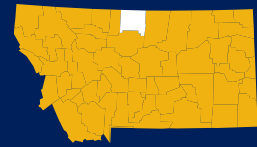


Hill County



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The Havre Blue Pony, by Kati Purkett.

Located in Northcentral Montana on the Hi-Line, Hill County presents many programs to a population of 16,347. Extension Agents Kati Purkett and Colleen Pegar serve major towns and cities in the county which include: Havre, Gildford, Box Elder, Rudyard, Kremlin and Inverness. The Rocky Boy Reservation is also part of the county and home to the community of the Chippewa-Cree Tribe. Havre is the county seat and is home to 9,800 people and the MSU Northern Campus. The Northern Agriculture Research Center is housed on historic Fort Assiniboine, southwest of Havre, which provides ample opportunities for collaboration. MSU Extension is vital in meeting local needs in agriculture, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development, and nutrition education.

Youth Aware of Mental Health is active in Hill County

The Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program is a school-based program for young people to learn about and explore topics in mental health. In 2021, YAM reached 117 freshmen and sophomores at Havre High School, and by the end of the 2023 school year it will reach 168 youth. The

program was invited to be taught in 2018 by the Superintendent of Schools, Craig Mueller. He understood the importance of mental health for the students and passed the sentiment on to the current high school principal Dustin Kraske and current staff members.

The students are typically freshmen and participate as part of the health requirement for physical education. They are engaged and open to hard conversations around anxiety, suicide, stress, and crisis. Role play is always part of YAM that students are the most reluctant to start, but once they know they are in a safe environment, the dialog created is heartfelt, real, and helpful in making them realize they are not alone in their feelings and struggles.

Students engage with the program on rotating days which gives them time to process conversations and think through the introduction, dilemma cards, and role plays. They also have time for questions and reflection. The program gives students needed tools to find a caring adult and get help no matter what they are struggling with.

MSU Extension looks forward to expanding the reach of the program and continuing to address the mental health needs of the students in Havre Public Schools.

Hill County 4-H Highlights

Hill County 4-H is a thriving program with a heavy emphasis on livestock projects:

- 37 youth enrolled in beef or beef breeding
- 10 enrolled in sheep or sheep breeding
- 31 youth enrolled in swine or swine breeding

The next most popular projects are shooting sports (34 youth); small animal projects (33 youth); and woodworking, where youth can work at school, at home, and with a dedicated project leader to complete projects.

We look forward to increasing partnerships with project leaders to expand 4-H's reach in our community. Family and Consumer Science projects are increasing, and we will expand these options in the coming 4-H year.

Our youth leaders are realizing all that 4-H has to offer. This year Hill County 4-H sent three youth to Rec Lab (Recreation Lab) in Hobson. At Rec Lab, youth learn many leadership and planning skills to use in their day-to-day lives. Two youth applied to be camp counselors and attended a multi-county 4-H camp held in the Bears Paw Mountains at Camp Kiwanis in June. Twenty-four kids from Hill County attended the camp and fun was had by all. In October, Hill County sent six youth to Fall Leadership Training in Great Falls.

Interest in attending state 4-H events is growing and the leadership skills these youth are gaining show up in their service to the county 4-H program. Youth who attended these events are already planning projects from what they have learned and they look forward to using the skills to mentor youth in 4-H clubs throughout the county.

Hill County Agriculture Highlights

Agriculture on the Hi-Line suffered through a drought-laden year in 2022. The lack of winter moisture had most producers questioning what to plant this spring and when the moisture was still absent in the spring, producers planted in hopes that something would grow. Rains came this summer, but the crops were already starting to mature. Overall, Hill County experienced almost a 40% reduction in potential forage growth for the year. Water for crops, livestock, and water quality will be the main topic of conversation for many years to come. Livestock producers are downsizing herds and hoping the winter will restock reservoirs, dirt tanks and dugouts.

The cropping seminar in January was well attended and touched on managing grain pests, cropping varieties, and agriculture law. The highlight of the seminar was having Montana Department of Ag's Cort Jensen talk about the complications arising from out-of-state people buying land in Montana without understanding things like water rights and boundary lines. Agriculture in Hill County is always adapting and hopefully, this winter and spring will bring much need moisture to replenish the soil and grow bountiful crops.



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Previous Page: (bottom) Dry conditions in September, by Colleen Pegar; **This Page:** 4-H youth perform ultrasounds on steers at the 2022 Hill County Fair, by Kati Purkett

SNAP-Ed in Hill County

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-Ed) in Hill County helps participants find measurable improvements. A total of 186 classes were taught, 476 children and adults were reached, and 30 class series were taught. SNAP-Ed also helped the local Salvation Army set up and grow container gardens, and use the produce to make a healthy meal.

Reported behavior change in adult participants includes:

- 100% diet quality improvements in one or more aspects of their diet. Indicators (i.e., eating fruits, vegetables, red, orange, and dark green vegetables, drinking less regular soda (not diet), drinking less fruit punch, fruit drinks, sweet tea, or sports drinks, and cooking dinner at home).
- 64% food safety practice improvements, in one or more practices. (i.e., washing hands before preparing food, washing all items and surfaces after cutting raw meat or seafood, not thawing frozen food at room temperature, or using a meat thermometer).
- 68% physical activity improvements, in one or more behaviors (i.e., exercising for at least 30 minutes, doing workouts to build and strengthen muscles, or making small changes to be more active).
- 32% food security improvements, in one or more indicators. (i.e., not eating less than you wanted so there was more food for your family or having enough money to get food for your family).

Youth participants saw behavior change improvements:

- Physical activity by 30%, in their physical activity practices or gained knowledge.
- Diet quality by 77%, in their abilities to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Recommendations or gained knowledge.
- Safe food handling by 55%, in using safe food handling practices more often or gaining knowledge



Hill County Staff

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

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