



## Director Clark Joins Gov. Gianforte in Hearing Come Home Montana Story in Drummond

Joining Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) Director Christy Clark, Governor Greg Gianforte earlier this week continued his 56 County Tour visiting Farmer Boy Eggs in Granite County to highlight a true come home Montana story about the Verlanic family.

“For too long, Montana’s most valuable export has been our kids and grandkids,” Gov. Gianforte said. “It was great to hear from the Verlanic brothers on moving home, investing in their family operation, and cultivating a quality product to nourish our communities.”

“Farmer Boy Eggs is a true Montana ag success story,” said Director Clark. “The Verlanic brothers came back to the farm to keep their family traditions alive and have added a tremendous amount of value to the Montana agriculture ecosystem and their community in doing so. When we can keep a family farm in family hands, that is a success for Montana agriculture.”



After moving back home to their family farm in Drummond, brothers Alex, Connor, and Andrew founded Farmer Boy Eggs to sell their natural, cage free eggs in stores across Montana.

“My brothers and I believe agriculture is a legacy and generational business, something we grew up with and something we feel very strongly about. The lifestyle for us and our families was what we wanted to come back to be a part of,” said Alex Verlanic.

He continued, “We’ve all three lived outside of the state, around the country, and the world – to come back to Montana was something that was very special to us.”





With over 35 distribution locations in Montana, Farmer Boy Eggs has been able to expand their operation thanks to the help of a MDA Growth Through Agriculture (GTA) grant.

To support Montana growers, the GTA program supports innovative Montanans and their businesses through loans and grants that produce and commercialize agricultural products and processes, that in turn, create wealth and jobs in communities and on farms and ranches.

As a recent recipient of a grant the business was able to upgrade their egg cleaning and sorting equipment.

“Montana’s producers play a critical role in providing essential products that nourish our communities. We’ll continue to support family operations like the Verlanic’s by reducing red tape and helping hardworking Montanans keep more of what they earn so more folks can come back home,” Gov. Gianforte added.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.farmerboyeggs.com/>





## Montana Wheat & Barley Update: Broadview Farmer Denise Conover Retiring from MT Wheat & Barley Committee After 9 Years of Service

Story by Northern Ag Network

Finishing three terms, Denise Conover of Broadview, MT is hanging up her work boots with the Montana Wheat & Barley Committee (MWBC). The summer MWBC board meeting on June 24 will include a special event honoring Conover's commitment to Montana producers and her work over the past nine years. US Wheat Associates (USW) President Vince Peterson will attend the meeting and gathering, with plans to discuss global wheat markets.

"Montana has been fortunate to benefit from so many top agricultural leaders," said Kent Kupfner, MWBC executive director. "Denise has contributed enormously to sharing the Montana producer's story with buyers around the world, and she is passionate about educating the public about where their food comes from. We are throwing her a party to thank her for her dedication."

Like all MWBC board members, Conover was appointed by Montana's governor – in 2015, that was Governor Steve Bullock. "I was surprised to receive the invitation," Conover said while reminiscing. "I didn't know much about what was to come: the connections I'd soon develop helping my fellow Montanans or the friends I would make which will last a lifetime. I really had no idea how important Montana is to the global wheat picture. It has been a great honor to serve our farmers."



Running a no-till practice today to benefit soil conservation and moisture retention, the Conover family plants winter wheat, spring wheat, malt barley and sunflowers. "To stay in business these days, you have to watch your bottom line, but always raise a good quality product for our domestic and overseas customers," Conover said. She noted that diversifying their crop selection has been good for the farm's sustainability.



With a few stories under her belt, Conover is most fond of her time hosting trade teams, where it is “great to get to know our customers one-on-one and bring them to the farm.” She said that the size and capacity of farm equipment fascinates teams. “It always amazes me the things we take for granted in Montana like big open fields of grain,” she added. “At the end of the day, we both [producers and buyers] have one goal and that is to feed the world.”

Terry Angvick, chairman of the MWBC board, said that Conover has been instrumental in her leadership with the committee. “She handed me the gavel last October and those are big shoes to fill,” he said, as Conover was previously chairwoman. “The efforts of this committee are a critical function of Montana’s farm economy. Denise always has such a keen sense for what Montana producers need and she drew upon that sense in her role here.” Angvick said that while they will miss Conover, he hopes that many will come celebrate her tenure. “And I’m sure we’ll find another duty for her down the road!” he joked.

Peterson took over as president of USW in July, 2017. USW is the wheat industry’s export market development organization, representing the interests of American wheat farmers in more than 100 countries. MWBC works closely with them to market on average \$1 billion annually in Montana hard red winter and hard red spring wheat to overseas buyers. Montana producers rely heavily on wheat exports, totaling 75-80 percent of its annual wheat crop.







# Director Clark Joins Gov. Gianforte in Celebrating Increased Trade Opportunities for Montana Producers

Director Clark joined Governor Greg Gianforte as he continued his fourth annual 56 county tour as governor in Toole County, visiting Ardent Mills at the Port of Northern Montana in Shelby to celebrate increasing trade opportunities for Montana producers.

“One of our greatest sources of pride in Montana is our world-class products that we grow here – whether it’s Montana beef or barely, our farmers and ranchers produce the best,” Gov. Gianforte said. “We’ll continue to support increasing our producers’ access to global markets as they work tirelessly to feed the world.”



The Ardent Mills rail truck transfer station in Shelby is one of over 40 locations across North America that specialize in the milling, storing, or loading of flour, oats, and pulses.

Visiting the Ardent Mills facility, the governor heard more about the company and its relationship with local farmers.



“We are the largest flour miller in North America, using the wheat that is grown right here in Montana and across America,” said Ardent Mills Senior Director Kyle Robson. “We produce a thousand truckloads of flour every single day and this facility right here in Shelby gives a local grower easy access to the market.”

In Shelby, the facility purchases upwards of 9 million pounds a year of oats, wheat, and pulses from Montana producers and transloads the product mills across the country and to Canada.



During the visit, the group also recognized the dedication of the Port of Northern Montana Operating and Storage Track Project. The \$3.6 million investment will expand the port’s gateway to the BNSF Railway mainline and increase the facilities ability to purchase and transload more products. Joining the governor for the ceremony was Montana Department of Agriculture Director Christy Clark, who spoke to the importance of community partnership for the project and ag industry.

“Rural communities are the backbone of Montana,” Dir. Clark said. “And the hardworking men and women who make up these communities and believe in projects like these are the reason why agriculture remains the number one economic driver in our state.”

Robson added, “This project is enabling us to have our own dedicated track line which will allow us ultimately to bring more wheat in that we can then send out to our mills across North America.”





## MDA On the Road & Where to Catch Us

- USLGE Argentina Inbound Trade Team - Billings, MT | July 7 - 12
- Quinn Institute Ribbon Cutting Event - Big Sandy, MT | July 9
- Pesticide Waste Disposal Event - Butte, MT | July 10
- Western Triangle Ag Research Center Field Days - Conrad, MT | July 10
- Northwestern Ag Research Center Field Days - Creston, MT | July 11
- WASDA Summer Conference - Park City, UT | July 14 - 17
- NACRW - Fort Lauderdale, FL | July 14 - 18
- Post Farm Field Days - Bozeman, MT | July 17
- NAAMO Annual Conference - Asheville, NC | July 21 - 15
- Food Safety Coalition Meeting - Helena, MT/Remote | July 25
- MABA Golf Tournament - Great Falls, MT | July 25
- Western Cider Orchard Tour - Stevensville, MT | July 31





## MDA Hosts Event for Montana Noxious Weed Awareness Week

Helena community members joined the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) for a noxious weed-pulling event on Wednesday.

“When you see those pretty weeds outside, they’re usually noxious, unfortunately,” said Jasmine Chaffee, the noxious weed section manager for the MDA.

Roughly 20 people showed up at the Old Shooting Range Trailhead to pull noxious weeds like spotted knapweed, dalmatian toadflax, and leafy spurge.



According to the Bureau of Land Management, “a noxious weed is any plant designated by federal, state, or county government as injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or property.”

As of 2019, 36 plants are classified as noxious weeds in Montana. Chaffee said, “All noxious weeds are invasive. They’re not native, so they’re not from Montana or even the U.S., and they are actually by law, so they are extra dangerous to the wildlife and our other native plants.”

June 2nd to the 8th is Montana Noxious Weed Awareness Week. The Montana Weed Control Association says, “Weeds are most easily identified by their flower color, but sometimes you have to look at other features, including their leaf structure.”

The association also provides Montana noxious weed field guides. “People live in Montana because they love our native landscape. It’s beautiful – the big sky. So, we want to keep that the way it always has been, and by doing that, we control our noxious weeds.”

-- Story by Allie Kaiser, MTN News





## Montana Farm Bureau's Summer Conference - Miles City, Montana

Members of Montana Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) had an exemplary time at the organization's Summer Conference. The event, held June 10-12 in the historic Cowtown of Miles City, offered plenty of food for thought, camaraderie, fundraising and entertainment.

Ten advisory committees met Tuesday morning and afternoon including Livestock, Equine, Farm & Trade, Membership and Private/Public Lands.

Director Clark shared insights during the Farm and Trade Committee Meeting regarding international trade trends, opportunities for producers, and evolving markets.



"With amazing speakers and relevant topics like property tax relief, private property rights, Farm Bill progress, water rights and their impact on agriculture and a host of commodity specific issues tossed with a dose of dinosaur hunting, I consider this an event worthy of acclaim. To top that, we had record-breaking fundraising and a fantastic crowd. Miles City was a wonderful place to host a statewide conference," said MFBF President Cyndi Johnson.





## 2024 EconoQuest Career Expo

EconoQuest is a ground-breaking international economic literacy program that excites high school students about real-world economics and career opportunities. The program fills a gap in statewide economic education and explores college-to-career pathways with Montana industries with a unique opportunity to engage with local companies and government leaders about economics, international trade, and workforce development.



**MONTANA WORLD  
AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

# ECONOQUEST CAREER EXPO

We hope you will join us at the third annual EconoQuest Career Expo at Montana State University Ballroom, engaging with MSU students and high school students from every corner of Montana. This year, companies will be able to interact with students on their EconoQuest competition projects - listen to students pitch their product on the global market!

Monday, October 28th, 2024  
Montana State University Ballroom  
3:00 - 5:00 PM

Companies are welcome to join the EconoQuest banquet with Consul General Gupta of India as keynote speaker.

**To register:**  
**Contact Nikki Geiszler at**  
**[ngeiszler@montanaworldaffairs.org](mailto:ngeiszler@montanaworldaffairs.org)**







# Montana Department of Agriculture Announces 2024 Summer Pesticide Disposal Events

The Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) is facilitating spring pesticide disposal events in the Columbia River Basin region during the week of April 10th-12th, 2024, in Libby, Polson, and Butte. Summer disposal events are set for July 9th-11th, 2024, in Eureka, Clearwater Junction, and Butte. These additional pesticide disposal events were made possible through the Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (MT PSPP).

The primary objective of the Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program is to have a lasting impact on the health and water quality of the upper Columbia River Basin (CRB), knowing that protecting the upper basin will also have a sustained positive effect downstream. The Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Columbia River Basin Restoration Funding Assistance Program was started in 2016 to better monitor and make a positive impact in the Columbia River Basin.



## PESTICIDE DISPOSAL EVENTS

### SPRING & SUMMER PESTICIDE DISPOSAL EVENTS

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Summer disposal events are set for **July 9th-11th, 2024**, in Eureka, Clearwater Junction, and Butte.

The pre-registration deadline for the spring event is Monday, April 1, 2024, and the pre-registration deadline for the summer event is Monday, July 1, 2024. Registrations for pesticide waste collection events are accepted on a first come, first-serve basis. There is no charge for the first 200 pounds of material; amounts over 200 pounds are assessed at \$1.00 per pound, and products are weighed on site. Additional fees may apply to pesticides with dioxins or dioxin precursors.

### SUMMER EVENT

Tuesday, July 9th- Eureka, MT  
Wednesday, July 10th- Clearwater Junction  
Thursday, July 11th-Butte, MT

Please visit the Montana Waste Pesticide Disposal Program page to register. For more information, please visit **agr.mt.gov/Pesticide-Waste-Disposal-Program** or contact Carli Davis at **(406) 465-0531**.

These additional pesticide disposal events were made possible through the Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (MT PSPP).





## State Partners Find Non-Lethal Answers to Grizzly Bear Interactions on Montana Ranches

**By Brandon O'Connor, USDA, and Greg Neudecker, USFWS**

Wayne Slaght has spent more than 25 years learning to coexist with grizzly bears and wolves on his Montana ranch near Ovando. In those years, he has learned an important lesson that serves as his guiding principle.

“If there’s no beef animals to eat, then they don’t learn to eat beef,” Slaght said. “They can eat deer and elk and whatever else they are supposed to.”

Protecting his cows requires constant vigilance, but Slaght has worked — with the help of State and Federal government agencies and nonprofits such as the [Blackfoot Challenge](#)— to implement a variety of preventative measures on his ranch and keep predators from eating into his bottom line.

Because of measures implemented across the Blackfoot Valley, annual conflicts have been reduced from 77 grizzly bear/human conflicts in 2003 to an average of 10 to 12 conflicts per year, according to USFWS data.

Slaght, other ranchers in the Blackfoot Valley and a variety of partners have worked for more than a decade to develop innovative community-based approaches to reduce conflict between predators, livestock and people.

Two of those partners, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), boosted their support for local, voluntary solutions this year including new funding and technical support.



## Life on the Ranch

Slaght manages a roughly 50,000-acre ranch in Ovando, Montana, where he and his family run a little more than 1,000 head of beef cattle at a time, not including their 200 replacement heifers. Life on the ranch is all Slaght has ever known. He moved there with his family when he was four years old and has managed it since he was 25.

Managing a ranch that size comes with the normal challenges of dealing with weather, equipment, fences and the day-to-day responsibilities of keeping more than 1,000 cows healthy. But since the late 90s, Slaght has faced another challenge particular to his area of the country — grizzly bears. Although they rarely see them in person, Slaght said based on images caught on cameras throughout the ranch and other evidence of their presence, they estimate about 10 grizzly bears are routinely living on the ranch.

Their first encounter with grizzlies came in the late 90s when bears came onto the ranch and killed a couple of calves in an event known as a grizzly bear depredation. The bears also gained access to the ranch's pit, where they had hauled the carcasses of animals that died from natural causes during calving season.

The twin encounters led Slaght to look for ways to keep both his animals and his workers safe, while learning to coexist with the bears.

"I know a lot of people think that the bears should learn to live with us, but if I want to be here on this ranch, which I do, I feel that I've got to learn to live with the bears," Slaght said. "So, we're always on our guard and paying attention."

Slaght's story is not unique. He and dozens of other ranchers in the Blackfoot Valley, a watershed of 1.5 million acres, all face these challenges and are working together to pioneer new solutions that can help prevent conflicts in the first place.

## Protecting the Ranch

Slaght began implementing a series of practices that have become commonplace in the Blackfoot Valley to keep the bears out of certain areas on the ranch and limit attractants in the first place. He has not been able to do it on his own though. Over the years, he has worked with many partners including Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USFWS, and others to implement the needed deterrents.

"Without these partners, we cannot do these projects because they just cost too much, and this is all on us," Slaght said.

One of the most successful practices, Slaght said, has been consistent carcass pickup throughout the ranch.

He estimates that during calving season the ranch loses 2-6% of its calves from natural causes, which could potentially create attractants for grizzly bears and other wild predators, such as wolves and mountain lions. To remove the temptation, Slaght has instituted a program where a team collects carcasses throughout the ranch twice a week during the two-month calving season.





The Clearwater Junction carcass pickup and compost facility in the Blackfoot Valley is operated in partnership by the Montana Department of Transportation, the Blackfoot Challenge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and many others. Through this partnership, livestock carcasses are removed from participating ranches and composted. The presence of carcasses on ranches can attract predators that can lead to livestock depredations and human safety concerns. In addition to domestic livestock, roadkill is also composted at the facility. This picture shows a pile of domestic livestock compost, which is managed separately from the wildlife compost. (USDA photo by Kyle Tackett)

The carcasses are taken to a composting site operated by the Montana Department of Transportation. In all, more than 50 ranchers participate in this effort, making sure that more than 1.5 million acres of working lands in the watershed are mostly clear of carcasses. Staying one step ahead of bears by removing the carcasses has been a tremendous help, Slaght said, and plays a major role in the predators never developing a taste for beef.

They have also taken extensive efforts to keep the bears out of calving and headquarter areas with more than four miles of six-wire electric fencing around their 400-acre calving area and an additional five or six miles of three and five wire electric fencing around other parts of the ranch. The goal is not to use electric fencing around the entire ranch, excluding predators and other wildlife, but to protect the most vulnerable locations of the operation.





In recent years ranchers in the Blackfoot Valley have installed drive-over electrified mats in gate openings. The mats provide multiple benefits over manual gates including convenience by keeping ranchers from having to open and close gates numerous times a day to keep bears out of sensitive areas. (USFWS photo by Suzanne Kerver)

In recent years they’ve also installed drive-over electric mats in gate openings. The mats provide multiple benefits over manual gates, Slaght said, including convenience by keeping them from having to open and close gates numerous times a day to keep bears out of sensitive areas. They also provide peace of mind by ensuring entrances and exits are always protected and they never have to worry whether they forgot to close a gate and left an area exposed.

Slaght has also reduced deterrents by securing the ranch’s animal feed in metal cargo containers so the bears can’t access it. The final pieces of the puzzle when it comes to bear prevention are range riders who patrol grazing areas.

“Just that presence of them up there in the cattle looking for tracks, wolves and grizzly bears and mountain lions or whatever,” Slaght said of their benefit. “They can see if the cattle are nervous. They can see with their cameras and with the tracks if there’s predators in the cattle. That’s quite useful, I think.”

The combined efforts have paid major dividends and Slaght’s ranch has not had a bear depredation event since the two encounters in the late 90s.

Overall, because of measures like this being implemented across the valley, conflict has been reduced in the Blackfoot from 77 grizzly bear/human conflicts in 2003 to an average of 10 to 12 conflicts per year, according to USFWS data.

### **Help from Partners**

Slaght is quick to point out that the success is not just his own. The efforts have only been possible by partnering with numerous public agencies and private groups who are invested in keeping ranchers and their animals safe while simultaneously protecting endangered species such as grizzly bears. Those efforts have expanded in recent years through the development of a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project between NRCS, the Heart of the Rockies Initiative, the Western Landowners Alliance and additional partners. The RCPP project will provide \$17 million of public and private funds to ranchers in Montana, Colorado, and Oregon to implement non-lethal methods of reducing conflicts between predators and working lands.

The methods Slaght implemented are eligible for financial assistance through the RCPP along with additional practices such as turbo fladry, where colored flags are placed along fences to deter wolves. Additional funding for electric fencing and electrified drive-over mats is available to ranchers in Slaght’s region of Montana through NRCS’s Grizzly Conflict Mitigation Targeted Implementation Plan, which provides funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Learn more at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center>





## What We Have Been (responsibly) Drinking Lately:

We like to get our “Drink of the Month” into different hands around the department.

It’s warm out there folks. Here is a nice local one to help keep you cool.

### The Mexican Lager from Copper Furrow Brewing

Crisp, light, clean, with soft scents of cereal grains & citrus on the nose.

Great with the lime wedge. Need we say more?





## What We've Been Listening To Recently:



### Summer Action

1. Summertime - Kenny Chesney
2. Cheeseburger in Paradise - Jimmy Buffett
3. Sunny and 75 - Joe Nichols
4. Toes - Zac Brown Band
5. Beers and Sunshine - Darius Rucker
6. Swimmin' in Sunshine - Billy Currington
7. Fins - Jimmy Buffett
8. No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems - Kenny Chesney
9. Sunshine and Summertime - Faith Hill
10. Long Hot Summer - Keith Urban



# We'd Love Your Feedback



Agriculture and in specific, Montana Agriculture is all about community. We thought, one does not have to be directly involved with agriculture to be apart of this community. Thus, our external facing monthly newsletter was created. It is meant to inform, inspire, educate, and reach our agricultural community hand out to whomever would like to be a part of the happenings here at the MDA.

Like to see a section that we didn't cover this month? Let us know! We'd love to hear from you.

Until then, happy July Friends!