



TOP STORIES

June 2026

Polaris to donate a Ranger to YF&R

For the 12th year in a row, Polaris dealers will award a Ranger® Side by Side to the winner of the MFBF Young Farmer & Rancher Discussion Meet which this year will be held during the MFBF Convention November 15-19 in Billings.

“Having the support of such an influential company such as Polaris shows their support of young agriculturists and the industry as a whole,” said last year’s Discussion Meet/Polaris winner Cady Brown. “The donation of a Polaris sets up young agriculturists for their future. No matter what commodity you have, a Polaris is a vital tool to have on the farm or ranch, and because of the Polaris donation, that’s a tool that can be obtained without the financial burden.”

Look for details on the Discussion Meet in the coming months in our publications and on social media pages.

Farm Dog of the Year

Farmers and ranchers are invited to submit nominations for the 2027 Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year contest, which comes with cash prizes and bragging rights. This is the ninth year of the contest, supported by Nestlé Purina PetCare, which celebrates farm dogs and the many ways they support farmers and ranchers. The deadline to apply is July 11, 2026. For details visit <https://www.fb.org/initiative/farm-dog-of-the-year>.

County Farm Bureaus educate through farm fairs

County Farm Bureaus hosting and participating in farm fairs is a popular educational opportunity often occurring in May. Busloads of students arrive at a farm or ranch to get hands-on experience in a variety of agricultural topics and have the opportunity to talk to farmers/ranchers.

The Cascade County Conservation District Ag Days, May 14-15 at Montana ExpoPark in Great Falls, hosted more than 800 fourth grade students and with more than 30 Cascade County Farm Bureau volunteers at the different stations.

The stations featured honeybees, wheat/pasta, water/soil erosion table, power/electricity safety, soil health, making ice cream and butter, Montana-grown crops, branding and livestock, including pigs, dairy cattle and beef cattle.

Paul Johnson, county vice president, spent a career as a district brand inspector, so he was a natural to talk about the hows and whys of branding cattle.

“We set up a branding fire, I have branding irons heating, and kids can brand their initials in a block of wood that they can take home,” said Johnson. “These farm fairs—I’ve been putting on a branding station for the Lewis & Clark Farm Bureau Ag Day for several years—are a way to show the kids what goes on in the agricultural life. In Great Falls, we had about 40 kids per station, so there was a lot of commotion, but I like to do this because how many kids get to see so much agriculture in one place?”

Kids love seeing the smoke and fire from the branding station, and although some might be hesitant to actually place their “brand” on the wood, even those who are hesitant warm up to the idea and are proud of their creations.

Johnson explains the reality of branding. “I tell them that if cattle wander away from home, the brand is their return address.”



Cascade County Vice President Paul Johnson educates students about branding during the Cascade County Conservation District Ag Days. The students each branded a block of wood with their initials.

Time to apply for the MFBF D.C. Fly-In

Have you ever wanted to walk the halls of the nation's Capitol or discuss issues during an in-person meeting with agency leaders? Now you can! The Farm Bureau Fly-In to Washington, D.C. is set for September 15-18, 2026.

Interested in learning more? Keep watching our social media posts and catch more details in the *MFBF Summer Spokesman*. Meanwhile, get additional information and check out our application at mfbf.org.

MSU kicks off GROW

Montana State University's College of Agriculture announces the launch of GROW — Growth through Research Opportunities and Work — a new scholars program designed to build a pipeline of agricultural talent from Montana high schools and communities into MSU and the state's agricultural workforce.

The GROW program recruits students before they graduate from high school, connecting them to paid summer research placements at one of MSU's Montana Agricultural Experiment Station Research Centers. Students who commit to attending MSU's College of Agriculture are eligible for a \$2,000 scholarship and the opportunity to work up to 40 hours per week during the summer and 20 hours per week during the academic year under the supervision of MSU faculty and staff.

"GROW is designed for students who are serious about their education and want real experience from the very beginning," said Joe Lackman, GROW Program Director.

For more information visit <https://agriculture.montana.edu/grow/> or contact the GROW Program Director at joe.lackman@montana.edu.

What is the fuss about exempt wells in Montana?

The Montana Farm Bureau joined other groups in a lawsuit in November 2025 to address a loophole regarding exempt wells. There have been discussions amongst irrigators, water rights holders, city administrators and more voicing concerns about what's at stake with the proliferation of exempt wells.

1. What are exempt wells?

Exempt wells are small water uses that bypass Montana's normal water permitting process. While each well may seem minor, tens of thousands of them, especially in new subdivisions, add up to billions of gallons of water use each year. It's estimated that the volume adds up to enough water to be approximately the amount of flow of the lower Yellowstone at Billings for 2-6 months of winter flow.

2. Why are exempt wells a problem?

They can reduce water available to senior water rights holders like farmers and ranchers without any process to stop the newer uses. In fast-growing areas such as the Gallatin, Helena and Bitterroot valleys, agricultural producers are already seeing impacts from increased groundwater use tied to subdivision growth. Unchecked, this problem will undoubtedly expand to other areas.

3. Why hasn't this been fixed already?

For decades, lawmakers have struggled to balance growth with protecting water rights. Efforts to limit or reform exempt wells have repeatedly failed, even as Montana's population and development pressures continue to grow.

4. What solution is being proposed?

Groups including the Montana Farm Bureau, want a simpler permitting system for small water uses that still protects senior water rights. The goal is to allow responsible development while preventing harm to existing water users and avoiding costly legal battles for ranchers and farmers. The permitting system was designed for just that and offers a great starting framework.

To read articles, op-eds and more on the exempt well issue, visit mfbf.org/media/news and check out our social media posts, videos and podcasts regarding the issue.

Calendar

MFBF Summer Conference

June 15-17, 2026
Kalispell, MT

Long Range Planning Meeting

August 26, 2026
Bozeman, MT

Budget Committee

August 27, 2026
Bozeman, MT

MFBF Annual Convention & Trade Show

November 15-18, 2026
Billings, MT

People

MFBF President **Cyndi Johnson** was featured in American Farm Bureau's International Year of the Woman Farmer series.

MFBF State Affairs Coordinator **Karli Johnson** and Gallatin County farmer and former Montana legislator **Walt Sales** shared the microphone on Voices of Montana to discuss the exempt well loophole and ways to mitigate the current challenges surrounding exempt wells.

District 1 Director **Beth Blevins** was featured in a Mental Health Monday post by Beyond the Weather/Northern Ag Network.

Recent MFBF Field Notes podcasts featured **Tienna Canen** and **Darcia Patten**. Also, don't miss the candidate forums from Richland, Park, Dawson/Wibaux and Powder River/Carter Counties on the MFBF Youtube Channel.

COUNTY NEWS

It's election season! Several counties held candidate forums and events to give constituents the opportunity to hear from candidates and ask questions. **Dawson-Wibaux** held a candidate forum April 28 in Glendive. The event saw nine candidates for a variety of offices, with 80 attendees. **Powder-River/Carter County** held a county commissioner candidate forum in Ekalaka May 4, while **Front Range County** held a forum for Pondera County candidates May 7 in Conrad. **Richland County** had more than 135 people attend their candidate forum May 8 at the Richland County Event Center in Sidney. On May 12, **Park County** hosted their Candidate Meet & Greet at the Clyde Park Community Hall.

Northwest Counties had a busy May. Their president, Buddy Cheff and his wife, Bridgett, hosted more than 400 fourth grade students to their ranch May 6-7. The kids learned about a variety of agriculture from pigs to soils, to raising grain, honeybees and more. Riding on a hay wagon and enjoying a cheeseburger lunch proved to be a highlight. In addition, the county hosted their annual ranch Olympics & BBQ May 16 which included hay bale tossing, irrigation pipe run, nail pounding and more.

Lewis & Clark County hosted their Annual Fourth Grade Ag Day May 12 at Gary and Loretta Burnham's Prickly Pear Simmental in East Helena. Fourth grade students from East Helena, Canyon Creek and Elliston experienced a variety of agriculture at 15 stations.

Sweet Grass held their membership appreciation event May 14 at the Circle T Taproom in Big Timber with "brats, brews and fun."



Northwest Counties Ranch Olympics included the five-gallon bucket carry timed event.

A few days following their successful Candidate Meet & Greet, **Park County** hosted their Family Fun Night & BBQ May 16 at Clyde Park Community Hall. Everyone enjoyed games and contests for the entire family along with free burgers and beverages.

Yellowstone County held their May Membership Month event during the Billings Mustangs game May 29 at Dehler Park. (Look for photos in the Summer Spokesman.)

Judith Basin County members Jeanne Rankin and Mary Hill, along with MFBF's Director of Agricultural Safety Program, Dana Jansen, participated in a Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue Training May 2-3 in Bozeman. The course was taught by Rebecca Husted, Ph. D and focused on proper handling and rescue of livestock during emergency situations such as motor vehicle crashes, natural disasters, and entrapments. This course was brought to Montana by the Montana Veterinary Medicine Association, with Montana Farm Bureau being a sponsor.

Dawson-Wibaux is hosting a summer picnic June 9 at Jaycee West Park in Glendive. There will be a candidate meet and great along with picnic fare.



Sweet Grass County members gather at the Circle T Taproom in Big Timber for their membership appreciation event.



Lewis & Clark County Fourth Grade Ag Day had a variety of stations including poultry.



Dawson/Wibaux County held a candidate forum for county commissioners.



Richland County held a well-attended candidate forum in Sidney.



Park County President Nick Jerke kicks off the Meet & Greet with candidates.



Farm Bureau members at the Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue Training in Bozeman.

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NATIONAL NEWS

MFBF applauds common-sense grazing decisions

Montana Farm Bureau applauded the positive news regarding grazing on federal land. The Department of the Interior issued its final rule to rescind grazing permits for seven grazing allotments in Phillips County, Montana, held by American Prairie and their conservation herd of bison. The Department also issued their final rule for the rescission of the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule, as well as their new Revision for Grazing Administration, more commonly known as the Grazing Rule. This rule is not final and has a 60-day comment period.

Grazing cattle and sheep on public lands contributes to food security and national security in several interconnected ways. MFBF President Cyndi Johnson shared in addition to keeping rural infrastructure alive, using public lands for cattle and sheep preserves domestic production capacity, maintains resilient supply chains and uses otherwise non-arable land productively.

For the full story visit mfbf.org/media/news.

Urge Senate to pass wolf management legislation

At publishing time, the Pet and Livestock Protection Act (H.R. 845) has passed the House with bipartisan support and is currently awaiting action in the Senate. This legislation would restore state authority to manage gray wolf populations and provide certainty for farmers, ranchers and others in rural communities who are facing increased livestock losses and growing public safety challenges. Gray wolf populations have exceeded recovery goals, but current federal protections limit effective management. This has created real challenges for those who live and work on the land every day.

The bill returns management authority to state wildlife agencies, provides certainty by preventing repeated court challenges and helps protect livestock and rural communities.

AFBF is urging members to contact their senators immediately and urge them to support H.R. 845 and encourage Senate leadership to schedule the bill for a floor vote.

Benefits: FieldClock

SAVE TIME AND MONEY

FieldClock brings its suite of labor management solutions uniquely designed to fit the needs of farmers, ranchers and rural businesses across the country. Montana Farm Bureau members receive \$10 off monthly pricing of any FieldClock plan selected.

Each plan includes all of these apps that provide solutions for different needs including FieldClock, a labor management tool and time clock app for workers on your farm or business operation as well as adminsite, kiosk and an employee portal.

Visit FieldClock.com/Montana-Farm-Bureau today to learn more and find the plan for you!