

Blaine County



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Blaine County Montana Hayfield, by Julianne Snedigar.

Blaine County is located in North Central Montana. The Missouri River is the southern boundary, and the Canadian border provides the northern boundary. Two small mountain ranges, the Bear Paw and Little Rockies, are located within the county. Blaine County encompasses 4,267 square miles or 2.713 million acres. Agriculture is the backbone of Blaine County, with cattle, sheep, wheat, and barley being the primary enterprises. An irrigated alfalfa/grass hay base along the Milk River is enhanced by irrigation supplied by the Corps of Engineers St. Mary's diversion project. Population in Blaine County stands at just over 7,000 people according to the 2020 census. Tourism and hunting contribute to the economy of Blaine County as well.

Blaine County MSU Extension serves the community through various programs from two full-time Extension Agents and a full-time administrative/ 4-H assistant. Programs are concentrated in 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Community Development.

The MSU Extension program is supported through an annual county budget which includes a portion of the agent's

salary and Montana State University's (USDA funds) direct support of the agent's salary. MSU also supports the program indirectly, and the county benefits with returned services for every dollar invested. This partnership between MSU, USDA, and Blaine County provides citizens access to high-quality education and research-based knowledge from the state's land-grant university system.

Blaine County 4-H Gathers Community Support for an Improved Show Arena at the Fairgrounds

The number of livestock projects exhibited by youth at the Blaine County Fair continues to grow yearly. With that, the space used in the past for livestock shows and the market sale was no longer large enough to accommodate the number of projects. For the past two years, livestock shows have been outside in a gravel arena. The location was very hot and the gravel was very hard on the youth and the livestock. MSU Extension Blaine County agents proposed the idea of planting grass and installing shade at the outdoor show location to

the Blaine County Fairboard. MSU Extension worked with the Fairboard, 4-H Council, 4-H Foundation, and many other partner businesses and individuals to raise funds to install sod and purchase shade structures for the arena. The North Chinook Boosters 4-H Club applied for and received a Montana 4-H Foundation \$500 People Partner Grant. Through contributions from more than 50 donors, funds were raised to complete the project. Over 20 4-H members, leaders, parents, and community members worked together to install sod the month before the fair. During the fair, countless youth, parents, and community members commented on how the grass and shade were very appreciated. The livestock judge gave high praise for the efforts. One of the main benefits was the lack of animal stress during the swine show. In previous years without grass, the pigs became tired and sore feet caused them to fight with other animals. This year with grass, there were no pig fights during the show. The newly improved area greatly reduced the stress on the animals, youth, and adult volunteers, and will be an asset to the Blaine County Fairgrounds for years to come.

Real Colors Helps Participants Understand Their Personality Types

Blaine County MSU Extension agents Trent Noel and Juli Snedigar co-facilitated a Real Colors program with Montana State University-Northern Resident Assistants and Ambassadors. Real Colors is a personality instrument that describes a person's temperaments as one of four colors: Green, Blue, Gold, and Orange. All participants use all four colors daily but primarily use two of the colors. Class participants learn their primary color and then group up with other participants with the same color. The color groups of participants then create a poster with the personality values for that color. The group then presents its values to everyone else. Participants learn the needs of others and how to interact with other colors. One of the most valuable lessons is that everyone has a place on a team and differing values can offer different benefits. The group at Northern was very diversified and had fun learning the Real Colors Program.

Busy 4-H Members Learn Life Skills While Meeting a Community Need

Young children frequently misplace things. Often to their parent's dismay, warm hats usually go missing. This past winter, MSU Extension Blaine County agents discovered a need for hats for preschool and school-age youth in the county. With that, they started a campaign asking for yarn donations from community members. Constituents answered the call and over 200 skeins of yarn were donated to the project. Blaine County 4-H teen leaders helped knit hats while participating in their monthly meetings. More than 100 hats were knitted and

donated to schools in the area. Blaine County 4-H members learned the importance of helping others in their communities. They were excited to pick out colors and wanted to construct hats that the wearer would be proud of. MSU Extension Blaine County was able to meet this need quickly and 4-H members gained new skills in the process.

4-H Project Day Builds Skills for the Future

Project Day has become a well-attended and anticipated day for Blaine County 4-H members yearly. This year was no exception with over half the enrolled 4-H members attending. Participants took part in workshops taught by current leaders and 4-H alumni. The main focus of 4-H Project Day is for 4-H members to participate in different hands-on workshops that allow them to learn new things and develop skills they will use in 4-H projects and the future. Every year, a different club in the county hosts the day. Club members choose which project areas to focus on so that 4-H members experience new things each year at Project Day. This year, 4-H members learned new concepts and skills in leatherwork, cake decorating, welding, building coyote calls, photography, gardening, rabbit and cat showmanship, and livestock quality assurance. Two 4-H members shared their talents in leatherwork and taught almost 20 younger 4-H members how to stamp, cut, and dye different kinds of leather. 4-H members also learned about becoming an airplane pilot and possibilities for careers in aviation in rural Montana. 4-H members heard from multiple pilots and learned how they use airplanes in their work and daily activities. All participants could use their new skills to create items, many of which they later entered at the fair. Project Day continues to be the most attended 4-H event of the summer. Plans are in the works to add additional project days in the upcoming year. These events will continue to focus on hands-on, life skills development. Project Day continues to be a great learning event for the 4-H youth of Blaine County.

MSU Extension Blaine County Serves Up Food Safety

Blaine County MSU Extension agent Trent Noel conducted a ServSafe program in Blaine County. ServSafe is a state-required program for restaurants and food-serving establishments. One person from every food establishment needs to be ServSafe certified. The ServSafe program is an 8-hour class with a comprehensive exam at the end. Participants must get a 70% on the exam to pass and gain certification. The certification is good for five years after passing the test. Noel had three Blaine County participants in the class and has 14 signed up for December. There is a continuing need for ServSafe in Blaine County, so this program will continue to deliver effective training in the future.



Top: (left) 4-H members and leaders lay sod to improve the arena, by Julianne Snedigar; **(right)** 4-H Member Sydney Bowles improves her cake decorating skills, by Julianne Snedigar; **Center: (left)** Trent Noel guides participants through Real Colors, by Julianne Snedigar; **(right)** A handful of the many hats that were made and distributed in Blaine County, by Julianne Snedigar; **Bottom:** ServSafe is a food safety training program offered by MSU Extension Blaine County, by ServSafe



Showmanship Skills and Much More

For the past three years, 4-H and FFA participants in the beef and lamb projects have participated in weekly showmanship workshops before the fair. Beginning in July, youth bring their livestock projects to the fairgrounds weekly to work on everything from showing in the ring to feeding and fitting beef and sheep projects. Almost 100% of sheep project members and over 75% of beef project members participated in the learning events each week. The market beef project numbers increased by 35%, and the beef breeding project numbers increased by over 70% in the past year. Sheep project numbers have maintained with many new youth members trying the project for the first time this year. There were four new members in the market lamb project this year, more than in the past five years. Beef and sheep project members credit the workshops with helping them, and their animals feel less stressed at fair. The animals behave better because they are used to being at the fairgrounds. Thus, the 4-H members feel more confident during the show. Parents also credit the workshops with helping them better understand the project participant's requirements. As an added benefit, older project participants assist the younger members. They state this has helped them become role models and learn more about the projects. Again this year, the fair livestock judge credited the showmanship workshops with providing youth an opportunity to fine-tune their skills and make his job a lot more difficult. Over 80% of the participants earned blue ribbons in showmanship with their projects. These learning opportunities have greatly benefited the 4-H youth in the county as well as increased participation in Blaine County 4-H.

Blaine County Staff



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