

MONTANA AGRITOURISM FELLOWS



CARISSA MCNAMARA - PLAINS, MT

After building a successful equine therapy practice over fifteen years ago, I officially began my journey as a serial entrepreneur. The last fifteen years have been exciting, including: mom to the most amazing human I've ever met, cowgirl wife to an exacting, perfectionist, "do it right the first time," farmer, owning an incredible retreat property and farm in Costa Rica, owning a boutique hotel in rural upstate New York, an alfalfa/hay operation and quarter horse ranch in Utah, a coffee shop, a skin care line, a lavender and herb farm in rural Montana, and one of six statewide Ambassadors for Montana Farmers Union. After all this time when people ask what I am doing, I still stumble my words, it's easier just to respond, "living the dream." My current role is, "farm-mom-trepreneur," of a beautiful lavender farm in the Northwest Montana forest, where we raise hay, registered Dorper sheep, offer u-pick opportunities, create value added lavender/herb products, and host guest stays on the farm. I hold a Master's degree in Public Administration from The George Washington University, as well as a bachelors in Psychology, and a bachelors in Anthropology from Weber State University. In high school I was voted, "most likely to run for President and win, and the same year, "most likely to die riding a bull," that probably covers it. Farm motto: "When in doubt, throttle out."

LAURA GARBER - HAMILTON, MT

Laura Garber has been sharing her farm, Homestead Organics Farm, with the community for the past 25 years. She started by hosting kids from the Bitterroot Youth Home for weekly summer visits and has steadily added more and more opportunities for others to share the joy in participating in a living agricultural system.

Laura founded the non-profit, Cultivating Connections Montana, to house the educational and community building programs that she and her husband, Henry, developed. Homestead Organics is the Farm-Campus for Cultivating Connections Montana, which offers skill and knowledge-sharing workshops, youth farm internships, school visits, a Farm Store, value-added foods, on-farm dinners, and an open gate to visitors.

She is excited to share her unique experiences with Agritourism in the hopes of helping more Montana farms to host more visitors!



JON AND ERIN TURNER - MISSOULA, MT

Turner Farms took root in the Missoula area in 2006. As a way to teach their young sons about earning money, they allowed the boys to sell extra produce from their garden. The boys raised enough money to purchase a bunkbed! When the season finished the family knew they had found a passion and they began planning for next season. Soon, the boys began asking for animals and suddenly Turner Farms was born. Almost two decades later, they are continuing to learn and grow in this industry. They farm on 18 acres just four miles from downtown Missoula. Turners raise beef, pork, sheep, chickens, ducks and geese along with a diverse selection of fruits and vegetables. Being so close to an urban population, they feel a responsibility to educate the public about local foods, local soils and the importance of local farming. They host farm tours, field trips and monthly Farm Markets at the farm. During the summer, the Turner sons host five weeks of Farm Camps for children ages 6-13 yrs old. The farm also collaborates with local schools, 4H, FFA and other youth organizations to offer learning opportunities. During the month of October, Turner Farms is completely open to the public for pumpkin picking and a fall festival each weekend. They opened a Farm Store in 2017 in an old barn which is original to the property. This self-serve farm store is open to the public everyday from dawn to dusk. It offers their farm raised meat, fresh produce, and other curated items from local and non-local producers. Turner Farms is deeply rooted in the community and they are committed to family which is why they are thrilled their three sons, who were the motivation for all of this, are now moving into leadership roles within Turner Farms with a strong vision for the future!





SUSAN JOY - HELENA, MT

Susan Joy is the Made in Montana program manager, located within the Montana Department of Commerce. Susan enjoys helping businesses of all sizes connect with resources to grow and promote their products. Susan grew up on a farm near Coeur d'Alene Idaho and enjoys living in Montana, where every corner of the state holds adventure. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in Geology which she uses to convince her family to look at cool rocks when hiking. Susan currently lives in Helena with her husband and two sons.

ANDY FJESETH - HELENA, MT

Andy Fjeseth has worked for the Montana Department of Agriculture for seven years and currently serves as the Bureau Chief for the Agriculture Finance, Trade & Development Bureau. The Bureau helps producers, businesses and industry advocates access and leverage funding and technical assistance to protect their livelihoods, expand their operations, access new markets, and develop new products, processes, and initiatives that advance Montana agriculture. Fjeseth was born and raised in Dillon, MT. His family homesteaded at Camas Prairie, MT in 1909 and his Uncle runs the family farm and ranch there today. He and his wife, Blair, reside in Helena with their three children, Sven, Olan, and Nell.



TANA AND TIENNA CANEN - CIRCLE, MT



Tienna Canen is a 5th generation rancher on her family's diversified farm and ranch operation near Circle, MT (Mahlstedt Ranch Inc.) where they are known for raising quality Quarter Horses. You will find Tienna either sitting in a tractor seat or sitting atop a horse most days, but the view is much better horseback! Tienna is passionate about agriculture education, improving and maintaining soil health, and the ranching lifestyle. Her background in production agriculture combined with six plus years of horseback guiding and tourism experience in South Dakota and Arizona, has helped create the unique Western Ranching Experiences offered on Mahlstedt Ranch. Montana Moments LLC was established in 2022 as a way to bring in a new income stream to support and sustain multiple families on the ranch. The tourism opportunities on the ranch are endless and so unique, including but not limited to: ranch tours, lodging, hiking, hunting, bring your own horse to ride, retreats, workshops, event venue, and so much more! Tienna loves the opportunity to educate and connect people with the land and their food through tours and conversations and finds that there is no better way to do this than through tourism.

Tana Canen is the woman behind the Quarter Horses of Mahlstedt Ranch and the drive behind the tourism aspect of the family ranch known as Montana Moments. She and her husband, Ross, live in Glendive, MT and make the routine commute to the ranch in western Dawson County where they ranch with Tana's parents and three daughters. Priorities for Tana are God, family, and the ranch. She sees herself as an AGvocate for production agriculture. She speaks to groups about incorporating tourism into ag operations and is available for consulting. In 2023 she was included in the Wall Street Journal, Q2 TV News, and a member of the Montana delegation to Spain & Germany promoting Montana Quarter Horse genetics. Tana is a member of Glendive Community Bible Church, leader of the church Women's ministry, a member of the Montana Agritourism Fellows group, Vice President of Montana Agri-Women, a member of MT Farm Bureau and AQHA, a 4-H leader, and a research associate for the Institute of Tourism & Recreation Research.



Haylie Shipp - Glasgow, MT

Born and raised on the family ranch north of Glasgow, MT, Haylie Shipp's education and career path took her on a tour of eastern Montana before settling back at home in 2014. She is now in the midst of ranch transition as her father sets his sights on retirement. Not afraid of wearing all the hats, Haylie manages communications and outreach for the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, a rancher-founded nonprofit, as well as owning her own boutique-style store, Shippwrecked, in Glasgow, MT. You may also hear her on the Western Ag Network or Ag Information Network as she produces radio content broadcast in multiple states across the country. Saving the best for last, she is the mother to a rockstar little boy who has turned her life upside down in all the best ways. She's excited to help agritourism grow as a possible added enterprise for farms and ranches in the state.

TODD AND MOLLY BARKLEY - BAKER, MT

Todd and Molly Barkley live 15 miles SW of Baker on a farm and ranch they leased in 1996 then purchased in 2007. This place borders the original Barkley ranch that they now lease. They also lease other neighbors properties. Todd Barkley is a 4th generation farmer/rancher. The original Barkley ranch celebrated its 100 year anniversary in 2022. Todd and Molly have four children, Seth, Haylee, Sayge, and Haddie. In 2021 they built a "Greenhouse in the Snow" geothermal greenhouse and created Barkley's Home Grown LLC to sell products raised on their farm/ranch and in the greenhouse. They also sell pure maple syrup from their daughter Haylee's in-laws from Wisconsin and honey produced from bees put out by their fields. They promote regenerative agriculture and the ways the farm and ranch and with talking to other people in tours and setting up booths at local events. Todd and Molly also are fellows with the MSU Bozeman's agritourism and sustainable agriculture study group. They have seen their local community lose many family farms and ranches over the past 30 years. They feel that nontraditional agriculture enterprise units such as the greenhouse and agritourism along with regenerative agriculture may help keep a younger generation in the community.



TAMARA ROBERTSON - FORSYTH, MT

As an entrepreneur and 4th generation farm and rancher from Eastern Montana, Tamara offers her community a new way to enjoy fresh, locally grown, cut flowers. After implementing a farm structure that allows her to work closer to home and accommodates her busy life as a wife and mother of three, she realized the potential flower farming offers and is now providing seasonal fresh cut flowers in the form of bouquet subscriptions, wedding florals, and special event arrangements to multiple counties in Eastern Montana. She looks to add hands on events that will support her community and Montana's growing tourism population. As a woman in a rural and agricultural setting, Tamara is working to give others the tools and education needed to secure their future and dig deeper roots. That's why she created Ag Talk Coffee, a platform for empowering women nationwide in rural and ag businesses through ethically sourced coffees and products.



MONTANA AGRITOURISM CONFERENCE



BREAKOUT SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

11:15-12:15

Room 233: “Understanding Your Agritourism Visitors” by Susan Joy and Dax Schieffer. Montana has over 27,000 farms and ranches operating on more than 58 million acres of land. Only 2% report agritourism as a farm-related source of income. Attendees will learn about existing marketing tools, research, and resources to identify the target visitor for their business plan.

SUB Ballroom B/C: “Past, Present, and Future for Montana Agritourism: Developing a Statewide Association by Hailey Vine, Sam Blomquist, Alma Galloway, and Shannon Arnold. This panel will discuss the evolution of Montana’s agritourism industry and steering committee, outline current and future initiatives, highlight legislative efforts and future association development, discuss producer and resource collaborations, provide insight from an established state member-driven agritourism association, and explore the state of agritourism in North Carolina and beyond.

Room 235: “Starting an Agritourism Business” by Tana Canen and Carissa McNamara. This session is an opportunity for those interested in creating, adding, or expanding agritourism to their operations to be inspired, ask questions, and hear stories about agritourism initiatives and projects. Through sharing our own personal experiences, sharing stories from others, and audience Q&A we will explore creative, and accessible ways to create diversity on the farm and ranch to serve and educate our local visitors, youth and outside visitors.

1:45-2:45

Room 233: “Sustainable Agritourism Production Practices” by Tienna Canen and Todd & Molly Barkley. Attendees will brainstorm and explore how agritourism can be incorporated on existing farms and ranches to help sustain the agriculture business. By making our agriculture operations sound and sustainable, we in turn, can make agritourism a sustainable and viable option for tourists and agriculture operations.

Room 235: “Marketing and Communication Strategies for Agritourism Businesses” by Tamara Robertson and Haylie Shipp. Every farm or ranch is unique, that is why your marketing plan should be unique as well. Join our breakout session for an in-depth look into structuring your enterprise with specific goals in mind. You’ll learn a few ins and outs of online marketing, on farm marketing and gain access to tools, resources and grant information that can help you as you evolve your marketing plan.

SUB Ballroom B/C: “Funding Opportunities for Agritourism” by Andy Fjeseth and Hailey Vine. Visit with staff from the Montana Department of Agriculture to find out about the Department’s grant and loan offerings that may be able to assist with your agritourism operation. Department staff will hold a feedback session with attendees to find out what other considerations government funders should consider as they launch new programs related to agritourism.”

3:45-4:45

Room 233: “Agritourism Liability Exemptions and Insurance Incentives” and “ A Comparative View of Agritourism from Europe to the Midwest” by Renata and Bryan Endres. Dr. Bryan Endres, a Professor of Food & Environmental Law in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois. Dr. Renata Endres leads the Agritourism Certificate Program at University of Illinois and her research explores sustainable tourism initiatives as a form of economic development, especially in the context of agritourism and food-based. This breakout session will explore incentive programs for agritourism as a rural economic development tool, comparing approaches in Europe with the Midwest Corn Belt experience. The session will also provide an overview of agritourism liability limitation laws and implementation of agritourism insurance tax credits.

Room 235: “Adding Value to your Agritourism Business” by Erin & Jon Turner and Laura Garber: You might already have untapped added-value and not realize it! In this workshop we will explore how your agricultural business can add value to your profit base, to your existing agricultural production and to your local community. We will dive into the nuts and bolts of expanding your current (or future) agricultural business to gain more value. (Remember: value can mean more than just profit!). We’ll examine unique and realistic ideas about what to add or develop, how to evaluate your property for Agritourism, insurance needs and how to manage the public. Hear from two different business models...a for-profit family farm and a non-profit organization about how they have successfully added significant value to their farms and their communities.

SUB Ballroom B/C: “Insurance for Agritourism Operators: A Discussion” by Matt Sailor, Holly Hovland, and Josh Pulst. The panel will discuss how to protect your assets from the increased liability exposures that come with running an agritourism business. Time will be devoted for specific questions from the audience related to insurance and liability concerns for agritourism operations.