

Chouteau County



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A frosty day on the Missouri River at Fort Benton, by Janell Barber.

Chouteau County, established in 1865, was one of the original nine counties of the Montana Territory. Once the largest county in the Montana Territory and second largest in the United States, Chouteau County covers over 3900 square miles. With a population of 5700+, the county includes the larger communities of Fort Benton, Big Sandy, Geraldine and Highwood, and smaller communities of Carter, Loma, Floweree, Shonkin and Square Butte. As part of the Golden Triangle, Chouteau County is the top producing county of winter wheat in the state. It is no wonder agriculture production and agricultural-related businesses are the top industries.

Positive Outcomes From Health Struggles

For people living with chronic physical and mental conditions like arthritis, diabetes, lung or heart complications, uncertainty, loneliness, despair and suffering are their reality every day. To bring them together to learn about and incorporate some positive changes into managing and living with chronic conditions, Chouteau County MSU Extension and the Chouteau County Public Health offices partnered to offer the Montana Living Life Well Chronic Disease Management Program. Eight participants engaged in six sessions held once per week.

For a rural and small community, one of the unexpected surprises was having a group of people who had mostly never met each other. By the conclusion, they connected through their similarities and differences. Even though they did not share the same chronic conditions, they felt supported by each other, realizing they were not alone and looked forward to coming each week. These eight participants successfully completed weekly SMART goal activities related to improving their physical activity, nutrition, to-do lists and self-care. They celebrated successes and supported one another when challenges arose. They reassessed and brain-stormed ideas together about what could be done differently when life did not go as planned.

From the perspective of the presenters, the observed outcomes and successes well-exceeded the objectives of the program. The participants conquered aspects of their lives they did not have knowledge about or confidence to try before the class. One participant shared “valuable information” was gained from the class and another said “meeting other people who have as much pain and coping with it as I do” was what they liked most about the class. Participants gave high ratings to the program around: feeling more confident about making decisions to improve their health; learning new tools for better problem solving; and, learning more about how to deal with difficult emotions.

Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources

Agricultural education and outreach for farmers was achieved through the Golden Triangle Cropping Seminar. Thirty-five producers learned about oilseed production, agricultural product marketing, Alzheimer's disease, web-based tools for agricultural producers, and fungicide efficacy in Montana crops. Five producers planned to use the Southern Agricultural Research Center web-based tools to assist with management decisions. If five producers managing 2,000 acres were able to save 50 pounds per acre in a urea fertilizer application, their cost savings could total \$50,000.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) of Wheat Stem Sawfly and Ascochyta Blight was presented at Initial Pesticide Applicator Trainings in Hingham, Chester, Fort Benton, and Billings. There were 118 producers who were updated on IPM of the wheat stem sawfly and Ascochyta blight in chickpeas. Producers developed knowledge and understanding of integrated pest management, promoting profitability, and sustainability of agricultural operations. After the update, they commented on the need to keep better records, use more rotational crops, scout their peas more, and learn about the Bobcat winter wheat variety and to learn how to better identify different insect infestations.

Calibration of Sprayers (Shortcut Methods) was presented at the Initial Pesticide Applicator Training in Hingham. Producers were updated on calibration techniques and shortcut formulas to increase spraying efficacy. Producers developed knowledge and understanding of research-based calibration techniques, promoting profitability, and sustainability of agricultural operations.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) presentation of Pale Western Cutworm, Army Cutworm, and Wheat Stem Sawfly in Carter. Producers developed knowledge and understanding of IPM, promoting profitability, and sustainability of agricultural operations. One producer commented that they will scout fields more often.

Pheromone traps were distributed and monitored for Orange Wheat Blossom Midge Monitoring (OWBM) and Wheat Head Army Worm (WHAW). Counts and sweeps were below threshold levels.

Testing for soil moisture took place in Chouteau County on March 24-26. All winter wheat locations exceeded 3.5 feet of stored soil moisture. Stubble plots located in the southern regions near Geraldine, Great Falls and Highwood and other sites near the Knees and the Kenilworth highway had excellent recropping potential.



Top: Alzheimer's and Memory Loss presentation was offered during the 2020 Cropping Seminar, by Janell Barber; **Bottom:** View of Square Butte, by Janell Barber

Chouteau County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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