

2020 MSU EXTENSION HIGHLIGHTS

Beaverhead County



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Branding, by Laney Brentano.

Founded in 1865, Beaverhead County is Montana's largest county with an area of 5,571 square miles. Of the 3.566 million acres of land, 69% is publicly owned, which contributes to the sparse population. The population density in Beaverhead County is less than 1.7 people per square mile, with an average cattle population density of 27.6 per square mile. The economy is driven largely by agriculture, mostly cattle and hay production, but tourism and recreation also contribute. Beaverhead County ranks first among Montana counties in beef cattle production and annual forage production.

Agriculture

As the largest annual forage producing county in the state, Beaverhead County farmers and ranchers must be cautious of high nitrate concentrations in their feed. Barley, oats, and triticale were the most common nitrate accumulating small grains grown in the county. This year, in Beaverhead County MSU Extension, 107 nitrate tests were conducted by the office. After producers cut and baled the feed, our office cored and sent 64 samples to the American Ag Lab to be tested for nitrate concentration and forage value. Using the information from these tests, livestock producers were able to make decisions about the class of livestock and the ration to be fed.

With over 150,000 beef cattle and 15,000 sheep, animal agriculture is one of the largest economic drivers in Beaverhead County. The Southwest Montana Stockmen's Association (SWMSA) and Beaverhead County Livestock Protective Committee (LPC) partner with Beaverhead County MSU Extension to provide resources for ranchers. The LPC generates funds from local livestock producers to safeguard the animal agriculture industry. The SWMSA provides a forum for producers to learn about legislation, rules, and regulations that will affect their operations. This association of roughly 70 ranches and agricultural businesses usually meets twice a year to discuss the latest ranching challenges and triumphs. This year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the SWMSA met once using an online and in-person forum.

The Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage (NWSFF) program is vital to maintain the ecological integrity of our public lands. Seven returning growers and one new grower participated in the NWSFF program by having 434 acres of forage inspected. Growers can see a higher return on investment when selling this certified forage.

Beaverhead County 4-H

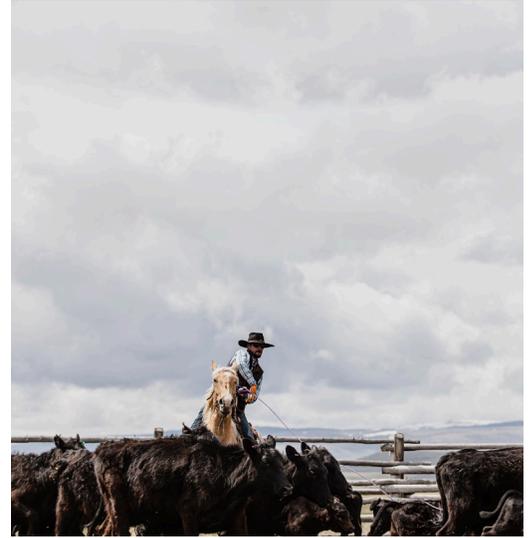
The Beaverhead County 4-H Program includes 190 youth in 10 clubs. Youth ages 6-19 are given the opportunity to

explore education and interests by participating in activities. Sixty-five adult volunteers help to deliver the program to the county's youth.

This year Beaverhead County had 135 youth participate in a livestock project. Livestock Quality Assurance was a paper/homework activity this year due to COVID-19; it teaches youth best production practices for their own safety and safety of the animals. Beaverhead County youth achieved high honors with processed animals in the carcass division this year with 24 Symbol of Excellence, 6 Steer of Merit, and 14 Certified Lamb awards.

Building exhibit projects numbered 130 this year, from crocheting and baking, to gardening and welding. Members learn new life skills in these projects they may not otherwise have the opportunity to discover. Usually, members participate in local food festivals, farmers markets, or project days. The shooting sports program is sustaining high enrollment with 36 archery members, 12 air rifle members, and 8 shotgun members. Shooting sports members practice weekly to hone in on skills and compete in the Beaverhead Invitational and fair shoot.

Due to COVID-19 adjustments, Beaverhead County youth missed a few annual competitions: the local communications rodeo, Beaverhead Bonanza livestock show, and style revue. They were still able to compete at fair in an altered format. Livestock projects arrived, were weighed, and shown the same day. Youth then took animals to a feedlot in the evening to be sorted onto trucks after the fair. The livestock sale was a hybrid format, where there were no youth or animals, but bidders were welcome in person and online. The building projects members were interviewed but didn't have a public display, while horse and rodeo projects were completed prior to fair. Even under unique circumstances in 2020, Beaverhead County 4-H members and supporters persevered and had a successful year.



Top: Branding in Beaverhead County, by Laney Brentano; **Bottom:** Photos for the 4-H sale catalog were taken at home in 2020, by Schuett Family

Beaverhead County Staff



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