



Welcome to Judith Basin County

Judith Basin County is located in central Montana in a fertile basin between the Highwood, Big Snowy, and Little Belt mountains. The county population is 2,016. The principal communities are Stanford, Hobson and Geysler. Numerous other small communities are in the county. Judith Basin County's economy is based on agriculture. The major components of this industry include livestock, small grains and forage production. The county ranks tenth in Montana for beef cattle numbers, tenth in winter wheat production, fifteenth in barley production, twenty-fourth for spring wheat production, fourth for alfalfa hay production, and twenty-first for other hay production. Timber and mining enterprises take place on a small scale. The MSU Central Ag Research Center is located in the county. The Judith Basin 4-H programs consist of 90 youth members and 29 volunteer leaders in four organized clubs. The county offers a variety of recreational opportunities, which include hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, snowmobiling and skiing. A major ski area is about 45 minutes from Stanford. The Judith Basin was the home of the legendary western artist Charlie Russell. Many of his paintings were scenes captured by the artist between Lewistown and Great Falls.

Stanford and nearby Utica have several museums of interest. Recreation opportunities abound in the nearby Lewis and Clark National Forest, Judith River Wildlife

Management Area and Ackley Lake State Park. The Judith River Wildlife Management Area, at the edge of the Little Belt Mountains, is a good place to view large elk herds in late fall and winter. Raynesford is an agriculturally-rich area. The homesteading boom from 1908 to 1915 and the extension of the Great Northern Railroad played an important role in the development of this area. Moccasin also began as a homestead community. In 1908, the Montana State legislature created the Central Montana Agriculture Research Center, three miles west of Moccasin. The purpose of the center was to teach dryland farming techniques to newly arrived homesteaders. Even after the homesteaders bust, the center went on to develop machinery and new crops, improving the area's wheat yields.

Many Finnish homesteaders settled in the Geysler area at the turn of the century. In earlier days, it was a stagecoach-stopping place on the trail from Great Falls to Lewistown. In 1920, Geysler became a rail line station, when the old town was moved to its existing site.



South of Utica



Photo by Katie Hatlelid

Cropping Seminar

Each year, the agents in the Golden Triangle organize and carry out a week-long, traveling workshop on cropping. Topics vary from year to year, depending on what is of interest to producers in the area. In 2017, Dr. Mary Burrows, MSU Extension Plant Pathologist, George Haynes, MSU Professor and Ag Policy Specialist, Dr. Stephen Vantassel, MDA Vertebrate Pest Specialist, and a representative from each area's Ag Research Center were presenters.

Burrows covered a range of topics, with focus on pest identification centering on a hands-on disease identification activity. Haynes focused his talk on the current market climate in agriculture, and some tips for passing the family operation on to the next generation. Vantassel presented various techniques to control pocket gophers, ground squirrels, and voles. Dr. Pat Carr of the Central Ag Research Center presented variety trials underway at CARC.

Of the 30 producers attending, several hold pesticide applicator licenses. This meeting is a point-earning opportunity for the continuing education credits these license holders need for recertification. Being in the last year of the renewal cycle in Judith Basin County, this was one of several opportunities for credits this year.

Pulse Production Workshop

MSU Extension hosted a Pulse Production workshop in February in both Conrad and Fort Benton. This was another collaborative effort by the agents in the area. With decreased commodity prices in cereal grains, there is additional interest in raising pulse crops. This workshop addressed many production and marketing challenges, especially for beginning producers. The workshop reached 270 producers, and covered production, marketing, insurance, disease management, and common mistakes with chemicals and inoculants and concluded with a producer panel. There is a good probability that there will continue to be an increasing number of producers growing pulses in this region. More pulse production education will be offered in the coming years as MSU Extension rises to meet this need.

Impact: A total of 63 producers noted changes, or that they were going to add pulses to their rotation as a result of attending the workshop. Pulse acres present a potential \$130 per acre increase in profitability compared to winter wheat, and at 200 acres per farm, could result in a \$1,638,000 advantage over winter wheat. Enhanced management options help individuals and families improve quality of life through increased economic stability.



Photo by Katie Hatlelid



Photo by Sara Stevenson

State 4-H Horse Show

In September of 2017, Fergus and Judith Basin Counties hosted the State 4-H Horse show in Lewistown at the Fergus County fairgrounds. This event gives 4-Her's across the entire state a chance to compete against each other. Beginning on a Thursday, 91 contestants, their families, and 121 horses came to Lewistown and the fairgrounds to compete. Competition at this state platform is the culmination of a year of hard work, chores, training, and learning the skills necessary to compete at their best. At an event of this size, youth also learn new networking skills and ways to improve while watching other competitors. Many of these youth look forward to the competition, and seeing the friends they've made at past shows is the icing on the cake.

This event takes a tremendous amount of coordination and behind-the-scenes effort. There were a group of volunteers who made up the show committee that did a sizeable amount of work to lay the foundation for this show in a very short amount of time. At the dinner Saturday night, over 200 plates were served. The local economic impact created by events such as this one will be felt in Lewistown for several months. Hosting 200+ people for four days creates increased opportunities for commerce in the area.

Nitrate Tests

The Judith Basin County MSU Extension office conducted over 30 Nitrate QuikTests this year. There was a serious drought from June to September, and many producers chose to hay their winter wheat crops rather than let them finish to grain. When cereal grain crops have been fertilized to meet grain production requirements, there is a high likelihood that drought stress causes the plant to tie up nitrogen fertilizer in the form of nitrate. A high concentration of nitrates can be fatal to animals. There were several tests that came back near or over the safe nitrate margin. Testing this forage saved producers from potentially losing valuable animals and helped to maintain a high calving success rate. For example, if testing for nitrates saved just five producers two calves each; then those weaned calves this fall at 650 lbs. would have been worth about \$1.70/lb. In total, that would have been \$9,350 that was saved for those producers.



Quality hay makes happy cows!



Pesticide Education

This year the Judith Basin County MSU Extension office reached over 200 people with pesticide education opportunities. This was the final year in the renewal cycle for Region 5, in which Judith Basin County lies. License holders have five years to obtain their renewal credits, and the last year is usually a busy one for each region. Six different meetings were held this year, covering topics including: biological control, record keeping, pesticide safety, water quality and use, vertebrate pest control, disease identification, and integrated pest management techniques.

The producers and private landowners in the county work hard to keep weeds managed and under control. The license they hold ensures they get the latest information and safety updates that the industry has to offer. MSU Extension offers a vital service in handling the training and re-certification of these license holders. These meetings are a great way to offer new information and refresh what has been learned previously. It is also a great way to interact with county residents and learn about any other issues or questions that are important to the area.

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