



Welcome to Chouteau County

Chouteau County is located in North Central Montana about 100 miles south of the Canadian border. Chouteau County was established in 1865 and was one of the original nine counties of the Montana Territory. Once being the largest county in the Montana Territory and second largest in the United States, Chouteau County is now an area of 3,936 square miles.

With a population of about 5,700, Fort Benton, Big Sandy, Geraldine and Highwood are the largest communities, with smaller communities in Carter, Loma, Floweree, Shonkin and Square Butte.

The terrain is primarily gently rolling plains that are dissected in the central portion by the eastward flowing Missouri River. The land is a complex mix of uplands, valleys, coulees and broad plains. In addition to the Missouri River, the Marias and Teton Rivers are additional surface water sources.

As part of the Golden Triangle where prime conditions produce bountiful crops, Chouteau County is Montana's top producing county of winter wheat. With these statistics, it is no wonder agriculture production and agriculture-related businesses are the top industry.

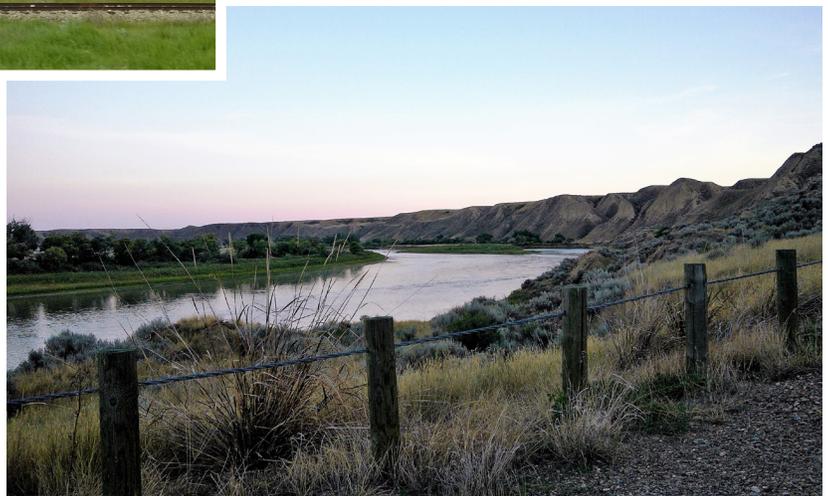
CHOUTEAU COUNTY

"Birthplace of Montana"

National Wild and Scenic Missouri River
Historic Sites of Lewis and Clark Expedition
Top County in Wheat Production in Montana



Left to right: Shep Monument; Highwoods; Missouri River. Photos by Janell Barber



Youth development and agricultural education

National 4-H Western Heritage Conference and Championship Shoot Hosted by Chouteau County

If you were in Fort Benton in early August 2017, you might have thought you traveled back in time. The past came alive with 4-H contestants and other registrants exhibiting their 1860-1900 period clothing and western action shooting skills for the National 4-H Western Heritage Conference and Championship Shoot.

With 84 competitors and an additional 275 participants from Kansas, Missouri, California, Colorado and Montana, Fort Benton residents and other visitors to the area were exposed to a phenomenal representation of how 4-H links the history of the frontier west to our youth of today through hands-on learning.

The Montana 4-H state office, assisted by Chouteau County MSU Extension agents and staff, other area agents and local community members collaborated successfully with the Fort Benton Chamber of Commerce and Montana Agriculture Museum and Agriculture Center and other local community businesses. Numerous individuals lent their hands in presenting workshops, giving tours, judging, scoring and many other logistical needs.

It was a unique experience for our community members to experience and learn about the benefits of what 4-H youth gain in the Western Heritage Project. These included connecting the youth with the values and traditions of our past, creating an investigative interest in American Frontier history, which leads to personal research and increased knowledge of the Old West, and recognizing the accomplishments and importance of both men and women from a variety of cultures and races that contributed to the history of the Old West. Youth benefitted from hands-on historical learning and the economic impact on local businesses was beneficial as well.

Sustainable Agriculture

MSU Extension in Chouteau County provides research-based agricultural education and outreach to farmers and ranchers.

Agricultural education and outreach for farmers was achieved through The Golden Triangle Pulse 101 workshop, the Golden Triangle cropping seminar and MSU Agricultural Research Center / MSU Extension in Chouteau County (MARC/MECC) field days and Integrated Pest Management diagnosis and education.



Left to right, National 4-H Western Heritage Conference events: Scavenger Hunt created by Chouteau County 4-H Ambassadors Andrea Rutledge and Jordee Bomgardner; candle making workshops. Photos by Janell Barber



Harvest field. Photo by Janell Barber

A collaborative effort of the Golden Triangle MSU Extension agents made the Golden Triangle Pulse 101 workshop possible. Presenters educated 270 producers in Conrad and Fort Benton about pulse disease, pulse production, pulse management, inoculants and pesticides. A total of 63 producers noted changes they were going to make to their operation as a result of attending the workshop. A \$130 per acre increase in profitability from pulse crops compared to winter wheat on 200 acres per farm, results in a \$1,638,000 advantage over winter wheat. Enhanced management options help individuals and families improve quality of life through increased economic stability.

The Golden Triangle cropping seminar educated 44 producers about integrated pest management, crop disease, business management, cereal crop varieties and ground squirrel control. One producer will try different spring or winter wheat varieties (\$40,000 estimated economic impact on one 2,000 acre farm). Again, enhanced management choices help individuals and families improve quality of life through increased economic stability.

MARC/MECC field days near The Knees, Loma and Highwood educated 58 producers on management of cereal grains and low pH soils.

Agricultural education and outreach for ranchers was achieved through a collaborative effort between the Chouteau County Livestock Protective Association and Chouteau County MSU Extension. Recommended by the Agricultural Advisory Council of MSU Extension in Chouteau County, Darrin Boss gave a presentation on cover crop grazing from a cattleman's perspective. Two producers are going to adopt cover crop grazing as part of their grazing management system. Research has shown that haying a cover crop can yield a \$55 per acre profit over crop fallow. Two ranches with 100 acres of cover crop could produce an \$11,000 profit.

The Agricultural Advisory Council of MSU Extension voted in favor of Chouteau County MSU Extension purchasing a microscope for pest diagnosis and one-on-one teaching. Because of the purchase of the microscope and usage by the Chouteau County Extension Agent, one Chouteau County producer saved \$2,000 in fungicide expenses by prompt diagnosis and verification of general fungi in chickpea. The producer had sprayed for *Ascochyta* blight 10 days prior and was concerned the blight had come back.

Healthy Matters

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 48 million people get sick each year from a foodborne illness. Foodborne illnesses are preventable with safe handling of foods when they are stored, prepared and served. ServSafe is a food safety and food handling class, and Montana now mandates that food-related businesses meet minimum training and staffing standards. ServSafe training programs are available in different certification levels. Four ServSafe eight-hour manager classes were held over the past year. Of 11 attendees, 45% received a passing score and became certified. This certification ensures their knowledge of safe food handling practices, along with ensuring others in the food establishment will also prevent food from being contaminated with foodborne illnesses.

It is also important to practice food safety during home food preservation. The food preservation classes held in 2017 included canning

Meals in a Jar and apples. In collaboration with the Toole County MSU Extension agent, we offered two classes in Shelby and two classes in Fort Benton. Participants received hands-on instruction using pressure canners, a steam juicer and some of the new Ball canning equipment, including an electric hot water bath canner, jam and jelly maker and a fruit and vegetable saucer. By showing the equipment, we were able to demonstrate time-saving and easier methods when canning food.

Many participants are surprised to learn there is new research on canning food safely and there have been improvements in canning equipment. This means the way they remembered their mother or grandmother canning may not be safe any more. Through our classes, we provide updated hands-on experiences and information for participants to use in their homes and share with others. One class participant had seen on social media that someone experienced a canning problem and shared it with our office. We shared correct information with the person who experienced the problem, and they were pleased to find out what happened and why, and what to do differently for their next canning experience.



Photos by Janell Barber



Chouteau County MSU Extension offered the Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP)[™]. DEEP assists people to feel empowered to take control of diabetes and their health. The six-week series of sessions included 14 participants. Topics discussed included: understanding the human body, understanding diabetes and its risk factors, monitoring your body, importance of physical activity, nutrition, diabetes complications, medication and medical care and the stress of diabetes and coping. The response after completing this series of sessions was highly positive. One participant said they obtained a clearer understanding of the class and had never heard it put so simply. Another participant had struggled for years to get their A1C to a level that was low enough for a medical-related procedure. She indicated this class and the support of the group helped her make the necessary changes to lower her A1C and was able to have the procedure done.

Learning in Progress with Local Youth

Chouteau County youth education and outreach was achieved through the following events:

- Chouteau County 4-H youth received Market Animal Quality Assurance (MAQA) certification and 4-H carcass management education. MAQA is a program designed to teach 4-H youth about producing a quality product. The goal is to assure livestock buyers that they are purchasing a safe, nutritious and good tasting product. Youth learn the importance of taking good care of their market animals. The end result is promotion of market animal quality, 4-H and the livestock industry.
- 4-H camp took place at the Kiwanis campground south of Havre. Seven Chouteau County youth and one Chouteau County camp counselor participated with Blaine, Phillips, Toole, Hill, Liberty, Pondera and Glacier counties. The camp was an excellent opportunity for youth to meet new people and develop confidence and leadership skills.



Photos by Janell Barber

- Chouteau County Ag Days educated 100 fourth and fifth graders about the importance of agriculture to Chouteau County and the state of Montana. Planning for the event was a collaborative effort between Chouteau County MSU Extension, the conservation districts, school principals, FFA, 4-H, NRCS and Farmers Union. Youth learned about soils, making cheese, entomology, watersheds and livestock on the farm and ranch.
- 4-H youth participated in Project/ Demonstration Day. Youth participated in hands-on activities and developed skills in gardening, photography, livestock production, CPR, food preparation and safety and public speaking. Sarai McCollaum, Miss Rodeo Montana 2017, spoke to the youth participants about her experience as Miss Rodeo Montana and the importance of public speaking skills in her role as Miss Rodeo Montana.
- Chouteau County 4-H was represented by four youth delegates at Montana 4-H Congress in Bozeman. Two of our Ambassadors joined in early to attend pre-Congress and completed the State Ambassador Officer selection process. Andrea Rutledge from Big Sandy was elected President and hit the roads of Montana immediately to attend and help at many of the summer county fairs promoting 4-H and spreading its positive outcomes and opportunities. She continues traveling the state attending and presenting at many events, including the Chouteau County Agriculture Business Day.
- The Legislative Breakfast and meeting our local Senator was a great educational experience for six Chouteau County 4-H youth members.
- Chouteau County MSU Extension provided noxious weed awareness and hunter/land owner education to youth at Farmers Union Camp and at county hunter safety classes.
- The Chouteau County 4-H Fair provided educational opportunities including project interview judging, posters and individual project displays, livestock judging, market livestock weigh-in, bred-heifer ultrasounds, market animal showmanship and confirmation, the heifer show, small animal show, round robin, awards ceremony, market livestock sale, 4-H carcass judging and working in the Chuckwagon.

Fundamentals for Farm Families Forum

Sessions at the Farm Families Forum included developing a disaster evacuation plan, varmint control, and farm safety. In addition, a panel discussion took place where experienced farm and ranch women shared information about their own experiences. Evacuation Planning was taught by Deborah Gessaman (Chouteau County

Fundamentals for Farm Families Forum

November 2, 2017
Community Church, 911 16th St
Fort Benton



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Disaster Emergency Services). She addressed the evacuation supply list, child preparedness and pet preparedness. Stephen Vantassel (Vertebrate Pest Specialist for the Department of Agriculture) covered wildlife varmints that find their way into the home or backyard. Wildlife covered were mice, rats, skunks, raccoons, squirrels and snakes. Farm safety was hands-on and presented by Tyler Lane (MSU Extension Chouteau County), Chouteau County Farm Bureau and Chouteau County firefighters. Families learned how to safely utilize farm tools, pesticide personal protective equipment, fire-fighting tools and ATVs.

One producer wrote that farm and fire safety education was the most valuable. According to the Montana Department of Labor, 22% of 2014 fatalities in Montana happened on farms and ranches. Teaching farm safety awareness improves quality of life, economic stability, social stability and community development.

Chouteau County Juniors and Seniors Learn about Agricultural Career Opportunities

Chouteau County agricultural businesses educated 96 up-and-coming high school graduates on employment opportunities in Chouteau County in an effort to promote Chouteau County Growth and agricultural-related careers. Approximately 20 Chouteau County businesses educated juniors and seniors about agricultural career opportunities in Chouteau County. Businesses were represented by people in many professions at the event, including agronomists, elevator managers, insurance agents, agricultural equipment suppliers, agricultural engineers, agricultural technologists, bankers, financial planners, attorneys, entrepreneurs,

animal scientists, agricultural education instructors, Extension agents and agricultural agencies. Andrea Rutledge, President of the Montana 4-H State Ambassador Team from Big Sandy was a guest speaker.

The Agricultural Business Day is a collaborative effort between Chouteau County Agricultural businesses, Chouteau County MSU Extension, Big Sandy High School, Fort Benton High School, Geraldine High School and Highwood High School. Our gracious sponsors included the Montana Agriculture Center, Chouteau County Farm Bureau, Montana Farmers Union and Montana Grain Growers Association.



MSU Extension Chouteau County Booth. Photo by Janell Barber

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