



## Welcome to Custer County

Custer County MSU Extension serves the citizens of Custer County and citizens of our neighboring counties. The responsibility of Custer County MSU Extension is to provide education and leadership in programs related to family and consumer science, agriculture, youth development and horticulture.

Custer County is located in Southeastern Montana with the Yellowstone River flowing through the northern portion from West to East. Miles City is the center of commerce and

is a transportation crossroads with I-94, US Highways 12 & 59, and the BNSF Railway all passing through the community. Custer County is home to the Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Station, one of the largest Agricultural Research Service stations in the nation, and serves the county's 90,000-head beef cattle industry. The county includes approximately 12,000 residents and is a shopping hub for all of Southeast Montana.



Spring pasture in Kinsey, Montana. Photo by Mike Schuldt.

## Teen 4-H Council to Host New State Contest

The Custer County 4-H teen leader council continues to grow their role in the success of a very dynamic 4-H program. The teen leader council has 15 active members completing leadership projects, taking a leadership role in county activities and coordinating project workshops.

Teen leaders provide instruction, organization and learning activities for the annual one-day Cloverbud camp (for youth ages 5-8). Cloverbuds from across the county participate in the camp to learn more about what 4-H has to offer, build friendships and get to know the youth leaders in the program. This opportunity builds confidence in the Cloverbud members so they can find success as they move into regular 4-H membership. Teen leaders become the role models for these younger members.

The teens also provide the workforce for successful youth Chef School activities, which teach grade-school aged children basic cooking skills. The council members are also an integral part of the county fair, serving as clerks, announcers and judge assistants during many of the livestock shows.

Providing the leadership and organization to host a brand-new contest at Montana State 4-H Congress is the latest undertaking by this ambitious

group. After participating in the National Western 4-H Roundup in Denver in 2018, the Horse Skill-a-thon team recognized that Montana has an untapped opportunity to send a Livestock Quiz Bowl team. The group proposed that if they were afforded the opportunity to compete as Montana's team in 2019, they would bring their experience back and provide the leadership to host this contest at Congress. The statewide Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development endorsed this idea and five 4-H members from Custer County will compete in Denver in January, 2019.

The highlight of the year for the teen council members is their annual leadership trip. This year they organized a three-day canoe trip from Coal Banks Landing to the PN Bridge on the Missouri River. Team building, history and plant ID were all lessons that were learned along the trip through the historic White Cliff section of the Missouri River. The trip is made possible by funds raised by the youth selling concessions at the annual Miles City Bucking Horse Sale.

Teen council has two voting seats on the county's 4-H council and they provide a meaningful youth-based perspective for many of the issues that come before the council. The teens are a great asset to the entire Custer County 4-H program.



Teens hard at work at the County Fair. Photo by Cindy Berg.



## Sausage-making Workshops Teach Many Lessons

Custer County MSU Extension, in cooperation with the MSU Extension programs from surrounding counties, have introduced sausage-making classes as a way to teach lessons on food safety, self-reliance, quality assurance and how processing can increase value. Following the guidance of Fort Peck Reservation Extension agent Wendy Becker, equipment was purchased to create a mobile teaching lab that provides students with the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in the processes required to convert bulk primal cuts of meat to a higher-value sausage product.

The curriculum that is utilized focuses on food safety and proper handling and storage of the meat product. Students can choose from a selection of fresh sausage recipes and create a unique product based on some of their personal taste preferences. Cuts of meat and where they come from are one of the learning objectives. Knife and equipment safety is also stressed throughout the program as the students complete each of the hands-on tasks including boning and cutting the meat before feeding it into the electric meat grinder, measuring and mixing the spices required, as well as operating the vertical stuffing machine to fill the casings and make the links. Students are also taught the proper technique to package the finished product in freezer paper to ensure air will be eliminated and freezer burn prevented. Students also learn the function and proper use of preservatives, salts, smoking and drying in meat preservation.

### Sweet and Spicy Country Style Sausage

5 pounds coarsely ground pork  
2 Tbsp dried sage  
1 Tbsp dried summer savory  
1 Tbsp ground red pepper  
1 Tbsp coarsely-ground black pepper  
¼ cup brown sugar

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl. This sausage can be either stuffed or formed into patties. For the best flavor, refrigerate overnight before cooking.

Custer County MSU Extension has presented two sessions in Miles City in 2018, one being an adult education-based program for the general public, the second being a session for the attendees of the Miles City Ram Sale. Over 40 individuals participated in the Ram Sale program, creating 60 pounds of lamb sausage links using four different recipes. These sausages were then served back to the producers at the buyer social that evening. Those making the sausage were proud of their product and extremely happy with the reception by the crowd – not one bite was left at the end of the evening.

Demand for the workshop is growing as the word gets out. Custer County MSU Extension agents have collaborated with area agents to present workshops in Powder River, Prairie, Fallon and Carter County. Fallon County received a Sustainable Ag Research and Education grant to purchase an additional set of equipment, doubling the size of the class that we can teach. The effort will expand to teach Quality Assurance and where food comes from to 4-H Market animal project members in 2019.



Making quality home sausage. Photo by Michael Schuldt.

## Family & Consumer Science Programming in Custer County

Family and Consumer Science programming in Custer County continues to evolve as the needs in the community change, new county and statewide issues are identified, and clientele request information on particular topics.

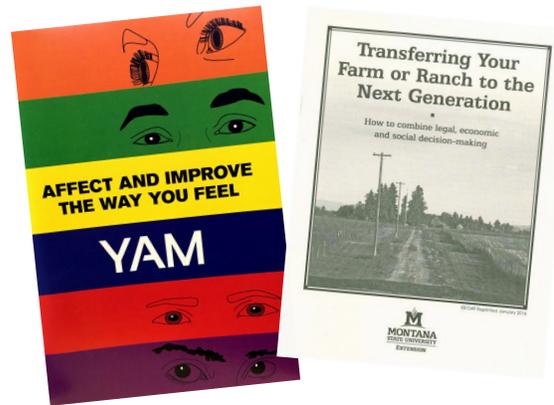
Montana currently has the highest suicide rate in the country, nearly twice the national rate. As part of a statewide effort to reduce the incidence of suicide and increase mental health education, Custer County MSU Extension facilitated the Youth Aware of Mental Health program, a research-based adolescent suicide prevention program for all 120 freshmen at Custer County District High School. Results of the program Montana-wide indicate that the knowledge about mental health increased, students experienced a decrease in anxiety symptoms, there was a 49% improvement in students reporting that they would seek help with feelings of suicide, and 79% improvement in students reporting that they would seek help for assistance with depression.

Custer County MSU Extension has also promoted the THRIVE program, a computer-based cognitive behavior therapy program to improve well-being and reduce depression.

After completing the Annie's Project program, which provided education workshops for businesswomen in agriculture, a need was identified

for education on inter-generational transfer of farms and ranches. To meet that need, Marsha Goetting, PhD, MSU Extension Family Economics Specialist, visited for three presentations in Custer County. Two presentations were on Estate Planning and the third was about inter-generational farm and ranch transfers. Attendance for the sessions was over 50 people and many attended more than one session.

Eastern Montana has an aging population, and with that comes increased cases of dementia in an area where services for dementia patients and their families are scarce. The goal of a five-week 'Powerful Tools for Caregivers' series was to offer support and education to families, as well as make them aware of the services that are available in Southeastern Montana. The participating group was particularly interested in financial issues created when one partner suffers from dementia, and we were able to provide resource packets from MSU Extension and the Alzheimer's Association to address the interest.



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