

Fergus County

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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.

4-H Ambassador Farm Safety Day

The Fergus/Petroleum 4-H Ambassadors organize a yearly Farm Safety Day for Central Montana first and second graders. Between 250 and 275 children from schools in Fergus, Petroleum and Judith Basin Counties attend each spring. The Ambassador Team reserves and pays for the Livestock Pavilion at the fairgrounds, sends informational packets to all the teachers, arranges the speakers, and keeps the whole event moving smoothly.

The children are divided into nine groups, rural schools in the morning and Lewistown schools in the afternoon. 4-H members serve as group leaders, rotating through learning stations; ATVs, electricity, grain bins, livestock, tractor/PTO, first aid EMS, fire and horses. They learn why it is important to ride a four wheeler the appropriate size for a person's height and weight, they watch in awe as electricity is arced to fry an orange, they watch a toy man disappear into a miniature grain wagon, and they see first-hand how fast a PTO turns. The livestock and horse stations teach them to respect animals and both the fire and ambulance crews visit with them about prevention and response to a medical or fire emergency. Plus, each group takes a turn at the coloring/snack station.

This is also a learning experience for the Teen Ambassadors who work to organize Farm Safety Day. They learn to delegate duties among their team of four, they practice marketing and communication skills while working with the schools, teachers, presenters and students. Organization and planning keep the day running smoothly, and they take the time to debrief after the event to make sure the next year is even better. They always hear great feedback from both teachers and students and ultimately believe they are preventing children from being killed or injured in our rural communities.

Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Denise Seilstad, Family and Consumer Sciences MSU Extension Agent, has been serving the residents of Fergus County for the past 20 years. Many residents visit MSU Extension for one-on-one consultations and questions ranging from food preservation and safety to financial planning.

With a high increase in opioid misuse, Seilstad has been working with a team from MSU to educate the people of Fergus and Petroleum Counties about this crisis. Forums were held around the state, one of them in Lewistown, to hear information and feedback about opioid misuse in Montana. The forums have driven creation of educational materials which Seilstad has started and will continue to bring to the people of Fergus and Petroleum Counties.

ServSafe Food Safety education was provided to 416 people throughout this past year. ServSafe training helps train employees and managers to meet standards for food safety training in retail food establishments and to train others in the foodservice industry. There were a considerable amount of requests to Extension that were answered on the topic of food safety. Questions cover everything from personal interest calls to Cottage Food Law questions. To help keep home food preservers and their families safe, 16 pressure gauges were checked for safety throughout the year. Along with pressure gauge testing, research information from MSU Extension about home food preservation is always available at the office.

Human services programs are also provided to Fergus/Petroleum residents.

- Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP) served 16 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 14 caregivers this past year.
- Fergus County MSU Extension has teamed with the Central Montana Medical Center (CMMC) in offering an Alzheimer





Top row: (left) First and second graders learning about farm safety, by Jennifer Saunders; **(right)** First and second graders learning about tractor safety, by Jennifer Saunders; **Bottom row: (left)** Safe Sitter babysitting workshop, by Denise Seilstad; **(center)** Farm Forum crowd, by Emily Standley; **(right)** Instant pot class, by Denise Seilstad

Caregiver Support group monthly, which has been serving anywhere from 7 to 12 caregivers.

- After finding out that Petroleum County does not have a Foot Clinic, one was organized by Seilstad, and takes place every other month with the help of a local nurse who travels to Winnett. This program has grown from two to 10 participants.
- Strong People, Strong Bones is in its twelfth year in Fergus / Petroleum County. This MSU Extension program helps men and women slow down or prevent osteoporosis and arthritis by doing strength exercises. Two session running twice weekly throughout the year meet and serve 35 to 40 people.
- 108 people learned the uses and safety of a countertop pressure cooker from Seilstad.
- 25 youth, ages 10-13 attended the Safe Sitter Babysitting Workshop. Youth are provided the needed skills and medical education to become responsible, dependable babysitters.

Farm Forum at Montana Winter Fair

The Montana Winter Fair is moving into its 75th year in 2020. This annual event, held in Lewistown for the last 16 years, celebrates agriculture and rural communities through a variety of events including beef shows, quilting clinics, fiddle contests, ranch sorting, cooking competitions, and more. One of the events MSU Extension is heavily involved with is the Farm Forum. This event features speakers and workshops centered around agriculture, and in the last few years has grown

from one day to two days. In 2019, the Farm Forum hosted Marsha Goetting, PhD, MSU Extension’s Family Economics Specialist, for two sessions of estate planning for agriculture and non-agriculture families. More than 60 people attended the workshops.

The second day of the Farm Forum featured an agri-tourism panel of local farmers and ranchers, as well as the Executive Director of the Central Montana Tourism District. Panelists spoke about experiences as hunting outfitters, hosting weddings, renting out cabins on their land, and interacting with guests from across the country. Attendees learned about the challenges and rewards involved with developing an agri-tourism enterprise, and also received firsthand tips and resources for how to get started.

The 2019 Farm Forum concluded with presentations about managing wildlife-livestock interactions. One speaker discussed opportunities for herd protection using guardian dogs, while the second speaker shared his experience ranching in grizzly bear territory on the Rocky Mountain Front. Attendees learned about resources for protecting livestock, challenges of fellow ranchers, and what to do if they suspect predator death or injury in their livestock.

Fergus County MSU Extension is excited to continue the Farm Forum event at Winter Fairs to come!

Fergus County Staff



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