Garfield County has been called the furthest place from anywhere in the Continental United States. The county seat of Jordan sits in the middle of the 3.1 million acre region. Sand Springs greets traveler on the western half of the county on Highway 200, while Cohagen marks the midpoint of the southern half of the landscape on Highway 59. Brusett is a well-recognized region in the northwest that is only accessible on dirt roads. The Missouri River Breaks and Fort Peck Lake create the northern boundary, offering recreationalists a very diverse destination when visiting the county.

There are approximately 1,250 people in Garfield County, with 600 in the incorporated town of Jordan. Agriculture is the primary industry and the collective culture of the population. Dryland wheat and barley are the predominate crops, followed by annual forages and a scattering of pulse crops. Cattle, both purebred operations and commercial herds dominate the landscape. While a historical sheep producing community, the sheep numbers have dwindled the past 20 years to only a few thousand head.

Tourism in the forms of fishing, hunting, boating, and dinosaur digging are available throughout the year. The Hell Creek Formation and the Hell Creek State Park recreational area on Fort Peck Lake draw people from all over the world.

Agriculture in Garfield County

Garfield County is agriculture. As such, a large portion of the work in the MSU Extension office is directed to production agriculture and working with producers to be efficient, productive, proactive and up-to-date with current issues. Forage production is key to livestock viability. MSU Extension in Garfield County works with forage producers year-round to evaluate livestock feeding requirements and safety. The development of mixed rations for livestock help growers to reduce total feed cost and meet the nutritional demands of their animals based on production year. Nitrates can play a large role in hay production and livestock health. Elevated nitrates can lead to discounted hay prices, poor livestock performance, and potential livestock deaths. To minimize the risk of nitrates for hay producers and livestock operators, MSU Extension works to provide research-based production methods to reduce nitrate accumulation in forages and offers testing of forages for nitrate levels. The new testing procedures used by Extension agents offer more reliable results that can be used in management decisions.

MSU Extension in Garfield County has been working with farmers to identify potential herbicide resistance and methods to mitigate the impacts of resistant weeds. In the past
few years, area farmers have been faced with resistant Kochia and Marestail. These plants can be a challenge to control when traditional herbicides no longer work. In cooperation with landowners in 2020, the Extension agent worked to identify potential resistant plants and develop management plans to address the problems with area farms.

2020 Challenges in Agriculture

2020 presented challenges to almost everyone in Garfield County. Destructive grasshoppers wreaked havoc on pasture, crops and gardens from mid-summer through the fall. MSU Extension worked with many individuals to find options and solutions for hopper management. Price of return versus price of management models were used to help make rational decision for crops and pastures. In gardens, emotional response won out; therefore, educational materials and validated methods of control were advocated to reduce the destruction hoppers created in most yards and gardens in the county.

The Huff wildfire had a dramatic impact to the community in September. Thousands of acres of fall grazing coupled with the entire hay crop were burned in a single afternoon. Livestock were scattered and fences wiped out. MSU Extension worked with local emergency units to manage post-fire issues and provided assistance to some impacted producers in the form of feed and livestock management options. 2021 will bring the need for grazing, revegetation, and weed management education and assistance to the forefront for many of the affected operations.

4-H Shooting Sports

The 4-H Shooting Sports project combines life experiences, self-discipline and positive attitudes to build self esteem, goal setting capabilities and a sense of personal accomplishment. The shooting sports program has over 30 members in the county. The youth meet on a regular basis in the winter to develop their skills and mental mindset to be successful in the project. In the spring, most of the members attend the Montana State 4-H match in Bozeman. The event is a goal unto itself. Shooters look forward to competing against others from across the state. One of the club members recently commented, “I have gained confidence in myself because of 4-H shooting sports. I have learned that I can meet my goals if I work hard.”

4-H Youth Development

Youth development helps provide young people with opportunities to learn while engaged in their own experiences. 4-H is an integral part of MSU Extension in Garfield County, with five traditional and active 4-H clubs and a shooting sports club, which represent 80 youth from ages 6 to 18.
On the line in Bozeman at a shooting match, by Eric Miller; Families at the Garfield County Fair, by Eric Miller.
2020 provided challenges to all walks of life, including traditional 4-H programs. New methods were needed to provide a traditional fair and fair sale. 2020 marked the first virtual livestock sale in Garfield County, which was coupled with increased marketing via the internet and traditional radio spots. All 4-H youth learned how to prepare for the sale and provide marketing information well in advance. The youth worked with MSU Extension to document and discuss their livestock projects and included the information to the general public.