

Toole County



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Harvest on the Hi-line.

Toole County is made up of 1,915 square miles and has a population rate of 2.8 persons per square mile. The incorporated city of Shelby, population 3,376, serves as the county seat. Other Toole County cities and towns include Ethridge, Galata, Kevin, Oilmont, Sunburst, and Sweetgrass. Situated in northern Montana, Canada provides the northern boundary, with the Marias River flowing along a major portion of the southern boundary.

Mining, agriculture, utilities, and transportation and warehousing are competitively positioned for growth and new business opportunities. These capitalize on the county's geographic location (major rail service, east/west & north/south highways, on the Canadian border, access to raw materials).

Toole County MSU Extension's 4-H program is unique in Montana because of the Four-County Marias Fair, held at the Marias Fairgrounds outside of Shelby. 4-H members join together with Pondera, Glacier, and Liberty County to exhibit projects and sell their livestock at the Marias Fair.

Toole County 4-H Chicken Club

Eleven Toole County 4-H members participated in the Chicken Club project, led by Blazing Saddles Club leader Barb Larsen. One of the Teen Leaders, Landan Omdahl, was

instrumental in selecting the chicks, and he acquired a small group of heritage breed turkeys from a local turkey farmer. He also collected donations from the local feed store for the first three bags of feed for the chickens. In the first year of raising turkeys with the Chicken Club, the 4-H members quickly learned how fast turkeys grow compared to chickens, and how much more aggressive turkeys can be.

Chicken Club workshops were held once a week from the beginning of April. Participants learned chicken anatomy, breeds, grooming, and showing. The chicks were raised in one of the barns on the fairgrounds under a heat lamp until they grew larger and the weather was nice enough to let the chickens live in the outside lean-to. Each family was responsible for feeding and caring for chickens once a week. This helped the 4-H members learn how to care for their animals, and was a great way for the 4-H members to handle the chicks to make them tame enough to show at the fair.

One of our local poultry experts, Randi Samsel, assisted the club and showed them the proper ways to show birds. Landan Omdahl also led many of the workshops as part of his Independent Study for his 4-H Chicken Project.

The Cloverbud group was very involved in the Chicken Club program, even though they knew they could not compete

in the regular 4-H Chicken Showmanship Contest. They planned to show their chickens in Open Class at the fair. The Open Class Manager loved that the Cloverbuds were willing to show animals, so they created a Youth Showman entry for open class for the other livestock showmanship projects. This opens the door for other Cloverbud youth to show animals in Open Class, and then they can show in the regular 4-H showmanship competition when they get older.

Toole County 4-H New Family Orientation

Toole County has seen rapid growth in the number of new 4-H members this year. We decided to host a New Family Orientation to assist new families and facilitate their questions. We invited all the new families and some of the returning families to meet. The Kountry Kids leader was also present to field any questions. The New Family Orientation covered information from the beginning of the 4-H year through events such as Project Day, 4-H Camp, and the Marias Fair, as well as where to find information on record books, project books, website, and registration. There were many questions about a new virtual platform called Z-Suites, and families learned how to add their record books to their Z-Suite account.

As an ice breaker, new families explained why they joined 4-H and if they were nervous about joining. Many families had friends in 4-H already. Some youth members were excited about events like 4-H Camp, Rec Lab, and Congress. Some of the parents expressed concern to keep track of events. We let them know, not to worry. Our office sends a monthly newsletter, has a Facebook group page, and e-mails upcoming events regularly.

One of our goals of the informational meeting was to convince a family to step in and resurrect an older 4-H club so we can offer three clubs again in Shelby. We currently only have two clubs, the Blazing Saddles and Kountry Kids, and they are both boasting numbers of 30+ members. With more families moving into the area, we need more clubs to accommodate youth members. More leaders can increase opportunities and bring expertise to clubs to help youth members with their various projects.

Toole County Ag Day

Ag Days have been a recurring event in Toole County at the Shelby and Sunburst Elementary Schools for many years. This event has been a continuing partnership with the Toole County Conservation District and the Toole County MSU Extension Agents. We begin planning in January for a rotational workshop series with topics related to agriculture and that are youth-oriented. We like to select local expert





Previous Page: (top) Cloverbud Showmanship, by Kim Woodring; **(bottom)** Ag Day in Shelby, by Kim Woodring; **This Page:** Toole County Members After the Fair, by Kim Woodring

speakers so there isn't much travel involved. In the past, we have had other MSU Extension Agents, Farm Bureau Members, FSA and NRCS workers, and members from our local garden club help us teach workshops.

Because Sunburst is a smaller school, the third and fourth graders participate in the workshop. We also invite the Galata school to attend the workshop (Galata is a smaller school also located in Toole County, which sends around five kids). In Shelby, only the fourth graders participate in the workshop because they have a larger student body. Each group usually has six to eight participants for each rotation.

The workshop rotations are a great way to capture the attention of the youth because they are moving to each station in small groups. Working with only six to eight kids helps everyone with better focus in small groups. They are easier for the speakers to manage as well, because sometimes there is not a group leader to accompany youth to each station. Although they are from rural communities, the youth from Sunburst and Shelby may not be directly involved with a farm or ranch operation, so this gives them an opportunity to learn about the county's largest industry.

This year, the workshops included climate information, weed identification, reading a compass, ATV safety, and potting plants.

Toole County Staff



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