



Welcome to Blaine County

Blaine County is located in North Central Montana. The Missouri River is the southern boundary and the Canadian border provides the northern boundary. Agriculture is the major industry in the county with cattle and wheat as the primary enterprises. Blaine County produces over 5.7 million bushels of wheat each year from 190,000 planted acres. There are 45,000 mother cows in the county supported by an irrigated hay base of over 60,000 acres located along the Milk River, enhanced by irrigation supplied by the Corps of Engineers St. Mary's diversion project. The population in Blaine County stands at just over 6,700 people with approximately half of these residing on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.

Blaine County MSU Extension serves the community through a variety of programming

carried out by two full-time Extension agents, a part time SNAP-Ed paraprofessional and a full-time administrative assistant. Programming is concentrated in the areas of 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Family Consumer Sciences. The Extension program is supported through an annual county budget which includes a portion of the agent's salary along with direct support of the agent's salary from Montana State University. MSU also supports the program indirectly and the county benefits with returned services for every dollar invested. This is truly a partnership between MSU and Blaine County which continues to provide citizens access to high quality education and knowledge available from the state's land-grant university.



Blaine County Courthouse, Chinook, Montana

Blaine County 4-H Youth Learn Leadership, Citizenship & Life Skills

Blaine County 4-H is a part of Montana State University Extension, and 4-H is the state's largest out-of-school youth program. Through a variety of projects and educational activities, it reaches over 130 Blaine county youth within the traditional 4-H clubs. There are also over 40 adult volunteers who assist Blaine County MSU Extension with the 4-H program. The volunteers teach youth valuable life skills which help them to become confident, competent and compassionate individuals. Through the research-based curriculum of 4-H, the youth in Blaine County actively explore a wide variety of interests, with animal projects being the most commonly-chosen project. Every project that a youth participates in is unique to each member as they make the project their own.

Blaine County 4-H is supported by the local 4-H Council and the Blaine County 4-H Foundation. The Blaine County 4-H Foundation provides financial assistance in the form of scholarships to graduating high school seniors and 4-H alumni. The Blaine County 4-H Council provides financial support, as well as structure and guidance of the 4-H program. It is comprised of volunteers who work closely with the Extension agents to strengthen 4-H in a variety of opportunities such as the 4-H Ambassadors/teen leaders, officer training, Project Day, Quiz Bowl, Blaine County Fair, Shooting Sports, 4-H Camp, and the livestock program.

A Blaine County 4-H leader assists energetic Cloverbuds during Project Day.



Youth Gain Life Skills

The 4-H Youth Development program creates an environment for youth to reach their greatest potential by acquiring knowledge, developing life skills and strengthening their values. Blaine County youth are provided opportunities to develop their talents and capabilities. Youth who develop these life skills become self-directed, productive and contributing citizens of their communities. Some of the life skills they develop are understanding of self; relating with others; communication; problem solving; acquiring and analyzing information; managing resources and working with others.

The Blaine County Fair is a yearly event with a wide variety of activities and events for the whole family to enjoy. This is a great opportunity for our youth to demonstrate the skills they have learned by exhibiting the projects they have been working on throughout the year. Although we experienced extremely high temperatures, youth and volunteers did an amazing job keeping the animals well-hydrated and cool throughout the fair. The fair provides opportunity for youth to showcase their projects, demonstrate their interview skills and work side-by-side with other youth to promote 4-H. The Blaine County Fair would not be possible without the hard work of our 4-H members and their families; our dedicated volunteers and leaders; as well as the generous support of the fair sponsors and attendees.



A Blaine County 4-H member visits with the judge during swine showmanship at the 2018 Blaine County Fair.

Blaine County Agriculture Working to Overcome Adverse Weather Conditions

In 2017-2018, Blaine County farmers and ranchers faced possibly the most wide-spread, catastrophic and diverse weather that has been seen on the hi-line for many years. The summer and fall of 2017 brought a drought to all of Blaine County. Then, the winter of 2017-2018 proved to be the coldest and harshest in the past three decades. Extremely cold temperatures and 100+ inches of snow brought extreme calving and lambing conditions. Snow was still on fields in late spring. In May, there was a record-breaking flood in the Milk River Valley, where producers saw their hay fields under water for more than 10 days. Sixty percent of alfalfa producers saw decreased hay production as a result. Following the flooding, the summer of 2018 brought the second year of drought to the county. Over the months of June, July and August, most areas of the county had less than four inches of rainfall. Rain started falling in September, which delayed spring wheat harvest, which caused many producers decreased yields and quality issues.

All of these conditions have created unique and costly challenges for producers of the county. Blaine County MSU Extension, with the addition of Julianne Snedigar, new Agriculture and 4-H Extension agent, was able to assist over 100 producers this year with various services. Over 40 samples were submitted for identification of diseases, insect infestations, and pest identification. In addition, over 75 samples were submitted for nitrate testing. These services allowed producers to make informed decisions about their operations.



Blaine County wheat field exhibiting symptoms of Fusarium Head Blight.

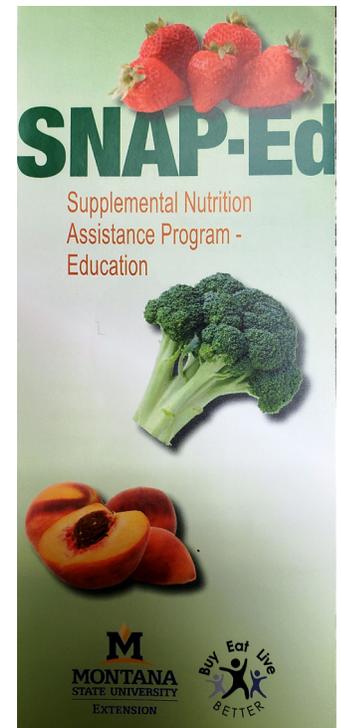
SNAP-Ed Continues to Impact Blaine County and Beyond

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Education Program (SNAP-Ed) continues to provide nutrition education to eligible individuals within Blaine and Phillips Counties and the Fort Belknap Reservation. Individuals who are eligible are Blaine and Phillips County families with children, youth, seniors, single individuals and individuals with developmental disabilities. SNAP Educator Joann Beard delivers a series of lessons to eligible individuals with information and practical tips for choosing healthier foods, preparing meals, learning appropriate food safety practices, modeling good food choices for family members and incorporating ways to be more physically active.

Over the past year, Blaine County provided 159 classes with an average of 3.61 classes per week. A total of 303 children and adults were directly reached through 26 total programs.

Participation in the SNAP-Ed program allowed participants to make healthier choices with their SNAP dollars while also making their SNAP dollars stretch farther. Ninety percent of adult participants showed improvement in one or more diet quality indicators. Participants stated they were willing to try new fruits and vegetables as a result of the program. They also stated they were drinking less soda, fruit punch, and sports drinks. In addition, they stated they were cooking dinner at home more. For the youth participants, 80% indicated they improved their diet quality. They stated they were snacking on fruits and vegetables as a direct result of trying them during the program.

The people of Blaine and Phillips County and the Fort Belknap Reservation continue to benefit from the direct and indirect contact they have had with the Blaine County MSU Extension SNAP-Ed program.



Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Blaine County residents consult with Kendra Seilstad, our Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent, throughout the year to answer questions ranging from food preservation and safety to financial planning. Food Safety education is an important step to prevent the spread of foodborne illnesses and it is important that everyone who works in the food service industry, from concession workers to kitchen managers, obtains food safety education and training. Extension is one of the main educators offering food safety training to the public. Those restaurants and food service facilities requiring the ServSafe® certification benefit from having local trainings available, making it convenient and economical. More than 83 people were trained last year in the Food Protection Manager course with 90% of the students passing (70% or higher) with an average score of 83.33%.



With the increasing popularity of electric pressure cookers, Seilstad provided a hands-on cooking class to showcase the convenience of cooking meals at home in minutes. Participants learned the ease of using pressure cookers and the range of foods that can be cooked. After the long, harsh winter the Hi-Line experienced, the workshop proved to be an informational cooking class and an opportunity for people to socialize.

Blaine County MSU Extension is represented on the Mental Health Local Advisory Council (LAC). The LAC is a coalition of community members interested in accessing, planning, and strengthening public mental health services within our community. Our main goal is to promote mental health wellness by improving accessibility to services through education and reducing the gaps or barriers to needed resources. With the ever-rising concern of mental health issues, especially among our youth, Seilstad became certified in the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) curriculum. This program is designed for youth in seventh to ninth grade, and promotes mental health awareness through five interactive sessions. YAM was implemented through the 2018 Chinook High School freshmen health class and is expected to branch into other schools in the coming year.

Kendra Seilstad and Denise Seilstad, fellow MSU Extension agent from Fergus County, team up to offer food safety programming.

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