

Ravalli County



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Snowy Bitterroot River near Skalkaho Bend Park, by Kimberly Richardson.

Let us acknowledge that in the Bitterroot Valley, we live, work, and teach on the traditional lands of the Bitterroot Salish Peoples then, now, and forever. With grace and reverence, we offer gratitude to generations of indigenous peoples who provided the fundamental stewardship model in Ravalli County and throughout the Bitterroot Valley. Their sacrifices shall never be forsaken, and through insightful healing and diligence, the new inhabitants of the Bitterroot Valley can continue to honor and protect these traditional lands in thought, service, and action.

According to the July 2021 U.S. Census Bureau Data Report, Ravalli County comprises 2,390 square miles of land and 6 square miles of water stretching from Florence to Sula with an estimated population of 45,959. The county seat is Hamilton. Ravalli County is known for diverse agricultural enterprises highlighting value-added commodity impacts of \$33.1 million from farms and ranches.

Ag News and Brews

Ten interesting, needs and research-based topics, 10 proficient, expert-in-the-field speakers, seven authentic Bitterroot establishments, 260 enthusiastic participants, \$5,500 profit for businesses in goods purchased, 200 topic-related trivia

questions, 10 approved continuing education pesticide credits, and infinite, relevant stakeholder impacts. These are a few accomplishments reported from the new ‘Ag News and Brews’ program in Ravalli County. No one would have imagined that agricultural education could be this much fun and this well-received.

The idea of bringing MSU Extension education to a more casual social setting was initiated in 2020 as a grassroots program before the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous MSU Extension agent Patrick Mangan’s successful pub series transformed to ‘Ag News and Brews’ in 2021 and 2022, and is slated to continue in 2023. For other Extension educators across the state and nation, Ag News and Brews is a program that can be implemented in any community with any program, anytime. This program’s success and popularity is based on its format of providing a unique educational experience for attendees with the added benefit of supporting and frequenting community businesses during their slower, less busy winter months. Ag News and Brews offers existing MSU Extension clientele opportunities to attend programs in a season when time is more flexible for farming and ranching schedules. Another important feature of the Ag News and Brews program is that it encouraged engagement with new Extension constituents in an environment that is less rigid and intimidating than

traditional classroom settings. Participants expressed increased interest in the featured topics and felt more confident in their interactions with the presenter and other participants. Speakers expressed their satisfaction with the program's format and requested a return appearance.

Improving with Ravalli County SNAP-Education

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP) in The Bitterroot Valley is a cherished and relied-upon program by many constituents countywide. In the 2022 grant cycle, \$50,849 in SNAP-Ed program support was provided to Ravalli County, including one staff member at 30 hours/week, educational supplies including food samples and other materials for program participants, and travel expenses to get to and from community organizations throughout Ravalli County. According to evaluated data, the behavior change in adult graduates of the SNAP-Ed program in the year 2022 is as follows:

- 100% diet quality improvement 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).
- 100% food safety practices improvement (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).
- 100% physical activity improvement (i.e., exercising for at least 30 minutes, doing workouts to build and strengthen muscles, or make small changes to be more active).
- 0% food security improvement (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).
- 80% improvement in diet quality, aided in an improved ability to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Recommendations or gained knowledge.
- 43% improvement in physical activity, tended to improve their physical activity practices or gained knowledge.

In the 69 education classes hosted by Ravalli County SNAP-Ed, 55% of the attendees who reported increases in safe food handling use demonstrated improved safe food handling practices more often or gained knowledge. Ravalli County SNAP-Ed also observed behavior changes in youth graduates. Throughout 2022, Ravalli County SNAP-Ed reached 218 children and adults in their 11-class series and their single-class opportunities.



Top: Ag News and Brews table display at Blacksmith Brewing in Stevensville, by Kimberly Richardson;
Bottom: Photo by Kimberly Richardson

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

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