

Sanders County



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View from Thompson Falls Historic High Bridge, by Juli Thurston.

MSU Extension in Sanders County provides educational programs in the areas of Agriculture, Horticulture, Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development, and Family and Consumer Sciences. Sanders County is located in Northwestern Montana. It is bordered on the west by Idaho's Panhandle and is Montana's 15th most populous county with a population of about 12,400. There is a diverse mix of agricultural land, small acreage subdivisions, rural communities and range or forested land. The highest number of jobs are in farming, fishing, forestry, and construction. Sanders County includes the city of Thompson Falls as the county seat, Plains, Hot Springs, Dixon, Trout Creek, Noxon, and Heron. Sanders County is supported by Commissioners Anthony Cox, John Holland and Dan Rowan.

4-H = Positive Youth Development *Demonstrations Prepare Members for Future Public Speaking*

More than 120 4-H members participated in the county demonstration program building the life skills of communica-

tions, planning and organizing, self-motivation, responsibility, self-discipline and learning to lead. These life skills reward demonstrators in their adult lives. 4-H alumni testimonials credit experience gained via the Sanders County 4-H Public Speaking Program as very valuable.

Youth Learn Leadership at State 4-H Congress

Sanders County 4-H members earn the opportunity to compete at the Montana 4-H Congress Contests. This year a larger and more talented delegation of 10 attendees represented Sanders County in the Demonstration contests and attended to represent the Sanders County Ambassador Program. Mikiah Cook was appointed as the 2022-2023 State 4-H Ambassador President.

4-H Projects Teach Life Skills to Members at County Fair

Over Labor Day weekend each year, approximately 140 Sanders County 4-H members, their families, and leaders come together for the County Fair. The purpose of the fair

is to enrich the learning experience of the 4-H member by exhibiting project work they have completed the past year. It serves as a learning laboratory for youth going far beyond winning ribbons. The County Fair provides a backdrop for youth to reflect on the important life skills they have learned and about their own personal accomplishments. Leaders and members work together as a team preparing to host livestock shows, display exhibits, serve delicious food (raising funds for the program), and share the value of 4-H with the community.

SNAP-ED Available for Adults and Children

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) offered classes teaching the importance of good nutrition, physical activity, food resource management, and food safety. Classes were free of charge and available to SNAP-eligible adults, high school students and elementary students in first, third, and fifth grades.

This year 104 SNAP-Ed classes were conducted, reaching 151 adults and children. Classes were taught in partnership with a variety of local organizations as well as in four school districts. Adults from counties not served locally by SNAP-Ed could attend a virtual 9-week class series to learn about healthy meal planning through a self-paced lesson and weekly check-in webinar with the Sanders County SNAP-Ed instructor.

In addition to holding classes, SNAP-Ed worked within the community to develop changes that make the healthy choice easy for community members. To this end, SNAP-Ed partnered with a community Farm-to-School committee, exploring ways to incorporate locally-grown produce and beef into school cafeteria menus. One local elementary school began pioneering the movement and testing farm-to-school projects such as setting up school greenhouses, community gardens and microgreen growing stations in the school lunchroom. Sanders County SNAP-Ed hopes to support and expand projects like these.

Sanders County Schools participate in the first Ag Day held in Sanders County

MSU Extension Sanders County and Montana Farmers Union partnered this September to host a first-ever Ag Day in Sanders County, with 120 third graders from Noxon, Thompson Falls, Trout Creek, Plains, Dixon, Hot Springs, and a Homeschool group in attendance. Teachers and chaperones (27) and volunteers (33) made the day possible, including our local 4-H Ambassadors. Several local sponsors also supported the event with funding lunch and rental expenses.

Ag Day exposed students to the diverse aspects of Agriculture available in Sanders County. All the volunteers teaching at booths were from Sanders County and serve a role in our local agricultural industry. Local beef and produce were served for lunch to help the kids experience full circle where our local food is sourced from and how tasty and nutritious it can be!

Students rotated around to 11 different learning stations in teams. Each team was named after a breed of cattle that they had researched beforehand. Learning stations included: Hay Ride, The Dorper Corner (Sheep), Get Beefy, Be a Doctor! – Veterinary Science, Soil Erosion, The Buzz on Pollinators, 4-H and Games, Apple Cider Making, Hay You! – Process of Making Hay, Garden to Plate, and Microgreens.

Ag Day was a hit, and many are looking forward to our Second Annual Ag Day next year. One teacher who attended said, “Thank you for all your hard work (and amazing) organization of the day! I sure hope this continues! It was one of the best field trips I have had the opportunity to take students on. I speak as a teacher of 29 years in four states, so kudos to everyone involved! There wasn’t a station that my class didn’t enjoy or learn from!”

Farm and Ranch Tours Ignite an Interest in Local Agriculture

Sanders County MSU Extension offered a series of Farm and Ranch Tours in conjunction with local producers this summer and fall. The tour season started at a newly developed lavender farm where participants made their own teas to help with health and well-being, learned about growing mushrooms in buckets, and toured beautiful lavender fields.

Our local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) gave us a tour of several greenhouses and taught us about irrigation systems, new and improved gardening tools, how to set up a greenhouse, and starting seeds. Other educational tours included a shrimp farm, blueberry farm, fruit orchard, large gardens, regenerative organic farm, and Mangalitsa Heritage pig farm. The end of summer brought a beautiful day tour of three local vineyards and a winery, a unique experience of seeing and tasting Montana grapes and wine.

The highlight of the tour season included two historic horseback tours of local cattle ranches. Participants stepped back in time to learn the history of the ancestors of county MSU Extension Agent Wendy Carr. Riders explored still-standing homesteads, a one-room schoolhouse, and post office remains as they learned the history of actual people who made a go of homesteading the area or who couldn’t, and left. The second horseback tour included a ride on the Whiskey Trail where bootleggers transported and delivered moonshine during prohibition. Riders roamed where the buffalo roamed when gathered up by local cowboys. Tour attendees explored the deep history of two ranches on the Flathead Indian Reservation while also learning about the cattle and crops the ranches currently raise.

Community Comes Together to Renovate 4-H Indoor Exhibit Building

The Sanders County 4-H Indoor Exhibit Building on the county fairgrounds had been in dire need of renovation for years. The project finally came to fruition and was completed



Top Row: (left) State 4-H Sanders County Delegation, by Erin Brush; **(right)** Microgreen Growing Station, by Kassy Moore, MT Wild Roots; **Center Row: (left)** Veterinary Science Education learning station at Ag Day, by Wendy Carr; **(right)** Historic horseback tour of local cattle ranch, by Wendy Carr; **Bottom Row: (left)** 4-H youth member learning to build shelf platforms for the renovated Sanders County 4-H Indoor Exhibit building, by Juli Thurston; **(right)** Avista Golf Tournament chairperson Sean Kelly, 4-H members and volunteers, by Ashley Devol

in 2022 just in time for upgrades to be shown off at the Sanders County Fair. The Sanders County 4-H Council applied for and was awarded grants to complete the project from the Montana 4-H Foundation, Northwestern Energy, Blackfoot Communications, and the Montana Department of Agriculture. Local Studs Building Supply also donated a portion of the wood siding. Volunteers, community members, and 4-H youth members all came together to remove old siding, pull thousands of staples, remove water stains from windows, paint, sand, build shelf platforms, and put up new pine wood wall décor. Youth members learned construction skills and how the community can come together to make a difference. Now on to our next project of staining the floor!

This year's tournament was highly successful and well-attended. All sponsorship dollars and donations went directly to Sanders County 4-H, breaking their fundraising record by raising \$23,600. Local 4-H clubs, their members, parents and volunteers gathered sponsors and silent auction items and helped promote and volunteer during the event. Proceeds have been put into a Montana 4-H Foundation-managed account and will help the Sanders County 4-H Program impact youth development for years to come!

Charity Golf Tournament and Online Auction

Sanders County 4-H was selected this year as the recipient of the Avista 12th Annual Charity Golf Tournament and Online Auction. The Avista Charity Golf Tournament was introduced in 2009 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Clark Fork Management Committee and the 50th anniversary of Avista's Noxon Rapids Hydroelectric Dam. Avista has continued the annual golf tournament as part of its ongoing commitment to support the communities in and around Sanders County. Past beneficiaries include Sanders County Council on Aging, Thompson River Animal Care Shelter, Sanders County Coalition for Families, Sanders County Community Housing, Cancer Network of Sanders County, Senior Citizen Centers of Sanders County, Western Montana Mental Health Center, and Project ASCENT.

Community businesses were asked to sponsor or be an auction donor for this year's tournament. By helping support this event, they were promoting their company to a group of loyal patrons of area businesses, and to the many area citizens who participated in the charity golf tournament itself.

Sanders County Staff



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

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