

## Montana

Rural Development ▪ Business and Cooperative Services ▪ Value Added Producer Grant

### Rural Montana Women Turn ‘Side Project’ into Profitable Operation



(L-R) Jessi, Abby, and Mariah, co-owners of Montana Ranchers Beef Co., in Hilger, MT.

Nestled in the heart of central Montana’s Fergus County sits the town of Hilger, home to the Montana Ranchers Beef Co. This woman-owned beef production business, which formed during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, is a collaborative three-family operation that raises, processes, and sells grass-fed Black Angus beef cattle.

In 2021, they applied for and received a \$49,954 USDA Rural Development Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) to fund business expenses related to processing, packaging, and marketing their product.

“One of the reasons why we consider this business so important is because of an increased demand by consumers wanting to know where their food is coming from,” said Abby Majerus, a co-owner of Montana Ranchers. “Several people who drive by our ranches and see cattle grazing in the fields are our customers, so they know where their beef products are coming from.”

According to Abby, the ranch is a ‘side project’ because she and her co-owners work other jobs and have families with small children, so time is scarce for ranching operations. But they are motivated by a passion to provide beef raised and processed in central Montana for their neighbors.

“People are looking for reasons to access their food locally, and we wanted to diversify so we could add value to our state,” said Abby.

They used their grant to fund startup costs, including processing and building inventory. Eventually the USDA grant generated more funding from additional sources.

“The application is not something you can start on a Friday and finish on a Monday,” Abby said. “The process took almost a month, but it was worth it, and the Rural Development staff was crucial to our success.”

So far, things are trending in the right direction. In 2022 Montana Ranchers turned a profit, and they were able to get some of their products into a local market in Livingston. But they continue to take things slowly.

“We are still only halfway through our grant, but the goal by the end is to become self-sustaining and be able to invest in other areas of the business,” said Abby. “The backbone of Montana lies in those who stick it out.”

The USDA Value Added Producer Grant program supports agricultural producers engaged in value-added activities with the goal helping them generate new products, create marketing opportunities, and increase their income.

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*USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.*

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**Obligation Amount:** \$49,954

**Date of Obligation:** September 2021

**Congressional District:** US Representative Matt Rosendale, MT-02; US Senators Steve Daines and Jon Tester

**Demographics:** Hilger, MT in rural Fergus County is home to just more than 900 residents.

**Impact:** Funded key components of their rural small business including processing, packaging, and marketing.