



The Montana District Office (MDO) Monthly Focus is our opportunity to explore and highlight different elements that contribute to Montana’s economy. MDO Monthly Focus is intended to highlight small businesses and our partners to inspire and encourage small business development and growth in different areas of the economy.

For more information about SBA and the Montana District Office Team, please visit: [Montana District Office](#)

## Montana Manufacturing



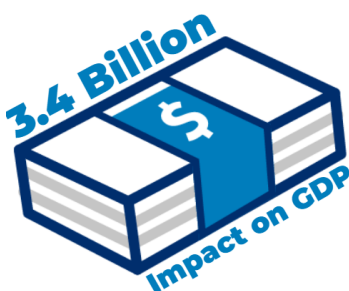
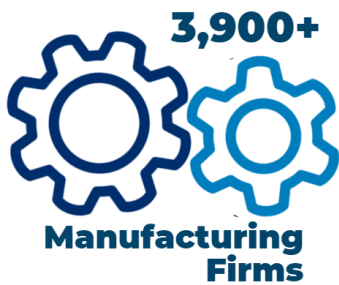
### Montana Manufacturing

This month we are highlighting one of Montana’s most diverse and reliable industries; Manufacturing. According to the 2021 Manufacturing Report by the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, Montana’s Manufacturing industry grew at twice the pace of the national average in employment, income, and output.

An industry made up of 3,900 firms, manufacturing firms have an impact of over \$3.4 billion dollars on our state’s economy, employ nearly 21,000 Montanans (4.5% of our workforce), and pay an average of \$51,220, which is 17% more than the state average.

In addition, manufactured goods are exported around the world and are driving our state’s economy by creating good-paying jobs.

As impactful as it is diverse, manufacturing has various subsectors including petroleum and coal from refining, wood products, chemicals, machined metal, and food products.



## Food Manufacturing

Food & Beverage Manufacturing also known as value-added agriculture, is the largest subsector of Montana’s manufacturing industry as well as the fastest-growing. *“This is great news because most of these manufacturers are purchasing their raw materials from small farmers and ranchers in Montana. This provides twice the benefit for Montana...first for the family farm or ranch and secondly for the small manufacturer.”* says Paddy Fleming, Executive Director of the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center at Montana State University.

There are currently 445 Food & Beverage manufacturing businesses in Montana, including over 100 breweries, with a workforce making up 11% of the manufacturing workforce. According to Dun & Bradstreet, the US food manufacturing industry consists of about 27,000 manufacturing businesses with combined annual revenue of about \$780 billion.

According to Market Watch, the market of food manufacturing and processing is increasing, projected to grow to \$7 trillion worldwide by 2026.



**Business:** Hi Country Snack Foods

**Location:** Lincoln, MT

**Website:** [www.HiCountry.com](http://www.HiCountry.com)

**Owner:** Travis Byerly

**Description:** Tucked away in the Lincoln Valley, in a town of the same name, sits the largest employer within a 60 mile radius. Hi Country Snack Foods started as just a beef jerky company forty years ago, made up of part-time seasonal workers, but under the guidance of Travis Byerly, who purchased the company in 2017, Hi Country now employs nearly 50 full-time employees making a variety of jerky, specialty seasonings, and operating the Hi-Country Trading Post full of Made in Montana products.

## Five Questions with Travis

### 1. What does Hi Country mean to you?

*Hi Country products and the Hi Country brand are an institution.* It's a meaningful piece of Montana, unique, nostalgic, and western. Dried meats have been a part of our history since the dawn of man and we want to honor that by producing good products, with the best seasonings, made with meats produced in Montana.

### 2. What happened in the last 18 months that changed your business?

Even though we are in a rural area, we were not spared the effects of the pandemic. We realized early on just how fragile and sensitive the supply chain is. Beef prices went up while packaging, labeling, and boxes were difficult to procure. *Small things became big issues.* It made us think different and plan more. We consolidated and made efficiencies we still use today.

### 3. How did the SBA impact your business?

*To be frank, we wouldn't be here if it weren't for the SBA.* The Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans were essential. During the shut down, we shut down and sent our employees home, but PPP and EIDL allowed us bring them back and offer them a pay increase. We were forced to battle unemployment benefits, and the Paycheck Protection Program allowed us to keep our talent here. The SBA funding helped us keep our doors open and our factory going.

*"To be frank, we wouldn't be here if it weren't for the SBA"*

Travis Byerly, Owner

### 4. What does the future hold?

A lot! *We are looking to expand not only our production, but our distribution as well.* With more partnerships and products coming online, we are expanding to add another facility focused solely on delivery for our products and the products of other companies. We have plans to add an ice cream shop at the Trading Post, a shooting range and ax throwing, but more importantly, we are investing in employee housing on our property so we don't lose workers due to lack of affordable homes in the area.

### 5. What piece of wisdom would you give the someone getting ready to start a business?

*Think outside of the box, give back to the community, and know you don't have to do this alone.* Utilize the resources and funding available. I didn't know about all the programs available until I started asking our lender who helped us apply for them.