Ravalli County is nestled within the Bitterroot Valley, bordered by the Bitterroot Mountains and the Bitterroot River. The county seat is Hamilton, Montana. As of the last census, the population is 43,806, which increased by 640 since the previous year. As a result, Ravalli County has seen an influx of folks moving to the area in 2021. Ravalli County’s primary industry is agriculture, with 241,233 acres, primarily small acreage, and high commodity crop operations.

In contrast, tourism is a close second. Ravalli County ranks second in Montana for sold and produced value-added product sales at $1,329,000. Ravalli County is also second in the state for direct-to-consumer sales at $1,550,000. Agriculture will remain strong in Ravalli County because of its commitment to the diversity of products produced, innovative marketing techniques attracting today’s consumers, and collaboration with MSU Extension and the Western Agriculture Research Center to experiment with research-based novelty crops.

2021 Fair

September 1-4 in the Bitterroot Valley saw another successful fair week for the 4-H and FFA, full of early mornings, bustling livestock shows, laughter around the barns, and memories made. Youth who exhibited their 4-H and FFA projects were an integral part of the 2021 Ravalli County Fair. Livestock shows occurred throughout the week in the Hourning, Iman, and Applebury Arenas, where youth exhibited their swine, sheep, goats, and cows. Youth members also exhibited poultry and rabbits in their respective barns during the week. Youth in the dog and horse projects participated in their individual shows before the fair but held demonstrations during the fair week. Members of the public that came through the animal barns witnessed youth spending time with their animals, cleaning their pens, feeding and watering animals, answering questions from the public, and interacting with their peer club members. The 4-H Indoor Exhibit Barn also displayed the incredible talent of youth who exhibited projects such as sewing, baking, and photography. The commonality in these activities is that youth are experiencing the 4-H slogan: “learn by doing” and implementing the 4-H motto: “To make the Best Better.”

Ravalli County 4-H Dog Project

During the 2020-2021 4-H year, the 4-H Dog project in Ravalli County met every Thursday night from October through July. Fifteen youth and two adult volunteers participated in the project. The 4-H dog project is a perfect opportunity for
youth interested in participating in an animal project but may not have access to or the means to invest in a livestock project. The essential volunteers have structured the lessons in modules that include Freestyle, Rally Obedience, Agility, and Showmanship. Youth develop life skills such as leadership, dedication and responsibility, and record-keeping through these consistent meetings. Youth also develop technical skills such as handling and showing dogs safely. In addition, children were encouraged to participate in demonstrations and presentations after each module and enter the county fair dog show, all of which developed confidence in youth.

**Ravalli County 4-H Small Bore Shooting Sports**

In June through August, Ravalli County 4-H Small Bore Shooting Sports project leaders spent Tuesday and Thursday evenings leading 4-H participants through the introduction to shooting small-bore rifles and pistols. A total of 13 young people participated, which is an increase from when the program started in 2018. By the end of the season, participants met goals, and safety had become a habit. The final night was especially memorable when the groups were combined, and the students coached the parents and had some fun shooting competitions.

It was a summer of learning new shooting skills, developing discipline, and gaining self-confidence.

**Ravalli County 4-H Junior Camp**

Fifty-four youth (ages 8-12), 14 teen counselors (ages 15-18), and 12 adult volunteers attended the annual Ravalli County 4-H Junior Camp held in July at the Darrell Fenner 4-H Camp located on Loon Lake in Bigfork, MT.

The teen counselors attended meetings starting in March to plan the entirety of camp. Teens planned and implemented workshops, evening programs, meal programs, cabin decorations, free time activities, and risk assessments. Through the planning meetings, teen counselors developed leadership, teamwork, communication, and organization skills.
Ravalli County Fair Sheep Show 2021, by Anne Bauer
Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran’s Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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