Welcome to Ravalli County

Nestled between two mountain ranges in western Montana, Ravalli County and the Bitterroot Valley are a haven for those who wish to live the Montana lifestyle. The 43,000 residents of Ravalli County enjoy blue-ribbon trout fishing on the Bitterroot River, hunting, hiking, and recreating in the Bitterroot National Forest, and partake in a diverse and growing local food scene. Agriculture, natural resources, recreation and tourism, construction, and small business opportunities all combine to contribute to the county economic base. There are nine small, rural communities spread through the valley. Hamilton, the largest of our communities and the county seat, serves as a gathering point for a variety of events and needs. The MSU Ravalli County Extension office has four staff members offering services to all Ravalli County residents.
Nutrition Education, Food Safety and Cooking Classes

In Ravalli County, access to evidence-based nutrition education is available to all age groups and individuals through programs and partnerships with Extension faculty. Three diverse programs were offered in 2018 to the community, serving 242 adults and 348 youth.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) offers free cooking and nutrition classes to SNAP eligible adults and elementary students in the first, third and fifth grades. A school’s eligibility is based on participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. In Ravalli County, qualifying schools for the nutrition classes include Darby, Hamilton, Stevensville and Victor. These same communities are offered the nine-week Eat Smart, Be Active program to help adults create healthy, nutritious meals while staying within a tight food budget.

In addition to the SNAP-Ed program, individuals in the community have expressed interest in making nutritious meals using an electric pressure cooker, which has grown in popularity in recent years. Over 150 adults have completed the two-hour class called Meals in Minutes, which was created in Ravalli County in partnership with other agents across the state. The class taught individuals safety mechanisms, nutrition information, and knife skills to create quick, healthy meals for their family.

Restaurants, food trucks and other food establishments have depended on Extension resources for ServSafe food safety training in recent years due to the change in the FDA Food Code, requiring every food establishment to have at least one person trained in an eight-hour food safety class. MSU Extension in Ravalli County provides this course twice a year in partnership with Missoula County MSU Extension.

4-H Youth Development

Montana’s 4-H Youth Development program in Ravalli County offers experience for youth to learn, discover and engage, with an emphasis on teaching life skills, responsibility and the value of citizenship. In the 2017-2018 4-H year, MSU Extension served over 485 youth in 21 community clubs through the assistance of 150 registered volunteer leaders. Every year, nearly 2,000 youth are reached through school enrichment and afterschool programming opportunities, such as the Fourth Grade Farm Fair and Sixth Grade Conservation Days. Experiential learning occurs throughout the year with their enrolled projects, ranging from photography to livestock, as well as at county-wide opportunities such as annual junior and teen camping programs.

Youth have the opportunity to build skills and knowledge in the project of their choice. Many youth engage in the 4-H program through club work as a member and complete a project. This past year, the 4-H program grew in
the Shooting Sports projects, which now includes Archery, Air Rifle, Air Pistol, Shotgun, Small Bore Rifle and Small Bore Pistol. Three of the disciplines were established this last 4-H year, which increased through volunteer capacity and interest from the youth. Through their participation in these projects, individuals report learning new skills, safety measures with equipment becoming a habit, developing discipline, and gaining self-confidence.

The 4-H program is also experiencing an increase in livestock projects. This past year, 254 youth in the valley raised an animal to sell at the Ravalli County 4-H/FFA Livestock Sale. After fall enrollment for the 2018-2019 4-H year, these numbers are increasing even more. Members depend on the education from Extension agents and volunteer leaders to successfully raise a quality animal for consumers.

There are countless ways where youth and community members can be enriched with the 4-H program. Talk to a 4-H member or leader in your community to learn their personal stories of why they contribute to the largest out-of-school youth organization in the nation.

Wellness in the Bitterroot

Personal health and well-being is an important facet of living an enjoyable life. Research shows that physical activity is a primary prevention tool used to prevent chronic diseases and improve mental health.

Starting in the fall of 2016, the MSU Extension in Ravalli County partnered with MSU College of Nursing students enrolled in the Population Based Nursing Care in the Community course. As a part of the class, the Family and Consumer Science Extension agent works with college nursing students to complete a community outreach project. The students chose to create a walking map to provide a resource to encourage physical activity in the City of Hamilton. This partnership has continued through the spring and fall semesters in 2017 and 2018 with new nursing students and expanding the project with an incentive program called Bike, Walk, Roll & Win and development of community walking maps, which now include Hamilton, Stevensville and soon-to-be-released Darby Walking Maps. In November 2018, the health-incentive program, WINter Wellness kicked off by engaging adults to complete any form of physical activity through the holidays and winter months.

In two short years, the impacts of this partnership have elevated the desire to create a culture of health in the county and strengthened collaboration with other county non-profits, individuals, businesses and government entities. As an example, the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Downtown Association plan to incorporate the Hamilton Walking Map as a part of their wayfinding program to increase physical activity and tourism by showing how quickly individuals can walk to wildlife and river access from downtown Hamilton.
Supporting Growers of all Sizes in Ravalli County Agriculture and Horticulture

MSU Extension in Ravalli County organized and hosted workshops and educational opportunities to meet the needs of landowners and growers of all sizes and focuses throughout the Bitterroot Valley. Seminars, field days, and workshops serve agriculturalists and backyard horticulturalists in Ravalli County and target the needs and desires of the producers to have up-to-date, research-based information and methods to help them make decisions.

A presentation held in Stevensville highlighted perennial forage management and integrating legumes into pastures, and was well-attended by 35 people. Two specialists from MSU Bozeman led a half-day grazing and pasture management field day, teaching 27 participants about how to scout and collect data for the health and utilization of grasses. Two full-day pesticide safety, equipment calibration, and weed management programs were all offered to support agriculturalists looking for new ideas, and provided license recertification credits to 64 participants.

Horticulturalists and backyard enthusiasts learned and practiced how to properly prune fruit trees on a snowy February weekend in Hamilton, and others learned about the importance of soil testing and soil fertility in their yards and gardens in May. A cohort of 10 Master Gardeners completed the level 2 Master Gardener class series, and have been engaged in volunteer actions throughout the communities of the valley, sharing their knowledge and love of gardening pursuits.

Participants listen to Megan Van Emon and Emily Meccage, MSU Extension Specialists, during a grazing field day. Photo by Patrick Mangan

contact us:

Ravalli County
215 S. 4th St., Suite G
Hamilton, MT 59840-2853
(406) 375-6611
ravalli@montana.edu
www.msuextension.org/ravalli

Katelyn Andersen
4-H Youth Development and Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent

Patrick Mangan
Agriculture Extension Agent

Jennifer Murrillo
SNAP-Ed Program Manager

Jocelyn Snider
Administrative Assistant

Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran’s Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.