



Welcome to Fergus County

The Fergus County MSU Extension office serves a population of 11,586 within the Fergus County boundaries. Fergus County MSU Extension also has a working agreement with Petroleum County (population 491) to provide Extension education and 4-H services to the county's clientele. Fergus County is located in central Montana and covers 4,250 square miles. In addition to Lewistown, the county seat with a population of approximately 5,901, other communities include Denton, Grass Range, Moore, Roy and Winifred. Each community has its own school system.

Agricultural production and business form the basis of the economy. Light manufacturing, timber and natural resources, health care, education and government services contribute heavily to the non-agricultural employment opportunities. The area is well known for tourism, outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing opportunities. Geographic features include mountains, spring creeks and mountain streams, foothills, large rivers, rough river breaks and rolling prairie. A big part of the Fergus County Extension office is the 4-H program, which includes 231 members and 59 volunteer leaders in 14 organized clubs.



Left to right: Emily Standley, Agriculture Extension Agent; Denise Seilstad, Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent; Jennifer Saunders, 4-H Coordinator; Mary Miller, Office Manager. Photo by Katie Hatlelid.

MSU Extension Benefits the County

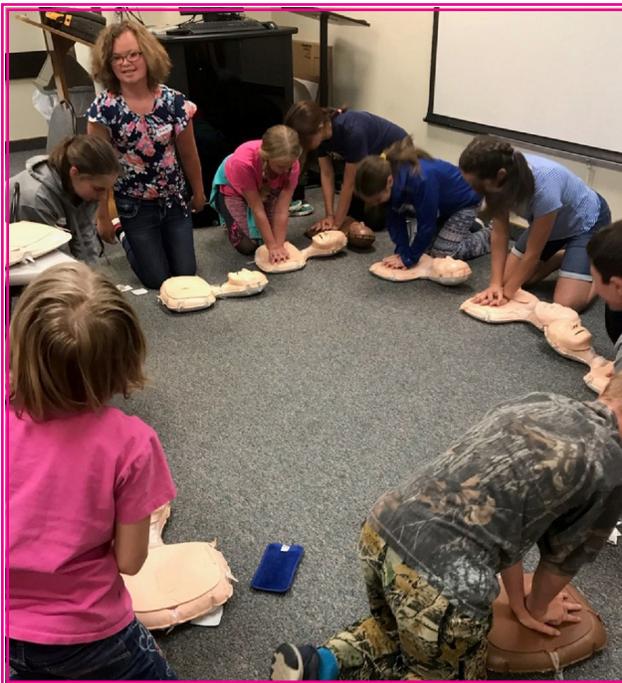
Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Denise Seilstad, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, has been serving the residents of Fergus County for the past 19 years. Many residents visit the MSU Extension office for one-on-one consultations or with questions ranging from food preservation and safety to financial planning. The ServSafe Food Safety education program was provided for 447 people throughout the year. The 8-hour full Manager training was given for 72 people, while 126 took the 4-hour course and 249 received the 2-hour employee/concession training. ServSafe training helps train employees and managers to meet state standards for food safety training in retail food establishments, and to train others in the foodservice industry. In another effort for food safety, 11 pressure gauges used for canning food were checked for accuracy throughout the year, helping keep food preservers and their families safe, while 8 people attended a Food Preservation safety workshop. Two human services programs are provided to the Fergus/Petroleum county

residents. The Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP) served 26 people in Fergus County, providing six weeks of self-management education. Powerful Tools for Caregivers, an educational program for friends and relatives acting as caregivers for an adult with a chronic medical condition, served 15 caregivers. Strong People, Strong Bones is in its eleventh year in Fergus /Petroleum County. This is an Extension program helping men and women slow down or prevent osteoporosis and arthritis by doing strength exercises. Two sessions run twice weekly throughout the year to serve 35 to 40 people. Community Education classes served 91 people over the past year, on topics of healthy, quick and economic meal planning and preparation, encouraging families to cook and eat together. The Safe Sitter Babysitting Workshop had 25 youth attend, ages 10 to 13. Youth are provided the needed skills and medical education to become responsible, dependable babysitters. The program is offered from MSU Extension in partnership with Central Montanan Hospital.

Working with the Lewistown Boys and Girls Club

Throughout the year, the MSU Extension staff work in various ways with the Lewistown Boys and Girls Club. This past summer the Club ran a farm-to-table themed program with the involvement of the Extension office. For the farm-to-table workshop, Emily Standley met with students at a local ranch. There, she talked about what happens when cattle graze the land, and the many decisions ranchers make to keep their livestock and landscape healthy. Students learned about the nutritional benefits of beef and had the opportunity to see ranchers use low-stress techniques to move cattle. The group finished their ranch visit by eating a hamburger lunch made from beef grown on that very ranch. Denise Seilstad taught students about wheat, and the uses of wheat. She first met with the younger members and read the Little Red Hen story. She demonstrated to them what a wheat



Safe Sitters class doing CPR.



Denise Seilstad working with Boys and Girls Club kids to make tortillas.

kernel looks like, how it looks in the stalk and then how it looks after it is milled into flour. Children then made their own loaf of bread-in-a-bag out of the flour. Seilstad later met with older children, sharing the same information, but they made tortillas for a taco lunch. Jennifer Saunders contributed to the Boys and Girls Club farm-to-table education by arranging guided tours of the animal barns, during the Central Montana Fair. Teen 4-H Leaders were paired up with groups of children from the Boys and Girls club to take through both the livestock pavilion and the small animal barn. They stopped to visit with 4-H members who told the groups about their animals and explained their 4-H projects. This collaboration contributed to learning opportunities for the Boys and Girls club youth who may not be exposed to agriculture as often as 4-H youth, and leadership opportunities for 4-H youth who guided tours during the fair.

Ag Opportunities Tour

Last summer, Emily Standley teamed with the Montana FFA Foundation to bring their Agricultural Opportunities Tour to Central Montana. This program showcases the wide variety of careers within the field of agriculture, and is open to students enrolled in FFA across the state. Thirty high school and collegiate FFA members, hailing from Bainville all the way to Stevensville, met in Lewistown to begin their tour. During the trip, students and chaperones traveled through Judith Basin, Fergus, and Phillips Counties to get a firsthand look at family farms, ag advocacy organizations, and ag-related businesses. The group visited organic and conventional farms to hear about different

production methods. They explored the inside of a local grain elevator and a nearby fertilizer plant. Students learned about cooperative and corporate business models. They heard the importance of marketing a product, whether selling to a niche audience or on a nationwide scale. The group witnessed the value of partnerships by visiting with non-profits on the hi-line who cooperated to create a community grass bank for ranchers. Students learned about the importance of crop rotation and diversifying ag operations. And while many of the stops included what might be considered “traditional” Montana agriculture, such as wheat and beef, the group also visited a hops farm, a garlic farm, and learned how drone technology can be used in ranching. Throughout the tour, students also built friendships, engaged in leadership activities, and experienced Central Montana hospitality in the form of home-cooked barbecue and delicious homemade donuts! Standley and the FFA Foundation accomplished the goal of showcasing a diversity of Montana agriculture.



A local rancher flies one of his drones for the students.



Small Animal 4-H Projects

In the last few years, Fergus/Petroleum 4-H program has seen an enrollment surge in the small animal projects, especially rabbit and poultry. These projects do not require a large financial investment to get started, nor do they require a huge amount of space. The animals can also be safely handled by a child of any age. Youth learn the same life skills they would with a large animal project. They learn responsibility by providing daily feeding and care. They learn to

fit and show the animals, and that hard work and practice will pay off. Through their workbooks they expand their knowledge about animal health, nutrition, genetics, reproduction and anatomy. Completing their records requires them to set goals and discuss the outcome, and they also keep record of their income and expenses. Youth practice interview skills as part of their fair competition. Any visitor to the small animal barn during the fair will quickly realize the pride the members take in their projects and the details and critical thinking skills they learn through participation.



Central Montana Fair 2018 - Small Animal Participants

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