

Judith Basin County

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Shooting Star with Square Butte in the background by Jerry Marquardt.

Judith Basin County is located in central Montana in a fertile basin between the Highwood, Big Snowy, and Little Belt mountains. The county population is 2,016 people. The principal communities are Stanford, Hobson and Geyser. Numerous other small communities make up the county.

Judith Basin County's economy is based on agriculture. The major components of this industry include livestock, small grains and forage production. The county ranks tenth in Montana for beef cattle population, tenth in winter wheat production, fifteenth in barley production, twenty-fourth for spring wheat production, fourth for alfalfa hay production, and twenty-first for other hay production. Timber and mining enterprises take place on a small scale.

The MSU Central Ag Research Center is located in the county. The Judith Basin 4-H programs consist of 90 youth members and 29 volunteer leaders in four organized clubs. The county offers a variety of recreational opportunities, which include hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, snowmobiling and skiing. A major ski area is about 45 minutes from Stanford. The Judith Basin was the home of the legendary western artist Charlie Russell. Many of his paintings were scenes captured by the artist between Lewistown and Great Falls.

Stanford and nearby Utica have several museums of interest. Recreation opportunities abound in the nearby Lewis and Clark National Forest, Judith River Wildlife Management Area and Ackley Lake State Park. The Judith River Wildlife Management Area, at the edge of the Little Belt Mountains is a good place to view large elk herds in late fall and winter. Raynesford is an agriculturally-rich area. The homesteading boom from 1908 to 1915 and the extension of the Great Northern Railroad played an important role in the development of this area. Moccasin also began as a homestead community. In 1908, the Montana State legislature created the Central Montana Agriculture Research Center, three miles west of Moccasin. The purpose of the center was to teach dry land farming techniques to the newly arrived homesteaders. Even after the homesteaders bust, the center went on to develop machinery and new crops, improving the area's wheat yields.

Drought Seminar

In October, after one of the hottest, driest summers on record, producers were looking for strategies to manage the extreme drought conditions Judith Basin County is in. Katie Hatlelid, MSU Extension Agent in Judith Basin County, organized a drought seminar featuring MSU Extension research specialists

Jeff Mosley, Hayes Goosey, and Megan Van Emon. Included topics for the seminar were Cattle Nutrition, Forage Quality & Management, and Grazing Management following Drought. The seminar topics were well received, and more than 40 producers and industry professionals attended. The feedback was very positive, and more seminars pertaining to drought management decisions and fire recovery and mitigation are being planned.

4-H Camps

Monday, June 28 saw the set up and final planning of the Multi County 4-H Junior Camp for 2021. The camp counselors, volunteers, and MSU Extension personnel met at Camp Rotary to put the finishing touches on the schedule and programming for the week. The counselors played ice breakers games and got to know each other before campers arrived.

With final preparations made, the campers arrived Tuesday afternoon and stayed through Friday morning. It was a hot, hot week, but campers and counselors were able to beat the heat with fun activities that included lots of water! It was great to be able to have camp in person and the campers were thrilled to be able to make new friends and see old ones again.

This year Judith Basin County MSU Extension and Fergus County MSU Extension also partnered to host a Tween camp for members in grades six, seven and eight. The camp was held outside of Lewistown, MT at Ruckman's cabin, and featured tours of the ghost towns of Kendall and Maiden, leadership activities and games, and a trip to Ruckman's pond for some much needed cooling off. The campers and chaperones were treated to homemade ice cream one evening and Aebleskivers (a Scandinavian sphere-shaped pancake) for breakfast one morning. All in all, it was a great three days of fun, learning, and new friendships.

Nitrate Tests for Judith Basin Producers

MSU Extension in Judith Basin County carried out 80+ Nitrate quick tests in 2021. Of those tests, there were several that prevented possible issues with livestock and were then sent to Ward Labs for further testing. Nitrates are tested in cereal grain forage that is intended to feed livestock because it can cause abortion or even death. Elevated nitrate levels are caused by stress the plant endures while growing, such as during the 2021 drought. Nitrate nitrogen is an important nutrient as it is converted to protein by the plant and then utilized by the livestock feeding on it. Protein is especially important to maintain condition through late gestation and lactation periods that usually fall during the coldest and snowiest parts of the winter.

This year the office tested everything from barley and oats to sunflowers and cornstalks. There are starting to be a lot of warm season forages grown in the area as part of cover





Previous Page: (top) 4-H Tween Campers, by Katie Hatlelid; **(bottom)** Cattle in a drought-affected pasture, by Katie Hatlelid;
This Page: Hay Barley Bales, by Katie Hatlelid

crop rotations. Sorghum-Sudan grass, millet, and other options are being used in these mixes to provide grazing opportunities in the late summer and fall to take the pressure off of native range pastures.

Natural Resources Day

Judith Basin County MSU Extension has partnered with the Judith Basin Conservation District and other local USDA entities for over 30 years to host the Natural Resources Day. The event provides hands-on activities to area fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. The day was centered on understanding and learning about the natural resources we live among in Judith Basin County. At the Judith Basin County fairgrounds in Stanford, MSU Extension Agent Katie Hatlelid focused her portion of the day on reading chemical labels, what they mean, why they are there, and how to handle them safely. A total of 120 youth and adults attended Hatlelid's workshop.

Judith Basin County Staff



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