

# Chouteau County



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*Chouteau County Landscape by Janell Barber.*

**C**houteau County, established in 1865, was one of the original nine counties of the Montana Territory. Once the largest county in the Montana Territory and second largest in the United States, Chouteau County covers 3,972 square miles. With a population of about 5,765, Fort Benton, Big Sandy, Geraldine and Highwood are the largest communities with smaller communities in Carter, Loma, Floweree, Shonkin and Square Butte. As part of the Golden Triangle, Chouteau County is the top producing county of winter wheat in the state. With these statistics, it is no wonder agriculture production and agriculture-related businesses are the top industry.

## Gaining Strength

After receiving many requests, a popular and previously held class, StrongPeople, was offered again this fall in Fort Benton, with 25 individuals registering. An average of 11 people attended the one-hour sessions twice weekly for the first four weeks. Participants reported beneficial progress after just four sessions. Ease of getting up and down a ladder, from the floor and low-to-the-ground chairs (elementary school) were top on the list of benefits of being active in the strength training

program. Better sleep and overall mood were also reported as benefits. Into the fourth week of sessions, participants progressed in additional repetitions and/or heavier weights. In addition, many participants maintain the strength training sessions on one of the days a session is not held, leading to positive change in wellness behavior. The program is scheduled for 12 weeks, wrapping up in mid-January. Additional locations across the county are being planned to offer the class closer to other constituents.

## Agriculture, Natural Resources and Horticulture

### Ag Day for Fourth and Fifth Graders

The annual Chouteau County Ag days occurred in early May at the Chouteau County Fairgrounds. In attendance were 95 fourth and fifth graders from Chouteau County. Planning the event was a collaborative effort between Chouteau County MSU Extension and six other agricultural groups. Presentations include entomology, soil cups, cheese-making, 4-H livestock, animal husbandry and the rolling river demonstration trailer. During the 4-H livestock class, 4-H youth educated the audience about the 4-H livestock projects.

## Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources

A variety of seminars, one-on-one consultations, mailings, and newspaper columns helped improve agricultural production practices and efficiency for Chouteau County agricultural producers. Seminars included the Golden Triangle Cropping Seminar, the Golden Triangle Barley Conference and Pesticide Education Seminars. Other projects promoting agricultural sustainability include the Chouteau County soil moisture monitoring program and pest monitoring for the orange wheat blossom midge. Five producers stated they would consider using the RATTs method when managing grasshoppers, resulting in a \$15,000 savings in insecticide. Three producers wrote they were switching to solid stem varieties to help manage the pest. Not having to swath can save \$12 per acre, resulting in a \$72,000 savings.



## Level 1 Master Gardener Program

A total of 27 people attended Level 1 Master Gardener programs in Big Sandy and Fort Benton, which were offered in March and April. Attendees learned about soil biology, plant biology, vegetables, flowers, trees and shrubs, lawn and irrigation, growing fruit trees and integrated pest management. Thirteen gardeners passed their Level 1 test and will take Level 2 next year. They will do 20 hours of community service, contributing 260 hours. Improving knowledge and understanding of garden management improves the quality of life through increased social stability and community development.



**Top:** StrongPeople Class Participants, by Janell Barber; **Bottom:** Sunset in Chouteau County, by Janell Barber

## Chouteau County Staff



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

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