Welcome to Lake County

Montana State University partners with Lake County to provide quality education programs and services which brings MSU to our residents. Local MSU Extension agents respond to citizens and stakeholders by developing, implementing and evaluating educational programs that address local needs and issues.

The following statements summarize the program goals of MSU Extension in Lake County for 4-H youth development, agriculture, healthy living, natural resources, community economic development, and family and consumer sciences:

- Prepare youth with life skills for the future so they can be productive, positive and contributing adults
- Develop through trainings, experiences and activities the youth and adult leaders necessary for a viable and engaged 4-H program
- Ensure sustainable agricultural enterprises on multiple levels
- Facilitate avenues for Lake County residents and families to improve their financial literacy, knowledge of consumer debts and needs while caring for themselves and their families through all stages of life
- Encourage healthier lifestyles and prevention of chronic diseases through promotion of positive health-related behaviors and self-care
- Enhance natural resource conservation and management by achieving defined objectives
- Expand access to Extension education and knowledge resources by meeting organizational goals and objectives affecting program quality and delivery, accountability, resource management and employee professional development

Horses hang out on a hillside in Irvine Flats.

Cows in a canola field enjoy a summer day.

Photos by Berl Tiskus
4-H market livestock members apply Animal Quality education

Lake County's 4-H market livestock project includes around 120 enrollees each year. Market livestock projects help enhance youth education and understanding of the modern livestock industry. Members who enroll in one of the market projects make a commitment to care for and train their project animal for more than three months (lamb and swine projects) or up to seven months (beef project).

During this time, 4-H members participate in a multitude of learning activities in animal science and building life skills.

Life skills learning includes:

- Responsibility
- Follow-through - outcomes related to work efforts
- Recordkeeping - expense charting
- Financial investment - break even analysis
- Animal science skills learning includes:
  - Livestock selection for desirable traits
  - Quality housing
  - Nutrition
  - Health care
  - Carcass quality
  - Sound environmental practices

Tim Herreid, Lake County Market Committee volunteer and 4-H parent, has observed that the income generated from a market animal project is often used by 4-Her’s for college tuition and/or to purchase other livestock, such as heifers, to help start them in the livestock business.

Raising Grandchildren

In Montana today, more than 7,400 grandparents are raising their grandchildren without parental involvement. These children most often end up at a grandparent’s home because of a family crisis. The grandparents may be ill-equipped to face the emotional, physical, financial and social hardships of raising their grandchildren. This issue is present in all socioeconomic and racial/ethnic groups. Here in Lake County, there is a large percentage of grandparents raising grandchildren. They may have become the primary caregivers for their grandchildren because of incarceration, death, deployment, teen pregnancy, parental substance abuse, physical or mental health issues of the parents or a number of reasons. But they all share the common faction of not having planned to raise more children, nor planned for the financial and emotional issues that accompany the responsibility.
MSU Extension partnered with Sunburst Mental Health agency in Polson to present the “Parenting a Second Time Around” to grandparents raising grandchildren in Lake County and to increase the awareness of the Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project. More than 20 grandparents attended the six-week program to help them deal with the emotions and opportunities for caring for their grandchildren.

One grandfather shared, “We didn’t know where to start.” Another grandmother said “I thought I was supposed to be enjoying my life now, not caring for kids.” The number of children cared for by the group which attended was more than 50 youth, ranging in age from newborn to teenagers. One teenaged daughter still living at home attended with her mother, the grandmother who was raising her two grandkids. She came to learn more about being a parent so she could help her mom. She was already adept at changing diapers, cooking, and many of the skills of being a parent, at a time when she should be able to focus on school activities and her own personal development.

The Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) Project, the only one of its kind in the state, was founded in 2002 to offer these caregivers support, education and access to resources so they can live happier, healthier lives and can, in turn, raise children who know emotional and physical safety, excel in school and social situations and are prepared to take on the challenges of their new life.

Task force plans bedbug decimation

Bed bugs infest Lake County homes, apartments, and motels. Essentially wherever people are, bed bugs can be there also.

Health agencies, extermination businesses, and the medical community have all put forth effort to educate, treat, and control this pest in attempts to eliminate bed bugs and the problems they cause. MSU Extension in Lake County was approached in 2017 by Lake County Public Health Department to:

- Determine what businesses and agencies are involved in bed bug control and prevention
- Organize a task force to unite efforts and awareness
- Conduct an education program to help all task force members with prevention and control

Results:

- Organizational meeting attracted 40 people representing 24 entities that are associated with bed bug issues on a variety of levels.
- Task force organization involving all 24 entities outlined a strategic plan to coordinate activities and distribute information that will lead to better prevention and control.
The moon shines down on snow-dusted mountains and farmland. Photo by Berl Tiskus