

Liberty County



P.O. Box 607, Chester, MT 59522 | (406)-759-5625 | liberty@montana.edu | <https://liberty.msuextension.org/>



*Helping people be successful in their livelihoods, like this local grower, is what Liberty County MSU Extension does on an everyday basis.
Photo by Janice Hendrickson.*

Located in the heart of the Hi-Line region of north-central Montana, Liberty County covers 1,458 miles of prime agricultural land. Liberty County MSU Extension partners with organizations at the county and state level to help people learn and grow in the fields of agriculture, family and consumer science, 4-H and community development. Utilizing methods and resources through online and in-person learning, Liberty County MSU Extension has continued to focus on programs that impact the lives of residents. Teaching about mental health awareness in school, making sure county residents are aware of current agricultural issues and home gardening techniques, working with youth as they develop lifelong leadership and communication skills, and helping in community development projects, Liberty County MSU Extension's mission is about helping people and community.

Helping Agriculture Thrive in Difficult Times

Challenges related to drought encompassed farms and ranches in 2021. Throughout the year, growers in Liberty County have been able to attend programs and work with MSU Extension to help meet agricultural needs. In January,

13 local growers attended the multi-county Cropping Seminar, a series offered in nine different locations over five days. Offered remotely and in-person to help mitigate COVID-19, participants learned about grasshopper suppression, how to manage herbicide-resistant weeds and antagonistic effects of herbicides, all while managing lands in drought circumstances.

In June, a field day was offered in Liberty County for growers to learn more about existing and upcoming spring and durum wheat variety trials. This field day was part of a four-county tour focused on work being done by the Northern Agricultural Research Center and local growers. Fifteen participants from three different counties had the opportunity to network with each other and ask questions regarding farming practices and crop varieties to research and state agronomy specialists.

Due to the ongoing drought conditions, many cereal crops in Liberty County failed to mature and produce yields that would make them as profitable as under normal circumstances. With hay also in short supply, many traditional cereal crops were utilized for straw production to help offset lower revenue. Growers often brought cereal crop straw samples to MSU Extension to test for nitrate toxicity. Nitrate toxicities were confirmed using university quick tests. Those samples showing the presence of nitrates were recommended for further sampling and testing

or delayed cutting to allow nitrates to decrease. This prevented forages with dangerous levels of nitrates from entering the market and causing livestock damage. Nitrate tests with negative results assured growers and allowed them to proceed with cuttings without waiting for tests to come back from out of area testing facilities.

Helping Youth Make Good Mental Health Choices

The last two school years at Chester-Joplin-Inverness (CJI), the School District had multiple closures due to COVID-19. Periods of social isolation and loss of normal activities resulted in marked decreases in the mental health of students. As a state, Montana youth reported almost a 5% increase in feelings of sadness and hopelessness. In 2021, Liberty County MSU Extension continued to partner with CJI High School and Liberty County Public Health Nurse Melissa Kantorowicz to help youth understand how to maintain positive mental health and how to help those around them do the same. Through the 5-hour curriculum, Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM), facilitators met with the CJI freshman class to showcase an interactive program for youth, promote increased discussion and knowledge about mental health and aid in the development of problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence.

With this being one of the few Extension-school district partnerships to offer the YAM course in 2021, 17 youth gained an awareness of mental health and suicidal thoughts and developed problem-solving skills in relation to those issues. Students began to recognize the need to think through different stress and crises situations and understand the importance of mental health. Students have also begun to have conversations with their peers about mental health.

Students stated the following observations from the class:

- It helped me with figuring out my mental health.
- I learned "how to help my friends when they need it."
- It helped me know a little better about mental illness.
- I know "how to deal with problems."
- It gives you examples of what to do, and what not to do in real situations.

As students continue to practice good mental health skills learned during their time in YAM, they will be better prepared to deal with and overcome stress and crises in their lives.



Top: Liberty County producers gather to listen to Montana State University researchers discuss spring and durum wheat variety trials, by Jesse Fulbright;
Bottom: The Chester-Joplin-Inverness (CJI) Freshman class learned about mental health awareness during the 2021 Youth Aware of Mental Health class, by Jesse Fulbright

Liberty County Staff



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

Jesse Fulbright
Agent

Julie Gagnon
Administrative Assistant