

Agriculture Programs

Agricultural Services

MSU Extension in Prairie County offers services to assist producers including: forage testing, insect and weed identification, plant disease diagnostics, plant variety information, ration balancing, feed analysis, range monitoring, and Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage certification.



Wheat Streak Mosaic Virus was a crop disease that affected producers in Prairie County in 2016. Positive diagnosis from the Schutter Diagnostic Lab at MSU and advice from MSU Extension Agents helped producers respond to this disease.

MSU Extension performs nitrate quick tests in the office to test for the presence of the toxin nitrate in forage. During the summer of 2016, 74% of the samples tested positive for nitrate. MSU Extension in Prairie County is in the second season of piloting use of a quantitative nitrate test that gives the grower an indication of how much nitrate is present in the sample, whereas the original quick test just confirms if nitrate is present or not present. These tests were especially useful to growers while their crop was still standing in making the decision whether or not to delay cutting or if they should graze. 27% of samples tested with the quantitative nitrate test were high enough that producers would have to feed cautiously, diluting the ration. As a result, one producer made the decision not to graze crop regrowth and another producer delayed cutting until test results were satisfactory.

MSU Extension Winter Series

MSU Extension agents in Prairie, Dawson, Wibaux, Fallon-Carter, Powder River, Rosebud-Treasure, McCone, Custer, and Garfield counties cooperatively plan the annual Extension Winter Series. The second week in January, guest speakers traveled to 10 towns in Southeastern Montana. In Terry, 41 men and women attended Winter Series. Speakers and topics were Dr. Kate Fuller, MSU Extension Economics Specialist, on agriculture leases; Cecil Tharp, MSU Extension Pesticide Specialist, on alfalfa weevil management; and Sharla Sackman, Prairie County MSU Extension Agent, on pesticide safety and proposed changes to the private pesticide applicator program. Winter Series is the largest adult education event in Prairie County. Producers report that they appreciate being able to hear from university experts and request topics to be presented throughout the year. Producers requested information from MSU Extension in Prairie County Extension on agriculture leases before entering into a lease agreement. As a result of increased awareness of threshold levels for alfalfa weevil, two producers swept their fields to assess weevil larvae populations. Producers gave testimonials during the program about the importance of taking safety precautions when handling pesticides.



Producers learn about alfalfa weevil management from Cecil Tharp, MSU Extension Pesticide Specialist, at Winter Series in Terry.

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Tri-County Weed Tour participants learn range monitoring techniques from Cheryl Schuldt with the Montana Rangelands Partnership.

Tri-County Weed Tour

Prairie, Fallon, and Wibaux Counties have worked together since 1990 on the Tri-County Leafy Spurge Project. Each year, an annual tour helps educate producers about noxious weed management.

Twenty-eight producers attended the Tri-County Tour in 2016. Tour topics included water quality and pesticide performance by Fallon-Carter Counties MSU Extension Agent Elin Kittlemann, protecting you and your operation by Jim Larsen with the Montana Ag Safety Program, multi-species grazing by NDSU Range Science's Kevin Sedivec, monitoring for range health by Cheryl Schuldt with the Montana Rangelands Partnership, and record-keeping reminders for pesticide applicators by Prairie County MSU Extension Agent Sharla Sackman. Following the tour, one producer commented, "I came for the (pesticide recertification) points but got a whole lot more." Another producer is looking into a molasses co-product being used to spray on weeds to encourage livestock to graze the weeds.

The Tri-County area of Prairie, Fallon and Wibaux counties is a location where leafy spurge is and will continue to be a permanent problem. Twenty-five years of educational programs and sustained integrated weed management efforts on the part of landowners have helped contain the leafy spurge infestation to the same area of Cabin Creek and slowed the spread to outlying areas.

Prairie County Range Tour

MSU Extension in Prairie County works cooperatively with the Prairie County Grazing District and local producers to select topics of local interest for an annual range tour featuring researchers from Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory.

Dr. Andy Roberts shared new research comparing Line 1 Herefords and Angus to study the effects of line breeding; Dr. El Hamidi Hay discussed use of genetically enhanced expected progeny differences (EPD's) in bull selection; and Dr. Lance Vermeire summarized range drought research taking place at Fort Keogh. Two guest speakers from the Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology discussed the dynamics of hydrology in Southeastern Montana, and interim Miles Community College Ag Instructor Dr. Merilynn Shantz discussed her research on annual grass management on the tour.

This annual tour has been a great way for Prairie County livestock producers to form a relationship with scientists at Fort Keogh. Thirty-nine producers engaged in active discussions at the tour, asking questions about research and seeking advice about their own operations. Producers reported knowledge on new hydrology resources as a result of attending the tour.



One producer has implemented a visual obstruction monitoring method demonstrated at the 2011 Range Tour. This method is used to determine forage standing crop in his annual range monitoring in addition to photo monitoring of the sites.

4-H and Youth Programs

4-H Program

Thirty-two members and 12 adult volunteer leaders were enrolled in 4-H for the 2015-2016 4-H year. Prairie County's total school enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year was 159, hence 4-H members constitute approximately 20% of the school population. Prairie County 4-H provided members many opportunities for young people to learn leadership, citizenship, and life skills.

4-H has a lasting effect on the lives of members. One Prairie County 4-H alumni reported that the first grant she had written was as a senior in high school to the Montana 4-H Foundation about the time the Foundation was established for a community service project. Her project, picnic tables in the park, are still used by community members at the park and at the Prairie County Fairgrounds today. Since that time, this 4-H alum has written many grants professionally and for the community.



A 4-H member prepares his Stir-Ups dish at All Events Day.

County Events

All Events Day is an annual event that provides 4-H members with opportunities to showcase their skills and talents in sewing, public speaking, demonstrations, and food preparation. The day is planned and implemented by a team of teen 4-H leaders under the guidance of the county agent.

One of the goals for the 4-H program locally has been to provide educational opportunities in a wide variety of projects. As a result, nine separate workshop sessions were planned throughout the course of the 4-H year, plus a series

of Shooting Sports and Horsemanship workshops. Members gained skills in project areas such as food and nutrition, sewing, market livestock care, horse, arts and crafts, shooting sports, farm safety, livestock showmanship, and livestock evaluation. Volunteer leaders and 4-H teen leaders were engaged to lead the project workshops with the county agent. 90% of 4-H members participated in at least one project workshop during the 4-H year.

For the second year, a 4-H orientation and training was held for 4-H families in Prairie County. The training explained the basic organization and operations of 4-H in Prairie County and how positive youth development goals are accomplished in the 4-H program. A focus of the session this year was how project work contributes to life skill development in 4-H. Families attending reported a greater understanding of how to utilize 4-H project curriculum.

Regional and State 4-H Activities

Prairie County 4-H members participate in a number of regional and statewide activities such as the Southeastern Montana 4-H Camp at Camp Needmore in Ekalaka, Southeastern Montana Junior High Oreo Trip to the Black Hills, Eastern Montana Regional Small Animal Judging Day in Miles City, statewide shooting sports competitions, and Montana State 4-H Congress. These experiences provide an opportunity for 4-H members to travel, network with members from other areas, and gain valuable communication skills and take on leadership roles outside of the county. Members participating in these events shared their experiences with other members at Prairie County 4-H Achievement Day.



4-H members learn some basic first aid skills from an EMT at a farm safety workshop.



Peter Kolb, MSU Extension Forestry Specialist, demonstrates best management practices for pruning trees.

Family & Consumer Science Programs

There are four active homemaker clubs in Prairie County whose interests include nutrition, horticulture, and community improvement. MSU Extension staff assist homemakers in meeting their educational goals by publishing a monthly newsletter containing information on subjects like food preparation and safety, nutrition, health, financial management, and gardening. MSU Extension Agent Sharla Sackman assisted the Prairie County Homemaker Council in submitting an application to Humanities Montana to host a Montana Conversations Program. Anne Foster presented her *Fashioning Montana: Clothing and Culture in the Victorian and Edwardian Eras* program in November of 2016. Participants reported learning a great deal about the history and culture of this time period.

MSU Extension in Prairie County has an added Family and Consumer Science track at the annual MSU Extension Winter Series. Tara Andrews, Custer County MSU Extension Agent, gave a presentation on incorporating a variety of grains in your diet. Vicky Tusler, Terry High School Art and Family & Consumer Sciences Teacher, led participants in a re-design and recycle project .

Horticulture Programs

MSU Extension provides community members with information on seeding and fertilizing lawns, lawn disease identification, transplanting trees, tree selection, tree disease and abiotic issue identification, selection of garden plants, and plant and insect identification. One of the most frequently used services that MSU Extension offers is assistance with horticulture-related questions, and tree care ranks among the highest areas of concern.

MSU Extension in Prairie County organized a tree care workshop in the spring of 2016. Laurie Kerzicnik, MSU Extension Insect Diagnostician, discussed common tree pests, their life cycles, and when control may be necessary. Peter Kolb, MSU Extension Forestry Specialist, talked about general best management practices for tree care and pruning trees for health, shape and after storm damage. One homeowner was able to have her apricot tree properly pruned during the workshop.



Winter Series participants learn how to re-design and recycle plastic grocery bags.

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