

Ravalli County



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The Bitterroot Valley and Bitterroot Mountain Range, by Patrick Mangan.

Nestled between two mountain ranges in western Montana, Ravalli County and the Bitterroot Valley are a haven for those who wish to live the Montana lifestyle. The 43,000 residents of Ravalli County enjoy blue-ribbon trout fishing on the Bitterroot River, hunting, hiking, and recreating in the Bitterroot National Forest, and partake in a diverse and growing local food scene. Agriculture, natural resources, recreation and tourism, health care, construction, and small business opportunities all combine to contribute to the county economic base. There are nine small, rural communities spread through the valley. The Ravalli County MSU Extension office has five staff members offering services to all Ravalli County residents, offering a wide diversity of programs to address the county's needs and interests.

Meeting Ravalli County residents where they are with agriculture and horticulture programming

Weed Science Pubs, Online Vegetable Journals, Virtual Fruit Conferences, and Sustainable Gardens for the Pandemic: meeting Ravalli County residents where they are with agriculture and horticulture programming.

Agriculture and horticulture programming in Ravalli County strived to connect with county citizens and constituents in a variety of settings, being responsive to needs and providing educational content to land owners, backyard gardeners, farmers and ranchers, and horticulturalists across the county and state.

Agricultural Science Pub Series:

Ravalli County MSU Extension started a partnership with a local brew pub in the town of Stevensville, to host agri-science themed speakers and lectures hosted in the pub environment. More than 80 participants attended the first two pub lectures, combining up-to-date science information with good food and drink. The series was put on pause in the spring, but plans to come back someday when social gathering is again suitable. The first two pub talks covered topics on weed management and herbicide choices, and will expand to include other agricultural science topics. Participants reported a good combination of important information delivered in a comfortable environment.

Montana Berry Growers Conference:

Ravalli County MSU Extension partnered with the Montana Berry Growers Association and the MSU Western Agriculture Research Center to organize and offer an online virtual growers conference in March. The conference, originally planned as an

in-person event, pivoted to online presentations, reaching over 200 participants through five broadcasts. The online format allowed for speakers from across the US and Canada to present to Montana farmers and orchardists about the emergence of high-value berry crops.

Online Gardening Guide and Virtual Presentations for Gardeners:

Agent Patrick Mangan responded to the increasing interest in backyard vegetable gardens this spring by developing and releasing a beginning vegetable and gardening guide, hoping to support local area citizens as they started their first experiences in vegetable gardening. The five-part guide covered soils, garden beds, fertilizers, and planting seeds and plants. Local area presentations and online virtual conversations expanded the opportunities to learn about vegetable production and gardening. The presentations and guide strived to support citizens interested in local food systems.

SNAP Education in Ravalli County

Montana State University Extension provides ‘Buy, Eat, Live, Better,’ Montana’s SNAP-Education program, which supports low-income Montanans in making the healthy choice the easy choice through a dual focus on nutrition and physical activity education and partnering with local and statewide organizations to improve policies, systems, and environments that support healthy behaviors.

The ‘Buy, Eat, Live, Better’ program offers free cooking, nutrition, and physical activity classes to SNAP eligible adults and elementary students in the first, third and fifth grades. A school’s eligibility is based on participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Qualifying Ravalli County schools for Youth Understanding MyPlate (YUM) nutrition classes include Darby, Hamilton, and Victor. These communities are also offered the nine-week ‘Eating Smart, Being Active’ class series to teach adults how to create healthy, nutritious meals while staying within a tight food budget.

Jennifer Murrillo, SNAP Education Instructor, taught interactive lessons for adults and youth to help families with:

- Easy meal planning according to MyPlate
- Stretching limited food dollars
- Increasing physical activity
- Discovering tasty ways to eat healthy
- Improving skills for safe food handling and preparation

For the 2020 grant year, 89 classes were taught with an average of two classes per week and a reach of 292 children and adults with 17 series and 10 ‘Creates’ classes. Modifications were implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Behavior change from the ‘Eating Smart, Being Active’ series and Youth Understanding MyPlate:

- 100% of participants showed improvement in one or more diet quality indicators (i.e., eating fruits, vegetables, red and orange vegetables, dark green vegetables, drinking less regular soda (not diet), drinking less fruit punch, fruit drinks, sweet tea, or sports drinks, and cooking dinner at home).
- 75% of participants showed improvement in one or more physical activity behaviors (i.e., exercising for at least 30 minutes, doing workouts to build and strengthen muscles, or making small changes to be more active).
- 89% of youth improved their diet quality via their abilities to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Recommendations or gained knowledge.
- 40% of youth improved their physical activity practices or gained knowledge.

Hamilton Daly and Victor Schools, O’Hara Commons Sustainability Center, Darby Bread Box Food Pantry, Hamilton Farmers’ Market, and Victor and Hamilton Community Gardens are the Ravalli County sites with completed work on policy, systems, and environment change.

Ravalli 4-H: Fun opportunities for All

The Ravalli County 4-H program, led by MSU Extension agent Annie Bauer, provides the opportunity for youth to explore and learn about topics important to them. Ravalli County 4-H has nearly 450 youth members, coordinated by over 120 volunteer leaders in 21 4-H clubs in the valley. There are a variety of county wide projects to assist youth in learning life-long skills.

Shooting Sports: Small Bore Rifle and Pistol

The 4-H Small Bore Rifle and Pistol discipline provided bi-weekly practices for seven youth between the ages of 12 and 18 with the goals of promoting safety, developing discipline, gaining self-confidence, and improving shooting accuracy. By the end of the three-month season, these goals were met through the hard work of youth and the two adult volunteers providing education for the project. This year, a teen who was participating in this third year of the project saw an opportunity to improve his leadership skills and stepped in as a junior coach. He demonstrated patience and knowledge, especially when he was coaching challenging students. Being involved with 4-H programs often presents opportunities for teens to identify a need, then empowers them to provide a solution, utilizing the life skills learned from past 4-H experiences.

4-H Fun Day

Ravalli County 4-H Fun Day is open to all enrolled Ravalli County 4-Hers’ including Cloverbuds (ages 5-7) and hosts workshops, a guest speaker, and provides an “etiquette lunch” where youth dress in semi-formal attire and practice dining



Top: Enjoying a group outdoor activity excursion during WInTer Wellness, by Katelyn Andersen; **Bottom Row: (left)** Providing SNAP education information and resources at a farmers market in Hamilton, Montana, by Jennifer Murrillo; **(center)** 4-H Fun Day, by Katelyn Andersen; **(right)** Master Gardeners tour and learn about vineyards and grape production for the local wine industry, by Katelyn Andersen

etiquette learned during one of the day's workshops. The annual event occurred in November, 2019. A positive impact of 4-H Fun Day is that teen leaders are involved with the planning and implementation process. This learning opportunity allows teens to improve their organization, communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills.

4-H Fun Day provides the opportunity for Cloverbuds to be welcomed into the 4-H program and interact with older 4-H members. Having these positive interactions can make lasting impressions and can inspire both Cloverbuds and their parents or guardians to remain involved with 4-H.

People, Partnerships and Programs

Community partnerships are key to building programs to address county needs and fundamental to Extension programming efforts in Ravalli County. MSU Extension generates a monthly e-newsletter to share about programs and resources to a mailing list of over 2,300 individuals located throughout the valley.

Last spring, MSU Extension agent Katelyn Andersen compiled a weekly e-newsletter full of resources and information from local, state and national agencies to help community members access resources to assist during the pandemic. This quick response paired with the large database of individuals was an asset for disbursing information and complimented the work of Ravalli County Organizations Active in Disaster (RCOAD). Murrillo routinely provided updates from food pantries and Andersen provided learning opportunities focused on well-being, nutrition and finances. In the fall, the committee invited MSU Extension to be a partner in their efforts.

Partnerships are an integral aspect of MSU Extension's health and wellness challenges, held throughout the year. WINter Wellness, 5K Your Way, and Bike, Walk, Roll & WIN have been staple health incentives to encourage constituents to stay active regardless of inclement weather. Since inception

in 2017 and under Andersen's leadership, this award-winning program has engaged over 800 adults from every community in Ravalli County. Participants report notable impacts of increased motivation to move due to this program, improved mental health, increase of social ties in the community and increased engagement in physical activity.

County Residents Contact MSU Extension for Horticulture and Food Preservation Needs

Spring brought warmer weather and an increased desire for Ravalli County residents to grow a garden and be self-reliant. Throughout the spring, summer and fall, individuals were able to receive gardening advice tailored to the Bitterroot Valley through the horticulture program. During harvest time, individuals sought canning advice and assistance from Andersen.

The increased interest in food preservation caused a nation-wide shortage of canning jars and lids, which required residents to learn about the diverse ways to safely preserve the garden bounty. In response, Andersen assisted in providing an online Food Preservation 101 Series, taught by Extension specialists and agents.

Ravalli County Staff



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

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