



Welcome to Big Horn County

Big Horn County encompasses over three million acres and over 13,000 residents, creating a land of diversity. Rural and urban, rangeland and industry, past and present, creates a rich tapestry that makes Big Horn County unique. About 65% of Big Horn County is within the Crow Indian Reservation and about 5% is within the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation.

A few of the major tourism destinations in Big Horn County include the Little Bighorn Battlefield, the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, fishing the Bighorn River, and participating in Crow Fair, Teepee Capital of the World.

Agriculture and coal mining are the two primary industries in Big Horn County. Agriculture production in the county includes 76,000 cattle and over 270,000 acres of dryland and irrigated farming. Common crops grown in the area include alfalfa, sugar beets, and small grains.



Bred heifers trailing through the snow on their way to the feed ground.

Big Horn County is Creating Strong Women and Strong Men

The Strong Women & Strong Men Program (SWSM) helps participants keep joints flexible; muscles strong; maintain and increase balance; and improve well-being. In 2018, 82 people participated in Spring and Fall classes. Hand and ankle weights and exercise mats are provided in the free classes which are held at the MSU Extension office.

The Center for Disease Control estimates that millions of people aged 65 and older are treated in emergency departments due to falls. Over 800,000 patients are hospitalized because of falls, most often with a hip or head injury. Falls are among the 20 most expensive medical conditions, averaging \$30,000, and costs increase with age.

Results from Spring 2018 classes show a 100% increase in flexibility to touch toes and increase bicep curl repetitions, 95% increase of marching in place and ability to stand from a seated position, an 85% improvement in reaching their back and standing from a chair to move around a cone and back.

Twice-weekly classes are led by Holly Jay, a trained SWSM leader. A grant for \$1,000 was awarded for eHEART: Healthy Eating and

Activity in Rural Towns, to be used toward improvement of community physical health and nutrition activities by Cornell University.

SWSM participants benefit from improved balance, increased muscular strength and flexibility. Couples also participate, and participants value social interactions. They report:

- “The program is more effective than my physical therapy.”
- “My husband recovered from surgery much sooner.”
- “I have not had shots in my knee since June 2017.”

New Leadership Will Guide the 22nd Year of SNAP-ED Programming in Big Horn County

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-Ed), offers free nutrition and exercise classes to low-income participants. As Big Horn county welcomed 21 years of SNAP-Ed with a new MSU Extension instructor. Sloane Real Bird began as the newest nutrition instructor in June. Through SNAP-Ed, two adult curricula are provided, a 9-week Eating Smart Being Active series, and a onetime CREATES class. Youth programming is provided to first, third and fifth grade students at Lodge Grass, Crow Agency,



Strong Women and Strong Men 2018
Photos by Holly Jay





River Valley Farmer's Market Display

Wyola, Hardin, Pryor, Fort Smith, and St. Xavier elementary schools. Both adult and youth classes include a tasting of a healthy snack or recipe, information on MyPlate, basic food safety, paired with a physical activity. Adult participants also have a chance to learn knife skills, and how to plan healthy meals on a budget. A total of 202 class sessions were taught in Big Horn County. This year 100% of adult participants and 77% of children and youth reported improved diet quality after completing classes. Real Bird has collaborated with the Helping Hands Food Bank in Hardin, the River Valley Farmer's Market, the Best Beginnings Coalition, and the Apsáalooke Abundance is Here Food Sovereignty Group. The work done in these collaborations will help to increase access to healthy foods across Big Horn County. Through these collaborations, Real Bird will also connect the Apsáalooke (Crow) culture and traditional food knowledge with the nutrition information currently being presented.

Invasive Grasses in Big Horn County

Since 2016, there has been more information coming to Montana about the economic impact of invasive grasses on rangelands due to the



Big Horn County producers looking at cheatgrass control plot trials during the Invasive Grasses workshop. Photo by Molly Hammond

introduction of *ventenata* (*Ventenata dubia*) and medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) winter annual grasses. In Big Horn County there have been several sightings reported of *ventenata* and medusahead near the state line. What makes identification of *ventenata* a challenge is its close resemblance to cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), which may be a reason it has been able to spread across Montana before being identified.

In September, Big Horn County MSU Extension partnered with the USDA-NRCS Hardin field office to hold an Invasive Grasses Workshop for area producers. Topics covered included invasive grass identification, information about the Big Horn County Weed District, invasive grass control, and lastly, rangeland renovation when invasive annual grasses are present, with a field trip to cheatgrass control plot sites. Many producers who participated in the workshop reported that seeing the plot sites was very beneficial, and that they would be looking closer to identify and manage invasive grasses on their range. One specifically stated that as a result of the workshop, she intended to make the following change, “Be more observant in monitoring rangeland grasses and not just noxious weeds, [and] possibly spray a test plot area.” Another producer stated, “I need to understand plants and weed ID better.”

The workshop helped more producers become aware of *ventenata* and medusahead prevalence in Big Horn County and the surrounding area, and the economic impacts on an operation. Education is key to continuing the conversation of invasive grass identification and control.

Big Horn County 4-H Program

MSU Extension appreciates all the hard-working volunteers and leaders who make the Big Horn County 4-H program possible, and a huge success. We had another year of increased membership with 133 youth members and 55 adult leaders.

The major highlight of the 4-H year is the Big Horn County Youth and Open Fair, which had over 750 project entries. This event is the culmination of a year's effort for many youth. Thanks to our generous community, the animal project sale generated \$194,643, about a 12% increase over the last two years. Often, youth use earnings from the sale to invest in their future.

Leading up to the fair, there are several other 4-H opportunities for youth to participate. Competition events include Performing Arts, Fashion/Quilt Review, Demonstration/Speech Day, Cook-Off/Edible Arts, Big Horn County Horse Judging, and Big Horn County Livestock Judging. Each of these competitions teaches youth life skills including decision making, critical thinking, and communication.

Lastly, the Big Horn County 4-H program would not be possible without the support of the Big Horn County Commissioners, Big Horn County Fair Board, and the numerous adult volunteers and leaders who donate their time in helping “Make the Best, Better.” The Big Horn County MSU Extension staff thank you for your continued support of Big Horn County youth.



Senior 4-H archery project participants during the Big Horn County Youth and Open Fair shoot.

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