

Blaine County



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Blaine County Sunset by Julianne Snedigar.

Blaine County is located in North Central Montana. The Missouri River is the southern boundary, and the Canadian border provides the northern boundary. Two small mountain ranges, the Bear Paw and Little Rockies, are located within the county. Blaine County encompasses 4,267 square miles or 2.713 million acres. Agriculture is the backbone of Blaine County, with cattle, sheep, wheat, and barley being the primary enterprises. An irrigated alfalfa/grass hay base located along the Milk River is enhanced by irrigation supplied by the Corps of Engineers St. Mary's diversion project. Population in Blaine County stands at just over 7,000 people according to the 2020 census. Tourism, along with hunting, contribute to the economy of Blaine County as well.

Blaine County MSU Extension serves the community through a variety of programming carried out by two full-time Extension Agents and a full-time administrative/ 4-H assistant. Programming is concentrated in the areas of 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture, Natural Resources, Family Consumer Sciences, and Community Development.

The MSU Extension program is supported through an annual county budget which includes a portion of the agent's salary along with Montana State University (USDA's) direct support of the agent's salary. MSU also supports the program

indirectly, and the county benefits with returned services for every dollar invested. This is truly a partnership between MSU, USDA, and Blaine County that provides citizens access to high quality education, and research-based knowledge from the state's land-grant university system.

Blaine County 4-H Gets Back to Work

Following the reduced activities and events of 2020, Blaine County 4-H members were ready to get back to work for the 2020-2021 4-H Year. Despite the pandemic, membership levels were sustained within the clubs of the county. Projects such as swine, horse, dog, rabbit, and visual arts continue to be the most enrolled-in projects. 4-H Cloverbud enrollment and monthly workshop attendance remained very strong. 4-H members were excited to be able to return to 4-H camp and attend 4-H project workshops. 4-H members worked hard completing community service projects such as installing automatic waterers in the swine barn, making snuffle mats for the local dog shelter, repairing and installing community Christmas decorations, and sending cards to nursing home residents. Blaine County 4-H ended the year with over 95% of members turning in record books on time.

Blaine County 4-H was also able to welcome back an alumni in a new role this year. Trent Noel began his position as the new MSU Extension Blaine County FCS & 4-H Extension Agent on March 15, 2021. He has hit the ground running in meeting with constituents, teaching 4-H workshops, and starting his Master's degree. Being raised in the area and participating in 4-H in his younger years has given him an advantage when developing 4-H programming. In Blaine County 4-H, Noel participated in a wide array of projects including everything from livestock to crocheting and knitting. His engineering degree and technology-focused background has also allowed him to bring knowledge to the woodworking, robotics, and welding projects. With a full staff in the office, MSU Extension Blaine County is excited to be working with 4-H leaders and parents to offer quality learning experiences for the youth of the county.

Blaine County Gets Strong

The Strong People Program made its return to Blaine County in 2021. MSU Extension Blaine County Agent Trent Noel facilitated the program for several individuals. Strong People is a weight training and physical fitness program specifically designed for senior individuals. Participants do various exercises such as bicep curls, overhead dumbbell presses, leg extensions, toe stands, and other simple strength exercises. At the end of every class session, participants listen to a peaceful meditation to wind down and cool down. The class was held in the Harlem community with two exercises per week over the course of 15 weeks. There were about 5-10 participants for each class session. In 2022, MSU Extension Blaine County plans to bring the Strong People program to the residents of Chinook as well.

Weathering the Drought in 2021

MSU Extension in Blaine County offered services to help producers navigate a very tough 2021. Drought conditions that began in 2020 continued and intensified in 2021. Blaine County is currently listed in the "Extreme Drought" category with a portion of the county in the "Exceptional Drought" range. Blaine County has received less than a quarter of normal precipitation for the year. The drought brought very poor range conditions, high nitrates in crops, and lack of irrigation and stockwater. Blue Green algae blooms in reservoirs and other water sources occurred throughout the county. What little forage was produced was hit hard with an infestation of grasshoppers. Grasshoppers decimated crop fields, range plants, gardens, and trees throughout the county. Hay and forage prices have soared to very high levels. Ag input costs have risen dramatically in the fall and look to continue to reach record levels in the spring of 2022. In addition, bovine

tuberculosis was discovered in a beef herd in Blaine County. MSU Extension agriculture agent Julianne Snedigar spent much of her time this year working with producers to help determine all available options. She has worked with over 200 producers to determine nitrate levels, develop rations, identify feed, forage, and crop alternatives, test water, and develop strategies to weather the drought. Extension publications and resources concerning mental health and agriculture-related stress were made available through the office, online, and in-person. Snedigar continues to provide workshops, distribute resources, and work with producers one-on-one to provide knowledge, research-based information, and help lessen the stress that producers are facing.

ReImagining Rural Barn Dance Unites Community

In 2020, members of the community took part in the ReImagining Rural presentations put on by MSU Extension Community Development and hosted locally by MSU Extension Blaine County. Following the three-part ReImagining Rural virtual presentations, Extension Agent Julianne Snedigar applied for and received a grant from the Montana Community Foundation to put on a community event. Along with community-minded volunteers Keri Hanson and Bonnie Weber, the small committee was able to plan and host an old-fashioned barn dance in August. The event was intended to be family friendly and introduce youth to a tradition of the past that has not been seen in recent years. Over 200 people attended the evening of music, food, and catching up with friends and family. Families who have lived in the area for many years greeted newcomers with open arms. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with everyone who attended requesting to know when next year's event will be. Others asked the committee to consider holding monthly events. The committee is currently working on new events for 2022. Everyone appreciated the ReImagining Rural program and the Montana Community Foundation's investment into our county. We look forward to bringing future events to the county that will allow folks to meet new people, connect, reminisce, and have fun!

Blaine County 4-H Horse Program Members Have a Great Year

Over a quarter of all the 4-H members enrolled in Blaine County were active in the 4-H horse project in the 2020-2021 4-H year. Throughout the winter, spring, and summer, horse project members worked on their skills and prepared for the 2021 Blaine County Fair. Beginning the first week of June and continuing until mid-August, every Wednesday evening,



Top Row: (left) 4-H member Saraya Jones, by Julianne Snedigar; **(right)** MSU Extension Blaine County Agent Trent Noel, by Trent Noel; **Center:** Blaine County 4-H horse project members practice showmanship following a riding workshop, by Julianne Snedigar; **Bottom Row: (left)** Friends and family enjoy music and fun, by Julianne Snedigar; **(right)** Extreme drought conditions coupled with high winds created dust bowl like conditions in Blaine County, by Julianne Snedigar

horse project members, parents, and volunteer leaders could be found at the fairgrounds. Rarely did anyone miss a practice where horsemanship and showmanship skills were learned and fine-tuned.

A small but mighty, group of 6 senior (ages 14+) 4-H members led the way and set a great example for a large, rambunctious group of over 20 junior 4-H members. A dedicated group of volunteer leaders gave willingly of their time every week to share knowledge with the youth. When fair came around, the youth gave both the horsemanship and showmanship judges a very difficult task of ranking their performance for the day. During the fair, youth entered over 30 different horse classes and accounted for over 180 entries into those classes! The judges all stated how prepared and knowledgeable the youth were. They were very impressed and gave very high compliments to the youth, parents, and leaders for the time and energy given to the project. The horse projects are among the most popular in the county, involve the most work, and have a positive impact on everyone involved. Enrollment in the 4-H horse projects for the upcoming 2021-2022 project year is already shaping up to be larger than the last two years. It looks to be another great year of 4-H horse projects.

Blaine County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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