

# Sweet Grass County



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*Crazy Mountains in Big Timber by Kandi Schuman.*

**S**weet Grass County is located in south-central Montana. Sweet Grass County became a county in 1895, formed from parts of Park, Meagher, and Yellowstone Counties. The county is 1,855 square miles of various topography. The current population is 3,824. Ranching and mining are the primary economic drivers. Sweet Grass County was known for its raw wool in the early part of the 1900s and was the largest inland shipping point in the United States for raw wool. Today, platinum and palladium are mined in the Absaroka Beartooth Mountain range south of Big Timber. The mine is home to one of the purest forms of these valuable minerals and employs many residents in Sweet Grass County. The Crazy Mountains also reside in Sweet Grass County. There are several theories on how this range was named. The Native Americans called them the Mad Mountains for their rugged beauty and haunting winds that blow down the canyons. Geology plays a part in another theory. The lava upthrusts are young in the perspective of geological time and do not fit in with neighboring rock formations, hence the name “crazy,” or because of being wholly disconnected from any other range and being a sort of “crazy” formation.

## Rancher education gets diversified

Following two years of Covid-19 restrictions and a year of severe drought, Sweet Grass County MSU Extension teamed with the Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers to bring diversified educational programs to producers. The rancher series started with a program on different risk management strategies for cattle producers. Ten attended this seminar and learned about futures contracts, options, the Livestock Risk Protection program, and how to use each product.

The next presentation in the series focused on irrigation water measurement, with over 40 producers attending. Irrigators learned about the various devices and structures used to measure irrigation water, how to install them, and how to read each structure’s measurements. Producers also learned about water rights and how they are enforced and applied during irrigation season.

The third part of the program focused on mental health. Sweet Grass County MSU Extension and the Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers applied for and received a Department of Agriculture grant for \$10,000 to invite a speaker to discuss mental health issues faced by producers and youth in rural locations.



The guest presenter did a school day presentation to 200 Big Timber Grade School students and Sweet Grass County High School students. He then did an evening presentation for more than 50 adults. Discussion at the end of the program among the adult participants focused on the fact that mental health is a real concern for producers who struggle to discuss this issue, as most of the time they work alone and perceive mental health as an issue that needs to be dealt with internally.

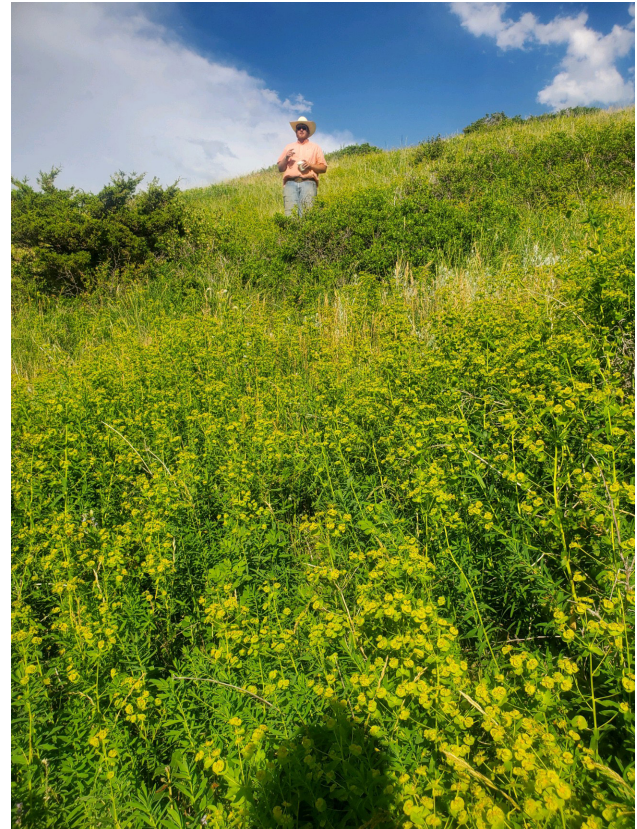
The final group discussion of the rancher series focused on the actual use and implementation of the Livestock Risk Protection program for cattle risk management. Thirty-eight producers participated in this evening program, learning about the implementation and requirements for using the government-subsidized LRP program. Eleven ranchers reported implementing the risk management strategies discussed.

These collaborative programs between Sweet Grass County MSU Extension and the Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers will continue in the winter months of 2023.

## Pesticide applicator programs

2022 was a recertification year for private pesticide applicators in region 5, which includes Sweet Grass County. Sweet Grass County MSU Extension and the Sweet Grass County Noxious Weed Coordinator worked together to host three large educational days to help producers learn new formulations and techniques for controlling the growing population of noxious weeds. Producers learned about new formulations of herbicides for control of invasive grasses that are starting to show up in our county. Producers also learned about noxious weed identification, equipment maintenance, calibration, and water quality related to herbicide efficiency.

In total, over 278 land managers took part in the educational seminars and received credits toward re-certification of their Montana Private Applicator licenses. Noxious weeds constitute one of the largest economic impacts on agricultural lands, both crop and range land in Sweet Grass County. In regions of the county, like up the Boulder River drainage, the spread of Leafy Spurge is estimated at impacting close to 40% of the private lands.



**Top:** Mental Health Speaker, by Kandi Schuman;  
**Bottom:** A producer's trouble with leafy spurge, by Marc King

## Sweet Grass County Staff



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

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