

Phillips County



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Crop Plot in Phillips County 2022 by Marko Manoukian.

Phillips County is in North Central Montana along what is known as the Hi-Line. It encompasses 3.2 million acres with 33% being managed by the Bureau of Land Management and 48.5% as private lands. Other land managers in the area are Montana State Lands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Agriculture is the main industry, consisting of 53,000 mother cows (ranking third most in the state); 5,900 sheep; 363,200 crop acres; and 40,000 irrigated land acres. The gross value of all agricultural commodities in 2017 was about \$77.9 million dollars excluding any government program. Recreation contributes as an industry in the county, with big game and upland bird hunting, and warm water fish species in the Milk and Missouri Rivers, which make up the southern border of the county. There is also one large irrigation reservoir, the Nelson, that has warm water sport fishing.

2022 A Little Better for Crops, Tough for Livestock Production

Montana State University Extension offered a wide range of programs in 2022 to assist agricultural producers in the

third year of below-average precipitation and grasshopper impacts. Dryland crop production of small grains, peas, and lentils was below average for most producers, as lack of large moisture events produced low yields to combine for the third year in a row.

Livestock water continued to wither with a lack of winter snow and no rain event to replenish pits or reservoirs. By August 2022, many producers continued to sell livestock. The livestock population in Phillips County is half as much now as in 2020, leaving just 25,000 of the original 53,000 cattle. Without above-average winter precipitation in 2023, more livestock operators will be forced to sell cattle in the next year. Statewide from 2021 to 2022, an estimated 250,000 cows left Montana.

Extension Agent Marko Manoukian spoke during the year to the Malta Dirt Daubers about managing gardens and yards in drought and grasshopper pressure. He made recommendations of delaying planting annual shrubs or trees until adequate moisture has accumulated to fill the soil profile, and discussed how gardeners could be ready to defend their yards from grasshoppers in summer of 2022.

Grasshopper arrival was delayed, but by August they began to fly and devour crops. Many small grain and pea producers harvested as many hoppers in the first two rounds of combining as they did small grain or peas. Livestock operators that saved grass for fall grazing lost most of it to grasshoppers, making culling decisions more difficult.

How does the current drought compare to others? Some producers were here during the 1980s when 7 out of 10 years were dry. Some producers believe that the current grasshoppers and drought are more severe than in the 80s. Regardless, both are still here, and with the help of MSU Extension, Manoukian hopes clients can continue to be productive in 2023.

Strong 4-H Support in 2022

Phillips County 4-H is a part of Montana State University Extension. Phillips County has 141 members who take a variety of projects from Beef to Robotics. We also have 50 volunteers who help 4-H members achieve in 4-H project and life goals. Every project that youth participate in is unique to each youth as they make the project their own. Phillips County youth have the opportunity to meet other 4-H youth from around the state by participating in 4-H camp, State Shooting Sports, State 4-H Congress and many other statewide events. Annually, each club organizes a county 4-H event: Livestock Judging, Miscellaneous Judging, Clothing, Foods, Demonstration Day, and Exploring 4-H/Project Day. Planning and hosting these events help youth learn more about communication, organization, problem-solving and categorizing information.

The 4-H Livestock sale was a success with 82 animals being sold for \$405,282, almost double the sale amount of last year. The average sales price for swine was \$12.28/lb, beef was \$5.91/lb, and sheep was \$10/lb. This was a record-breaking sale for Phillips County 4-H, with the majority of support from local Phillips County businesses and some from surrounding counties.

Building 4-H for Tomorrow

The Phillips County Cloverbuds, a program offered for youth ages 5-8, continues to maintain 20 members. They meet once a month for hands-on learning, doing science activities, and learning the basic structure of 4-H. At the end of the 4-H year, Cloverbuds get together and plan a meal to make for their families. This allows the Cloverbuds to practice kitchen safety and be proud of what they made for their families.

More than 40 Phillips County youth participated in livestock and miscellaneous judging. Judging activities help youth build skills in critical thinking, decision-making, communication and public speaking.

Fair is a great time for youth who take non-animal projects to show off their skills in other areas. LeatherCraft is the most popular non-animal project with 20 members enrolled. Other non-animal projects in Phillips County include baking, cake decorating, gardening, photography, robotics, sewing, small engines, veterinary science and visual arts.





Previous Page: (top) A reservoir in Phillips County almost gone dry in June 2022, by Marko Manoukian; **(bottom)** Phillips County youth judging livestock in 2022, by Randee Lundstrom; **This Page:** Phillips County 4-H Swine Show 2022, by Randee Lundstrom

Phillips County Staff



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

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