

# Ravalli County



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*Hay field in Corvallis, MT by Kimberly Richardson.*

**R**avalli County is nestled within the Bitterroot Valley, bordered by the Bitterroot Mountains and the Bitterroot River. The county seat is Hamilton, Montana. As of the last census, the population is 43,806, which increased by 640 since the previous year. As a result, Ravalli County has seen an influx of folks moving to the area in 2021. Ravalli County's primary industry is agriculture, with 241,233 acres, primarily small acreage, and high commodity crop operations.

In contrast, tourism is a close second. Ravalli County ranks second in Montana for sold and produced value-added product sales at \$1,329,000. Ravalli County is also second in the state for direct-to-consumer sales at \$1,550,000. Agriculture will remain strong in Ravalli County because of its commitment to the diversity of products produced, innovative marketing techniques attracting today's consumers, and collaboration with MSU Extension and the Western Agriculture Research Center to experiment with research-based novelty crops.

## 2021 Fair

September 1-4 in the Bitterroot Valley saw another successful fair week for the 4-H and FFA, full of early mornings, bustling livestock shows, laughter around the barns, and memories made.

Youth who exhibited their 4-H and FFA projects were an integral part of the 2021 Ravalli County Fair. Livestock shows occurred throughout the week in the Hourning, Iman, and Applebury Arenas, where youth exhibited their swine, sheep, goats, and cows. Youth members also exhibited poultry and rabbits in their respective barns during the week. Youth in the dog and horse projects participated in their individual shows before the fair but held demonstrations during the fair week. Members of the public that came through the animal barns witnessed youth spending time with their animals, cleaning their pens, feeding and watering animals, answering questions from the public, and interacting with their peer club members. The 4-H Indoor Exhibit Barn also displayed the incredible talent of youth who exhibited projects such as sewing, baking, and photography. The commonality in these activities is that youth are experiencing the 4-H slogan: "learn by doing" and implementing the 4-H motto: "To make the Best Better."

## Ravalli County 4-H Dog Project

During the 2020-2021 4-H year, the 4-H Dog project in Ravalli County met every Thursday night from October through July. Fifteen youth and two adult volunteers participated in the project. The 4-H dog project is a perfect opportunity for

youth interested in participating in an animal project but may not have access to or the means to invest in a livestock project. The essential volunteers have structured the lessons in modules that include Freestyle, Rally Obedience, Agility, and Showmanship. Youth develop life skills such as leadership, dedication and responsibility, and record-keeping through these consistent meetings. Youth also develop technical skills such as handling and showing dogs safely. In addition, children were encouraged to participate in demonstrations and presentations after each module and enter the county fair dog show, all of which developed confidence in youth.

## Ravalli County 4-H Small Bore Shooting Sports

In June through August, Ravalli County 4-H Small Bore Shooting Sports project leaders spent Tuesday and Thursday evenings leading 4-H participants through the introduction to shooting small-bore rifles and pistols. A total of 13 young people participated, which is an increase from when the program started in 2018. By the end of the season, participants met goals, and safety had become a habit. The final night was especially memorable when the groups were combined, and the students coached the parents and had some fun shooting competitions.

It was a summer of learning new shooting skills, developing discipline, and gaining self-confidence.

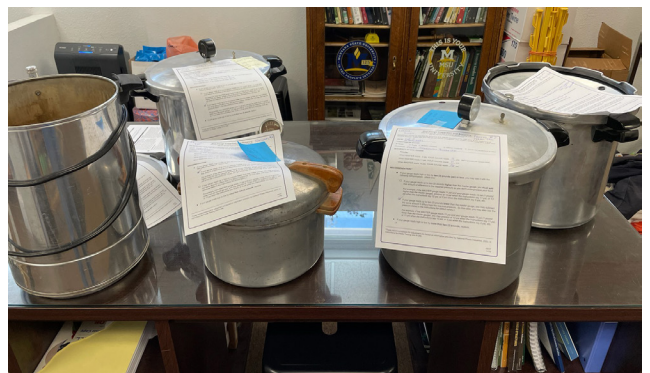
## Ravalli County 4-H Junior Camp

Fifty-four youth (ages 8-12), 14 teen counselors (ages 15-18), and 12 adult volunteers attended the annual Ravalli County 4-H Junior Camp held in July at the Darrell Fenner 4-H Camp located on Loon Lake in Bigfork, MT.

The teen counselors attended meetings starting in March to plan the entirety of camp. Teens planned and implemented workshops, evening programs, meal programs, cabin decorations, free time activities, and risk assessments. Through the planning meetings, teen counselors developed leadership, teamwork, communication, and organization skills.

## Gauge This

Food preservation is a desirable method of enjoying produce and wild game long after harvesting. Food preservation methods also aid in limiting food waste and spoilage. As grocery demand continues to surpass supply and limited labor continues to impact food availability, food preservation allows our constituents to maintain food security in unprecedented times. Ravalli County has an average of 100 degree growing days. Compared to the rest of Montana, having a longer growing season allows individuals to grow various high-value commodity







**Previous Page: (top)** 4H Dog Project, by Anne Bauer; **(middle)** 4H Small Bore Shooting Sports Project, by Anne Bauer; **(bottom)** Pressure canners tested awaiting pickup, by Kimberly Richardson; **This Page:** Ravalli County Fair Sheep Show 2021, by Anne Bauer



crops and vegetables. In addition to being a production valley, Ravalli County is also known for its exceptional trout streams and wild game hunting. Food preservation enables anglers and hunters to extend their coveted meat products. Food preservation can maximize food supply and sustainability if practiced safely, adhering to research-based practices and recipes. Pressure canning can be dangerous if the equipment is not correctly inspected yearly. Ravalli County's food preservation education includes ensuring all pressure canning equipment is tested and inspected before its usage. In 2020, Ravalli County tested 34 pressure gauges and educated 29 different individuals about their pressure canners and food preservation safety. Two gauges were obsolete, five gauges needed to be replaced, 15 gauges needed pressure adjustments, and 12 gauges read accurately. In 2021, Ravalli County tested 31 pressure gauges and educated 23 different individuals about their pressure canners and food preservation safety. Five gauges needed to be replaced, 23 gauges needed pressure adjustments, and three gauges read accurately.

## New Invaders

Ravalli County utilizes the Schutter Diagnostic Laboratory frequently throughout the growing season. On any given week from March through September, the office is receiving on average 40 questions and samples for identification or mitigation. When samples are received in the office, the agricultural agent and administrative assistant become researchers, investigators, and educators in identification, prevention, control, and mitigation. Many samples submitted to the office are identified or resolved in-house, relying on the knowledge and expertise of the office, networking, and neighboring resources. Pieces that need confirmation or expert evaluation are submitted to The Schutter Diagnostic Laboratory in Bozeman.



Turkish Hawksbeard, by Kimberly Richardson

The Schutter Diagnostic Laboratory specializes in plant identification, plant pathology, and entomology. Receiving and sending samples this year presented several different challenges that are ordinarily not problematic. First, Ravalli County did not have an agricultural agent on staff until July 1, 2021, leaving samples for the administrative assistant to triage. Secondly, with the COVID-19 pandemic lingering, the mail delivery system became the least effective way to submit samples to the laboratory. Luckily Jocelyn Snider, Ravalli County's administrative assistant, and Master Gardener, was able to address these challenges and successfully limit the number of samples being sent out through her expertise, recruitment of other Master Gardeners for assistance, and reliance on neighboring agriculture agents. In 2021, Ravalli County processed 145 samples. The Schutter Diagnostic laboratory-processed 94 of the samples submitted in Ravalli County. Most notable of the samples was the discovery of Turkish Hawksbeard and the Colorado potato beetle.

## Ravalli County Staff



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

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