their previous three year’s carcass data they had discovered their animals had historically put down excessive back fat. “We know now that we were wasting money by feeding too much feed to our hogs in the pursuit of heavier weights rather than watching the hog’s frame size and finish.” Beaverhead County 4-H members raised 78 hogs, 40 steers, and 30 lambs. Beaverhead County 4-H members have captured the top steer carcass statewide for four of the past five years with steers bred and raised in Beaverhead county. In 2017, a first year hog member fed the second place lightweight hog carcass statewide. The overall quality of our carcasses over the past three years is starting to slowly improve.

Beaverhead county 4-H leaders have identified carcass quality to be an area of concern within our market livestock programming. We will continue to explore options to create educational opportunities to improve the quality of the product we offer our livestock buyers.
MSU Extension adds value for agricultural producers

Beaverhead County MSU Extension agent Jackie Sutton helped producers get back to basics. In prevailing drought conditions and dropping commodity prices, producers worked to manage available resources and optimize returns. Nitrate testing, value added annual and perennial forage, range condition monitoring and management, and artificial insemination and synchronization were topics of interest to producers.

- MSU Extension in Beaverhead County consulted with 25 producers, in 14 on-site visits and 48 in-office nitrate tests, including both quick tests and expanded nitrate strip testing. Pre-harvest nitrate testing and management gave 87% of these producers the information they needed to successfully harvest their annual forages with little risk to their cattle. Working more extensively with the remaining 13% of these producers with pre-harvest management and post-harvest testing, safe feeding and grazing plans were formulated. Just under 30,000 acres of barley, oat, and triticale hay and aftermath grazing was tested for Beaverhead county hay and cattle producers.

- Forage production in pastures, hayfields and on native range ground is an important piece to the economic puzzle for Beaverhead County. MSU Extension in conjunction with the MSU Cropland Entomology department monitored six fields of alfalfa for alfalfa weevil infestations, growth stages of the larva, and economic thresholds for control measures. This study positively impacted one producer by adding up to an additional ton per acre to his alfalfa crop, and benefitted a second producer in making economic decisions to control weevil annually to prevent the overwintering of the adult pest. Knowledge gained of the weevil’s life cycle in Beaverhead County will benefit all producers seeking to control weevil in the future.
• Weed management and control positively impacts all crop and native forage production.
  Sutton trained 102 participants in sprayer calibration in 2017. Private applicators had four separate occasions to gather required recertification credits. Beaverhead County MSU Extension also co-sponsored a MWCA grant workshop and rangeland improvement class focusing on cheat grass control for 30 participants. Thirteen new private applicators were tested and licensed in Madison and Beaverhead County in 2017. Beaverhead County producers certified 450 acres of weed-free forage, producing 1,350 ton of value-added forage.

• A new producer sought help in adding value to their calf crop through the use of artificial insemination and estrus synchronization. Sutton helped develop a synchronization program and helped AI the cattle. The producer realized a $6,000 savings in bull costs, sold a very even group of synchronized calves a month early, with 75 additional pounds of weight. The cattle calved in a 56-day window and bred back at 97% within the first two heat cycles.

**Exceptional Kids Helping**

Beaverhead county 4-H members Kassidy and Shaylee Broere, in partnership with Gavin, Zane and Scarlett Garrison, planned and hosted the first annual Exceptional Kids Rodeo in Dillon in August. Exceptional rodeos are designed for children and young adults with special needs. It patterns safe, friendly, fun competitions after real rodeo events the kids are familiar with. The six exceptional contestants in Dillon participated in dummy roping, barrel racing, goat feeding, goat tail untwining, pony tail braiding, and horse branding with painted hand prints. They also created custom artwork to thank rodeo sponsors. Kassidy got the idea to host an Exceptional Rodeo while competing in Tennessee at the National Junior High Finals Rodeo in June. Realizing our area did not have anything similar to offer special needs youth, she decided to start a similar event in Beaverhead County. Kassidy and her sister recruited their 4-H club, the Extension office, and the Garrison family to help. Kassidy stated “This gives them a rodeo that is all about them.”

“It’s really about us kids helping other kids have fun and introducing them to a sport we love.” The organizing “kids” gathered sponsors and were able to give each participant their own rope, and customized back number just like professional cowboys wear. Surveying the crowd, it was hard to tell whose smiles were bigger, the organizing 4-H members, the parents and adult audience, or the participating young people. Broere plans to make the Exceptional Rodeo an annual event and has already started gathering sponsors and ideas to include more kids in future events.

2017 Exceptional Rodeo Participants in Beaverhead County. Photos by Ruth Jackson
Food Safety Matters

The ServSafe program provides food safety education to foodservice managers. This training is now required for managers of all retail food establishments, private caterers, mobile food operators and temporary food permit holders by the State of Montana.

The Beaverhead County MSU Extension agent is certified to teach ServSafe Manager Certification courses and test participants, and to proctor tests online. Since becoming certified, she has certified 52 food managers with an average score of 82%. Giving the food industry leaders a local option to certify has decreased the financial burden this regulation has placed on their establishments and businesses.

In addition, the Beaverhead County MSU Extension office has purchased the equipment to test pressure gauges for home canning systems. Testing pressure gauges has opened doors to have food preservation safety discussions, resulting in the dissemination of educational materials to 12 households in the past year.