Phillips County is in North Central Montana along the Hi-Line. It encompasses 3.2 million acres. Agriculture is the main industry in Phillips County, consisting of 54,000 mother cows, ranking third most in the state; 5,900 sheep; 157,400 acres of wheat; 40,000 acres of pulse crops; and 40,000 acres of irrigated land. The gross value of all agricultural commodities in 2014 was over $60 million dollars, excluding any government program. Recreation is also an industry in the county.

Weather continued to play a major role in 2018 for agricultural producers. Winter was long and cold with permanent snow cover beginning December 20, 2017 and staying through April 20, 2018. The National Weather Service in Glasgow estimated over 59 inches of snow for the winter. Having had a drought in 2017, hay supplies were short and with most of the older cows in the county calving in April, this created an unfortunate death loss among cattle producers. It is estimated that 7,000 head of calves (15%) were lost during March and April snows.

For the second straight year when the snow cleared in the spring, the winds started. Phillips County received no moisture in May and only about an inch of rain in June countywide. With July and August being traditional moisture-short months, it was impossible to catch up from the lack of moisture.

Better conditions finally came to winter wheat farmers as in September 2018, Phillips County received 2-3 inches of rain countywide. This moisture will be invaluable once spring comes in 2019 in case we are again in a dry spring weather pattern.

Shorn sheep exiting the shearing plant on March 22, 2018, with snow still covering the ground.
Jim Schumacher Memorial Livestock Day

More than 30 producers attended the annual Jim Schumacher Memorial Livestock Day on January 24, 2018. A Utah State Veterinary Specialist discussed how liver biopsy from cattle can aid in determining an animal's mineral status, which is important because mineral imbalance can significantly affect weight gain of calves. Emily Meccage, PhD, Montana State University Extension Forage Specialist, discussed new research varieties for annual forage production. She has performed many statewide trials and reported that spring Triticale is a promising crop. Eric Riley from Montana Farmers Union provided an overview of the Pasture Range Forage (PRF) insurance program. PRF insurance can be placed on pasture, rangeland, and forage that is owned or rented. Brian Warr, veterinarian from Feedlot Health in Canada, discussed how producers can perform necropsy investigations on animals that are post mortem (pm). Warr demonstrated the critical photos that are helpful in determining cause of death for a pm animal with a video of a necropsy. Producers learned that a simple necropsy can provide clues in determining the cause of an animal’s death.

Pulse workshop provides education, outlook for pulse industry

Pulse production in Phillips County has grown to 40,000 planted acres according to the Montana Agricultural statistics in 2016. In response to this growing industry, the Phillips County MSU Extension agent held a pulse workshop. Kevin McPhee, PhD, Montana State University Pulse Breeder, explained how his breeding program will grow to meet seed and variety demands. Specifically, he discussed how to access to pulse genetics, pulse crosses, and winter pulse variety development. Jessica Rupp, PhD, Montana State University Extension Plant Pathologist, presented disease identification of pulses, control of pulse diseases with rotations and fungicide treatments. Joe Janzen, PhD, Montana State University Assistant Professor Department of Agricultural Economics, presented a market outlook for pulse crops, which is important as India had proposed significant trade tariffs on all imported pulses.

Crop Seminar 2018

A crops seminar was held in Phillips County in November, 2018. The focus of the seminar was root diseases of pulse crops, herbicide carryover, and crop rotation. With commodity prices for wheat, peas and lentils at their lowest point since 2014, many producers are producing at or below their break even price. Producers must decide if each input is going to improve production to remain economically viable. Alan Dyer, PhD, Montana State University Plant Pathologist, discussed the limited seed treatment options for pulse production and encouraged the growers to apply seed treatment correctly and follow recommendations made in the Small Grain Seed treatment MontGuide from MSU Extension. With an input cost of $2 per acre to seed treat, producers need to make sure they are using the right product and rate. Tim Seipel, PhD, Montana State Extension Crop Weed Specialist, cautioned growers to read the label to avoid carry over of herbicides to the next crop. Moisture or lack of it can also cause herbicides to carry over for a longer period. Kent McVay, PhD, Montana State University Extension Agronomist, showed how growers could grow the same amount and value of grain by using crop rotation as opposed to just wheat fallow. This can increase marketing options for producers. Thirty producers from Phillips, Blaine and Valley Counties participated in the program.
Phillips County 4-H 2018

The Phillips County 4-H program started the 99th year with 180 youth. Youth range in age from Cloverbuds (five years old) to seniors in high school. Phillips County has 42 adult volunteer leaders and 14 youth leaders who give their time and talents to help youth achieve their goals to become productive members in our society.

Youth are engaged in 447 projects ranging from gardening to leadership, child development to rabbits. The top five most popular projects for Phillips County in 2018 were market swine, archery, air rifle, horse, and market beef. The charts illustrate that you don't need to have an animal and live on a farm to be a productive member in 4-H, as more youth are enrolled who live in town than live on farms and ranches.

4-H Livestock Judging

Forty-five youth participated in judging events, where the 4-H member practices sound reasoning and decision making skills by interpreting the topic, comparing the items, and ranking the items in proper order. The task is to decide which item is the best, which ranks second, third, and which is the least desirable. Youth started the judging with six classes of livestock: replacement heifers, breeding bucks, bull calves, market steers, market swine, and swine feed. Area producers and feed businesses provided the animals for the classes. Youth then honed their skills by participating in miscellaneous judging classes which included bicycling, silverware setting, dog food labels, sheep card combs, soils, and mixing tools.

Wool Pool Receives Record Prices

The Eastern Consolidated Wool Pool sold 102,191 pounds of wool in June, 2018. The Eastern Consolidated pool represents growers from the areas of the Front Range, Hi-Line, Plentywood, Sidney, Wibaux, and Beach, North Dakota. Total pool value was $282,583. There is a global shortage of fine wools, which has resulted in these record high prices. To place this into context, selling one ton of fine wool would equal $6,624 per ton. Not many “legal” agricultural crops can yield so much value.
Shooting Sports

The 4-H shooting sports program has been a great asset to Phillips County in helping youth develop an understanding of the safe, responsible use of firearms and archery equipment. Phillips County offers three disciplines including air rifle, air pistol and archery. In 2018, the Phillips County shooting sports program taught 51 youth the importance of safety, marksmanship, sight alignment, archery techniques and types of equipment. With the disciplines being taught, youth went on to compete at the state level, which demonstrates their dedication and responsibility, as well as self-confidence in a competitive project.

4-H youth receiving their award from shooting sports competition.

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