

# Missoula County



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*Hillside wildflowers overlooking the Clark Fork River, by Patrick Mangan.*

**F**olded into a series of mountain ranges and river valleys, Missoula County is a dynamic landscape of contrasts. The forested mountains provide habitat for wildlife as well as recreational pursuits for residents, while the valleys hold fertile soils that support farms of all sizes. Four rivers converge within Missoula County, forming the heart of the Clark Fork River, and up into the Swan Valley a chain of lakes create a recreational haven.

Missoula County has several dynamic communities through its landscape. The large urban center, the city of Missoula has a strong regional presence in western Montana for employment and commerce, and is home to the University of Montana. Other smaller communities like Seeley Lake, Lolo, Frenchtown, and Condon have their own unique identities and places in the county. The Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribal Nation is partially located in Missoula County.

Missoula County's dynamic landscape and communities create a diversity of employment, living situations, and opportunities for MSU Extension to interact.

## Plant Clinic Serving Missoula County Horticultural Needs

The Missoula County Extension Plant Clinic provided leadership and educational opportunities to the public on the identification and integrated pest management (IPM) practices of plant diseases, pests and related plant health problems through emails, phone calls, walk-in and site visits. Weekly scouting and trapping for insects in fruit orchards helps define an effective control, and time management options to reduce unwarranted pesticide use.

We started off the year preparing for our hot pepper eating contest to be held at the Western Montana Fair. We grew six pepper varieties with varying degrees of Scoville Heat Units scale (SHU) then delivered them to the Western Ag Research Station to spend the summer growing in a hoop house. Three individuals competed to be the Western Montana Chile Pepper eating champion. This contest also brought awareness of growing peppers with longer degree-day requirements than we typically have in western Montana.

Partnering with local, cut flower growers, Missoula County MSU Extension held the first cut flower conference. Twenty-five growers and florists came to learn from speakers in the national movement (Slow Flowers), local wholesale operation, about starting a relationship with floral shops, and educational topics such as soils, fertilizers and pests. This conference has

led to the start of an organization that will develop a social media platform to be a source for those looking for farmers who grow cut flowers in Montana and hopefully continue to broaden the industry.

## Family and Consumer Science Programs in Missoula County

COVID changed our schedules, lifestyles, habits, and priorities in 2021. It made me more aware as an FCS Extension Educator, of the importance of helping people in my county to find reliable, research-based information from MSU Extension that would allow them to make more informed decisions about maintaining family wellness.

### Food Preservation and Cooking Demonstrations:

Interest in food preservation increased by 50%. We completed 48 pressure gauge checks-covering five counties in Western Montana. There were 20 calls about general food preparation, 10 concerning food safety, 10 kitchen equipment questions, and 11 requesting information on family financial planning, memory care and end of life planning. Many callers report that they could have done an internet search, but chose to call MSU Extension instead. One caller said, “We’re so lucky to have you in Missoula to answer canning questions and help us out.”

The Missoula County Public Library hosted 10 monthly, virtual cooking classes. Twice monthly in-person classes are taking place for the remainder of 2021 and 2022; “Making Fresh Tomatillo Salsa” (using locally-grown tomatillos and peppers from Benson’s Garden), “Keeping Kids Busy Making a Kid-Friendly Thanksgiving Appetizer,” were two recent class topics.

### Caregiver Programs:

The monthly MTKNP (Montana Kinship Navigator Program) virtual support group and two Powerful Tools for Caregiver’s classes were held in partnership with Missoula Aging Services. The virtual accessibility allowed for out-of-state participants to join as well. As a result of attending classes, participants reported having gained valuable coping tools and resources, allowing them to make improvements in relationships and self-care.

## Small Farms and Backyards; horticulture education focuses on growing food locally

The Missoula County MSU Extension horticulture education program had a busy year offering programs and events for vegetable and produce growers about the benefits of growing fresh, healthy, and local produce as part of a broader goal to increase food security and support a strong local foods network.

Over 60 participants tuned into a six-part series on beginning backyard vegetable gardening in the spring of 2021. From learning about the best times to plant various crops into their

beds, to learning about insect and pest management, gardeners reported they learned tidbits or something new every night.

The horticulture program partnered with the All-Nations Health Center in Missoula, a health care center for enrolled tribal members in western Montana, to offer gardening and education support for beginning gardeners in that program. New gardeners learned about soils, planting seeds, watering, and weeding in their new garden beds during the growing season.

The MSU Extension horticulture program hosted a two-day workshop for small-farm owners and producers in western Montana, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of operating a small footprint farm and accessing local markets for products. Producers learned about marketing, agritourism, food processing, and the organizations and agencies that help farmers with supports and programming. The 45 attendees enjoyed the variety of sessions and speakers and the focus on making small farms sustainable and successful.

## Missoula County EFNEP Highlights

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) offers nutrition and physical education classes to community members who qualify for public assistance, and children in Title One schools. This year, Missoula County EFNEP partnered with numerous community agencies including the YWCA and Carole Graham House, where mothers of young children learned to prepare healthy food on a budget for their whole family. EFNEP also worked with Share House and All Nations.

EFNEP partnered with Double Snap Dollars and provided 27 coupons to class participants in 2021, totaling \$1080. EFNEP educators met class participants at the local farmer’s market to redeem coupons for fresh, locally-grown produce. This was the first farmer’s market experience for numerous participants. Several mothers invested in seeds to begin growing herbs in their homes and everyone was able to purchase nutritious produce.

As a result of the EFNEP nutrition classes, the participants from the Carole Graham House initiated a friendly competition to see who could include the most vegetables in their dinners. Numerous participants from the YWCA became cognizant of the amount of sugar their families were consuming by learning to read nutrition facts labels for the first time. As a result, they began intentionally reducing the quantity of sugar they consumed. EFNEP taught at several Missoula County schools, including Seeley Lake, Desmet, and Clinton Elementary. The EFNEP educators encourage children to be messengers and share their newfound nutrition knowledge with their families.

## Rocky Mountain Gardens and Exploration Center Breaks Ground

In 1994 Jerry Marks, Missoula County Extension agent, visited an Extension office in Wyoming that included a learning center with a Master Gardener education garden and was inspired to create something bigger and bolder in Missoula. After decades of planning, on a sunny day, May 14, 2021, we





**Top Row: (left)** Hot Pepper Eating Contest at the Western Montana Fair, by Sandy Perrin; **(right)** Fresh ingredients for tomatillo salsa, by Kelly Moore; **Center Row: (left)** Participants listening to a presentation at the Montana Small Farms Conference, by Patrick Mangan; **(right)** A screenshot of the Missoula EFNEP website, by ; **Bottom Row: (left)** Missoula County Weed District and MSU Extension staff at facility groundbreaking, by Jean Jenkins; **(right)** Missoula 4-H Horse Judging Team at Western Nationals in Denver. Their trip was funded in part by scholarship dollars raised through the Pig Raffle fundraiser, by Campbell Barrett

broke ground on our new home, the Rocky Mountain Gardens & Exploration Center. Featuring 2.5 acres of education gardens, a demonstration kitchen, plant lab, green house and Montana's first tropical butterfly house, the Exploration Center will attract people of all ages to connect to our rural heritage in the heart of urban Missoula. We are proud to partner with the Missoula Butterfly House & Insectarium and Missoula Conservation District to build this premier center for scientific education and community-centered learning in the Rocky Mountain West. Spring of 2023 is our estimated completion date. It will be the crown jewel of the Missoula County Fairgrounds.

The Exploration Center is for everyone! It will be a magnet for our community and our region, drawing people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to Midtown Missoula. It will serve community members of all ages, from infants and toddlers to seniors, Pre-K – Grade 12 school groups, student volunteers, 4-H members, University of Montana interns, researchers, Gardeners, community agriculture groups, landowners, farmers, ranchers and out-of-town visitors and fairgoers. We are excited to expand our educational programs and collaborate with our partners to develop new hands-on educational opportunities. This project would not be possible without the vision for something bigger and bolder and the public-private partnerships that have worked diligently to make this a reality. Learn more about the Rocky Mountain Gardens & Exploration Center at [JoinTheBuzzMissoula.org](https://JoinTheBuzzMissoula.org). Look for the live link on the website and watch it grow.

## **Tremendous fundraising year for 4-H leads to Scholarship opportunities and impacts on Graduating Seniors**

"Because of 4-H, I have an amazing life." – Duncan Richardson, 2021 Frenchtown graduate, 10-year Missoula 4-H member.

"4-H changed me into a person who never gives up." – Ashlyn Kneib, 2021 Big Sky graduate, 10-year Missoula 4-H member.

"I am a better person because I am a 4-H'er." – Sadie Danyo, 2021 Missoula Christian graduate, 7-year Missoula 4-H member.

Throughout the pandemic that has disrupted much of their lives, Missoula County's nearly 400 youth members have persevered in many ways. Completing projects, exhibiting at the Western Montana Fair in 2021 to record crowds, and in 2020 to zero crowds. They have put remarkable effort into selling many, many 4-H Pig Raffle Tickets, raising more than \$19,000 in 2021.

As the primary fundraiser for Missoula County's 4-H youth development program, the 4-H Pig Raffle brings in the money that supports youth and volunteers with educational materials, project expenses, camp scholarships, college scholarships and registration fees to travel to state and national leadership events and competitions.

Of the many smaller scholarship opportunities funded through the 4-H Council's budget, three \$1500 scholarships are awarded to graduating Senior 4-H members, who apply and interview with a selection committee from Missoula's business community. Recipients in 2021 were Duncan Richardson, Ashlyn Kneib and Saidee Danyo.

Richardson, on his Missoula 4-H college scholarship application, remarked that "...through 4-H, I learned how to be responsible, be kind to others, how to compose myself during an interview, and I got comfortable with getting my hands dirty." He is now pursuing his college degree, playing football for Montana Tech.

Kneib is attending the University of Wyoming at Casper. She says "4-H taught me the true meaning of giving back to my community. ... I have learned that not everyone gets things easy in life." She has a goal of finishing at Casper with a 4.0 and continuing her degree at Oklahoma State University.

Danyo is studying to be a nurse and said of her career path "4-H afforded me this. The people I worked with, the community I have become a part of, and most importantly the work ethic that I developed through 4-H have all served me well."

## **Missoula County Staff**



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

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