

Beaverhead County



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Summer pasture supports the beef industry in Beaverhead County, by Dori McNeill.

Founded in 1865, Beaverhead County is Montana's largest county with an area of 5,571 square miles. Of the 3.566 million acres of land, 69% is publicly owned which contributes to the sparse population of the county. The population density in Beaverhead County is less than 1.7 people per square mile, but it has an average cattle population of 27.6 per square mile. The economy is mainly driven by agriculture, mostly cattle and hay production, but tourism and recreation also contribute. Beaverhead County ranks first in beef cattle production.

Agriculture

Beaverhead County farmers and ranchers must be cautious of high nitrate concentrations in their feed. Barley, oats, and triticale were the most common nitrate-accumulating small grains grown in the county. This year in Beaverhead County MSU Extension, 187 nitrate tests were conducted. Using the information from these tests, livestock producers could decide the class of livestock and the ration to be fed. This year was especially important for producers to test for nitrates as drought conditions heightened nitrate accumulations.

The Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage (NWSFF) program is vital to maintain the ecological integrity of our public lands. Eight returning growers and two new growers participated in the NWSFF program by having 350 acres of forage inspected.

With more than 125,000 beef cattle and 13,100 sheep, animal agriculture is one of the largest economic drivers in Beaverhead County. The Southwest Montana Stockmen's Association (SWMSA) and Beaverhead County Livestock Protective Committee (LPC) partner with Beaverhead County MSU Extension to provide resources for ranchers. The LPC generates funds from local livestock producers to safeguard the animal agriculture industry in Beaverhead County. The SWMSA provides a forum for producers to learn about legislation, rules, and regulations affecting their operation. This association of roughly 65 ranches and agricultural businesses meets twice yearly to discuss the latest ranching challenges and triumphs. This year, members of the association continued to spearhead efforts to release the Hidden Pasture Wilderness Study area in Beaverhead County.

The Beaverhead County Wool Pool gathered wool this April. Fifteen producers from Beaverhead County shipped 6,972 pounds of wool to Billings to be sold. Also this year, wool

pool members visited with folks from the MSU Wool lab and MSU Sheep Extension Specialist Brent Roeder. 4-H members interested in wool products showed up to help and learned how to measure microns and test for moisture in wool bales.

4-H in Beaverhead County

The Beaverhead County 4-H Program includes 145 youth in eight clubs. Youth ages 6-19 are given the opportunity to explore education and interests by participating in activities. Sixty adult volunteers help to deliver the program to the county's youth.

The 4-H program works annually to involve youth in weed management through attending Beaverhead County Weed Day. Each year, 4-H members take a Saturday in July to remove noxious weeds from our county. Each member is given colored tape to mark their bags of weeds pulled and at the end of the day, the member with the most bags wins a prize. This year, members of the Beaverhead County Weed Department and 4-H did a weed pull at Blacktail Meadows and removed nearly 15 contractor bags full of noxious weeds.

Market animals were a popular project again this year with 114 market projects and 20 breeding projects. Youth learn the responsibility of caring for an animal while also taking part in the farm-to-fork concept of the livestock industry. Beaverhead County held various species-specific livestock quality assurance programs to help members understand how to care for their animals properly. After a very successful livestock sale at the fair, the carcass results proved participants in Beaverhead County Fair knew how to feed animals. We had 15 participants receive Symbol of Excellence awards, three Steer of Merit awards, and 12 Certified Lamb awards, which certify high-quality standards in animal care. Other projects were popular at the fair this year as well. We had 4-H members bring projects ranging from knot-tying and robotics to baking and poetry. These members are interviewed about their projects and other life skills they learn. The various judges and sponsors commented on the high level of work displayed in projects inside the fair building.



Top: Brent Roeder, MSU Extension Sheep Specialist, and Kaleena Miller, Madison-Jefferson Extension agent, baling wool in Dillon, by Jessica Murray; **Bottom:** Archery practice, by Jessica Murray

Beaverhead County Staff



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