

Fergus County



712 West Main Street | 406-535-3919 | sarah.bock@montana.edu | www.montana.edu/extension/fergus/



Judith Mountains from the North, by Cody Ream.

Fergus County is located in the heart of Montana with Lewistown acting as the county seat while Petroleum County sits just east with the county seat in Winnett. Most of the population is located in Fergus County with around 11,617 people compared to the estimated 519 individuals in Petroleum County. These two counties consist of 6,024 square miles, and both are bordered by the Missouri River to the north and the Big Snowy Mountains to the south. The local economy is dominated by agricultural production with approximately \$64 million in cash receipts from livestock and crops. Crops like winter and spring wheat, barley, and hay are the major crops produced, with an additional 66,000 beef cows and heifers. Youth development activities are significant, as demonstrated by a 4-H program that includes 228 youth members and 72 adult leaders.

Montana 4-H Rec Lab

Montana 4-H District 3, which includes Fergus/Petroleum County, had the exciting opportunity to host State 4-H

Recreation Lab! Our county committee of five teens, two adult leaders, and the Extension staff began work in the fall. Monthly conference calls began in November with the other four counties: Judith Basin, Cascade, Chouteau, and Teton. The Hobson School was selected as our location, the dates were set for March, and 'Highway 2022-The Road to Success' was chosen for the theme. Responsibilities were divided and Fergus County volunteered to organize registration, group activities, and entertainment. One-hundred and seven teens and 36 adults from 32 counties attended Rec Lab. They each chose four workshops from a selection of 37. Workshop topics varied from crafts and recreation to leadership and team building. Kyle Shobe was the opening speaker, a 4-H alumni who has achieved great success in many different avenues- music, business, auctioneering, and as a rodeo announcer. Karen Grosz was the closing speaker, she walked the group through a hands-on exercise related to setting and achieving goals. Everyone left the event prepared to be better and more inspired leaders in their 4-H club, county, and statewide programs. Our local team had the added benefit of experience in planning a large event.

Babysitting class builds confidence in youth in Fergus County

In August 2021, Fergus County MSU Extension Agent Sarah Bock partnered with Central Montana Medical Center staff to teach a babysitting clinic. During the six-hour class, 16 sixth- to eighth-grade students learned many different skills to assist them in babysitting their siblings or other children.

During the morning, students learned about handling behavior issues with children of different ages, how to entertain them with games and activities, and what they should know about a child and the family before babysitting. They also practiced using a fire extinguisher and calling 911 in an emergency. Youth noted this was the day's highlight. In the afternoon, participants learned about safe sleep for infants, how to perform CPR, and basic first aid skills. There was also a presentation and discussion about babysitting as a business.

Many youth stated they felt much more confident in their abilities to safely babysit as well as in their skills of communicating with parents. This class gives youth confidence and ensures they have reviewed common issues and what to do in an emergency to give families confidence in their abilities.

4-H Food Booth – Farm to Table

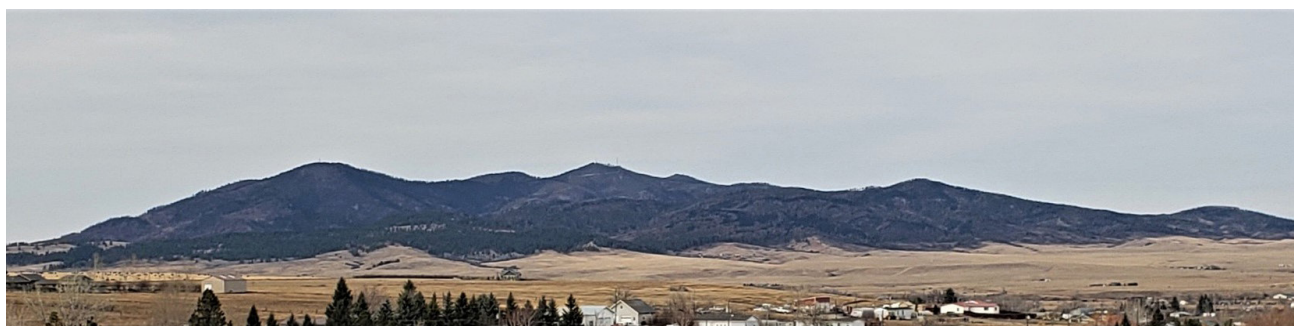
The Fergus/Petroleum County 4-H Food Booth featured locally produced hamburgers in the 4-H Food Booth during the 2022 Central Montana Fair. The rising cost of beef, the desire to promote local beef producers and the opportunity to provide education for members and customers about value-added products, led the food booth managers to research the Farm to Table concept. Numerous central Montana Ranchers, some of them 4-H families, are selling their beef directly to the customer, these producers volunteered to provide hamburger for one day during the 10 days the 4-H Food Booth is open during the fair. The customers raved about the taste of their burgers, the producer of the day was featured on signage in the booth and 4-Hers became more aware of the opportunities available for ag producers to market and sell their products directly to the customer.

South Moccasin Fire Restoration Coalition

In early October 2021, the South Moccasin Mountains in Fergus County experienced a devastating wildfire. This fire burned approximately 7,200 acres of forested land predominately owned by private landowners. After some site visits to assess the damage, landowners formed the South Moccasin Fire Restoration Coalition (SMFRC). MSU Extension organized the SMFRC in a way that would cover the needs of all in the group.

Two salvage loggers were contacted to remove dead or dying trees before the timber value depreciated to zero. Smaller pines were sold to the local Amish for making pallets. Timber value from this effort went toward seeding and rebuilding





Previous Page: (top) Cattle in Central Montana, by Cody Ream; **(bottom)** Participant learning CPR at a babysitting class held in August, by MSU Extension; **This Page: (top)** Fergus County Rec Lab Team, by Jennifer Saunders; **(bottom)** Moccasin Mountains after the fire, by Cody Ream

infrastructure. A helicopter was contracted to spread a grass seed mix created by MSU Extension Range Specialist Jeff Mosley in May to replace the burned timber areas. This was done to help prevent weeds from taking over the area. Total re-seeding costs, including helicopter fees, were covered by NRCS funding that the coalition obtained (\$132.41/acre for 7,200 acres). Cost-sharing grants were also obtained through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for rebuilding fences destroyed by the fire.

Looking forward, the activities of the SMFRC are coming to an end, but it is not over. The next step for the SMFRC is to obtain a grant to cost share 50% of the chemical expenses to control weeds over the next three years.

Fergus County Staff



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

Sarah Bock
Extension Agent

Jennifer Saunders
4-H Program Assistant

Cody Ream
Extension Agent

Allison Smith
Administrative Support