

Beaverhead County



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Fall in the Grasshopper by Jessica Murray.

Founded in 1865, Beaverhead County is Montana's largest county with an area of 5,571 square miles. Of the 3.566 million acres of land, 69% is publicly owned which contributes to the sparse population of the county. The population density in Beaverhead County is less than 1.7 people per square mile but has an average cattle population of 27.6 per square mile. The economy is driven largely by agriculture, mostly cattle and hay production but tourism and recreation also contribute. Beaverhead County ranks number one in beef cattle production and annual forage production.

Agriculture

As the largest annual forage producing county in the state, Beaverhead County farmers and ranchers must be cautious of high nitrate concentrations in their feed. Barley, oats, and triticale were the most common nitrate-accumulating small grains grown in the county. This year in Beaverhead County MSU Extension, 146 nitrate tests were conducted. Using the information from these tests, livestock producers were able to make decisions about the class of livestock and the ration to be fed. This year was especially important for producers to test for nitrates as the drought conditions heightened nitrate accumulations. The Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage (NWSFF)

program is vital to maintain the ecological integrity of our public lands. Eight returning growers and one new grower participated in the NWSFF program by having 446 acres of forage inspected.

With over 150,000 beef cattle and 15,000 sheep, animal agriculture is one of the largest economic drivers in Beaverhead County. The Southwest Montana Stockmen's Association (SWMSA) and Beaverhead County Livestock Protective Committee (LPC) partner with the Beaverhead County MSU Extension to provide resources for our ranchers. The LPC generates funds from local livestock producers to safeguard the animal agriculture industry in Beaverhead County. The SWMSA provides a forum for producers to come learn about legislation, rules, and regulations that will affect their operation. This association, of roughly 65 ranches and agricultural businesses, meets twice a year to discuss the latest ranching challenges and triumphs. This year, members of the association helped spearhead efforts to release the Hidden Pasture Wilderness Study area that lies in Beaverhead County. The Beaverhead County Wool Pool gathered wool for the first time in two years. Fifteen producers from Beaverhead County shipped 14,025 pounds of wool to Billings to be sold. Also this year, wool pool members got to visit with folks from the MSU Wool lab as

well as MSU Sheep Extension Specialist Brent Roeder. 4-H members interested in wool products showed up to help and learned how to test for microns and moisture in wool bales.

Beaverhead County 4-H

The Beaverhead County 4-H Program encompasses 190 youth in nine clubs. Youth ages 6-19 are given the opportunity to explore education and interests by participating in youth activities. Sixty adult volunteers help to deliver the program to the county's youth.

This year we worked to get more kids involved in 4-H workshops. MSU Extension hosted a camp workshop and a caramel roll workshop during the “off season” to keep the kids involved and introduce them to new hobbies. Ten participants learned how to make bread dough from scratch and turn it into a homemade pan of caramel rolls to share with their families. For our camp workshop, 10 participants learned how to make a fire starter using pinecones and wax to make a fire for s'mores. After fire starters, we learned to make buddy burner cookstoves and everyone cooked a couple pancakes on their new stove.

The 4-H program in the county works annually to involve youth in weed management by attending the Beaverhead County Weed Day. Each year, the 4-H members take a Saturday in July to remove noxious weeds from our county. Each member is given a colored tape to mark their bags of weeds pulled and at the end of the day the member with the most bags wins a prize. This year, members of the Beaverhead County Weed Department and 4-H decided to do a pull at the Blacktail Meadows and removed nearly 30 contractor bags of noxious weeds.

Market animals were a popular project again this year with 126 market projects and 17 breeding projects. Youth learn the responsibility of caring for an animal while also taking part in the farm to fork concept of the livestock industry. Beaverhead County held various species-specific livestock quality assurance programs this year to help members understand how to properly care for their animals. After a very successful livestock sale at fair, the carcass results proved participants in Beaverhead County Fair know how to feed animals. We had 26 participants receive Symbol of Excellence awards, six Steer of Merit awards, and 17 Certified Lamb awards.

Our building project numbers were up at fair this year as well. We had 4-Her's bring projects ranging from knot-tying and robotics to baking and poetry. Every year we hold a silent auction during the fair so building project members have the chance to make money on their projects. Most members put cakes, cookies, or handmade projects up for bid by the community. This year, 18 members made nearly \$600 on their projects. The various judges and sponsors commented on the high level of work displayed in the building projects.



Top: A 4-H Member Lending a Hand Testing Moisture in the Bales, by Shannon McWilliams; **Bottom:** Making Fire Starters at the 4-H Camp Workshop, by Shannon McWilliams

Beaverhead County Staff



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