

# Liberty County

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*Agriculture is a way of life for many Liberty County residents, by Janice Hendrickson*

**L**iberty County is located in the heart of the Hi-Line region of north-central Montana. MSU Extension in Liberty County partners with organizations at the county and state level to help people learn and grow in the fields of agriculture, family and consumer science, 4-H and community development. From teaching about mental health awareness in schools, to making sure the community is kept abreast of current agricultural issues and home gardening techniques, to working with youth as they develop lifelong leadership and communication skills, the name of the game in Liberty County is all about helping people and community.

## Master Gardener Class, Level 1

The Master Gardener Class, Level 1, was taught in Liberty County in 2019 for the first time in several years. Eight adult participants and one youth participant met once a week for eight weeks to learn research-based principles of gardening. Students learned about a variety of topics including soils and nutrients, plant growth and development, annuals and perennials, pruning, lawn maintenance, small fruits, and integrated pest management. In addition to the local Extension agents, Toby Day, MSU Extension Horticulture Specialist, also presented to the class.

Class participants learned basic gardening knowledge and became resources of research-based information to their communities. Additionally, participants were encouraged to complete 20 hours of community service to certify as Level 1 Master Gardeners. This further builds the Master Gardener program through serving communities, sharing knowledge, and also develops civic engagement and pride.

## Liberty County Agriculturists are Outstanding in Their Field

Liberty County sits in the heart of the Golden Triangle, one of the main wheat-producing centers of Montana. Liberty County MSU Extension and the Northern Agricultural Research Center continued to collaborate on a spring wheat and durum variety plot tour in July 2019. Peggy Lamb, Research Scientist in Agronomy at the Northern Ag Research Center, was the keynote speaker of the tour and shared research-based information on spring wheat and durum wheat varieties for the area. Kent McVay, PhD, MSU Extension Cropping System Specialist, shared research data on crop rotations and the benefits of no-fallow cropping systems. Anamika Sharma, Western Triangle Ag Research Center research associate, discussed

current research occurring in Liberty County on flea beetle pheromone trapping in canola and mustard crops. Jesse Fulbright, Liberty County MSU Extension agent, related basic biology of the orange wheat blossom midge and updated growers on current levels of the midge found in traps in irrigated spring wheat in Liberty County.

The 25 producers who attended developed a better understanding and awareness of current and upcoming spring wheat and durum varieties that could prove to be economically important. Producers also utilized the opportunity to network with each other and ask questions regarding farming practices for other cropping systems in Liberty County, such as pulse and oilseed crops. As producers look towards varieties and crops that improve yield and other important production factors, Liberty County will continue to be a leader in serving agricultural communities in Montana.

## Statewide 4-H Event Comes to Liberty County

District 2 of Montana 4-H, which consists of the six counties from Glacier to Phillips across the northern tier of Montana, hosted the statewide 4-H Rec Lab at Chester-Joplin-Inverness High School in Chester in March, 2019. Approximately 90 youth and almost 30 adult leaders and volunteers attended this two-day yearly event, which provides an opportunity for youth and adults to enhance their leadership, communication and team building skills in an action-packed and interactive setting.

As the host, Liberty County MSU Extension and the Liberty County 4-H Council facilitated and chaperoned the attending 4-H youth. With a county 4-H population of just over 50 youth and 40 adult volunteers, involving as many 4-H teens and club leaders was necessary to cover all logistics, including organizing meals and helpers for preparing and serving meals. Local 4-H volunteers and youth who helped serve meals contributed over 30 hours of community service.

Youth learned interpersonal relationship skills by interacting with others through team building activities. Youth can attend 4-H Rec Lab if they are 13 years old as of Oct. 1. With permission from all counties in the district and the state 4-H office, underage youth, or those who turned 13 after Oct. 1 and who were in seventh grade from the district, were able to attend for the day. This led to an awareness of Rec Lab and 4-Her's anticipated enrollment in the event next year when they are eligible to attend the entire event. Youth also learned life skills that can help them be more independent and proficient as teen leaders in their respective 4-H clubs.

## Keeping the Farm Together

MSU Extension offered two days of farm management workshops in Chester in spring, 2019.

Sixteen participants from four different counties in the Golden Triangle attended the two-day farm management workshops, which addressed: financial analysis and enterprise budgeting, risk management, crop and livestock production, agricultural leases, agricultural policy issues and business succession.

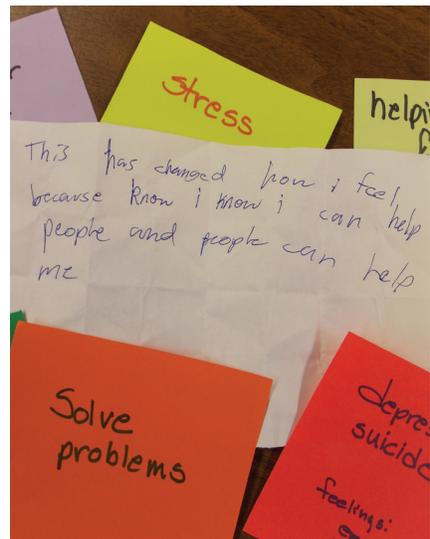
The workshops were facilitated by MSU Extension economists George Haynes, Kate Fuller and Joel Schumacher, and Liberty County Extension. Other contributing faculty members included agricultural economists Anton Bekkerman, Diane Charlton and Eric Belasco; family economist Marsha Goetting; cropping systems specialist Kent McVay; beef cattle specialist Megan Van Emon; rangeland weed specialist Jane Mangold; soil fertility specialist Clain Jones; forage specialist Emily Meccage, and MSU Liberty County Extension agent Jesse Fulbright. Workshops were taught in person or were pre-recorded for faculty who were unable to attend for a specific time or place.

Participants gained a better understanding of estate planning in a farm and ranch setting and had opportunities to practice making decisions regarding enterprise budgets, Farm Bill programs and other financial decision-making tools. Additionally, participation in these workshops satisfied requirements for Farm Service Agency production and financial management training.

## Mental Health Class for Youth Changes Lives

Mental health awareness continues to gain footholds in the everyday lexicon, as well as work and school systems. Recognizing that mental health needn't have a social stigma around it, more and more people are willing to discuss the effects of good and bad mental health on them and those around them. To promote a better understanding of how to maintain positive mental health and how to help those around them, Liberty County MSU Extension has continued to partner with Chester-Joplin-Inverness High School and Liberty County Commissioner Maureen Wicks to offer a 5-hour long curriculum to high school freshmen. The curriculum, titled Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM), showcases an interactive program for youth, promoting increased discussion and knowledge about mental health and the development of problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence.

Over the five-session course in 2019, seven youth gained an awareness of mental health and suicidal thoughts and developed problem-solving skills in relation to those issues.



**Top row: (left)** Master Gardener participants learned the basics of gardening over an eight-week course during the winter of 2019; **(right)** Producers listen carefully as a local researcher talks about ways she is working to improve agriculture in Liberty County, by Jesse Fulbright; **Middle row: (left)** Liberty County 4-H teaches youth that serving their community is vital to civic responsibilities, by Jesse Fulbright; **(center)** Area growers learned about principles of farm and estate planning during a two-day farm management course; **(right)** Crop research; **Bottom row: (left)** Liberty County 4-Hers gathered together for the 2019 4-H Rec Lab, hosted at Chester-Joplin-Inverness High School; **(right)** The impacts of teaching youth about mental health can be life-altering, as evidenced by what one student wrote

Students also recognized the need to think through situations and circumstances to determine the most beneficial actions. Students have also begun to have conversations with their peers about mental health. Youth stated observations from the class:

“I learned that some people will look depressed and you need to realize it, and how to help people in many different ways.”

“I’ve learned the importance of mental health and some signs to look for.”

“I’ve learned signs that might be a sign of depression or suicide. It has changed my perspective on how to deal with things.”

“This class made me more aware of everyone’s actions and feelings.”

“We learned the signs and how to help, so we are skilled in helping anyone.”

## Liberty County Staff



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