

Custer County



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'Steele Grit' Welcomes You to Miles City by Michael Schuldt.

Delivering MSU Extension programming has been challenging in 2020, with a focus on flexibility and adaptation to new delivery methods. Before the onset of COVID-19 restrictions, our program included traditional activities like Winter Series, Arthritis Exercise, 4-H project workshops and contests, and other in-person educational activities.

COVID-19 restrictions caused a disruption in planned programming and new demands on resources to provide virtual learning and meeting activities. Modified programming had agents learning to teach virtual classes like Dutch oven cooking, arthritis training and artisan bread making. A \$19,000 COVID relief fund grant helped 4-H offset costs of required changes at fair time. Other 4-H modifications included a weekly STEM activity for families when schools switched to virtual, virtual council meetings, and a virtual achievement night.

We are looking forward to 2021 and the opportunity to restore some traditional programming and implement lessons learned in 2020.

Sainfoin Trial to Evaluate Solutions for Alfalfa Weevil Damage

Cropping practices to produce alfalfa hay in Southeast Montana are promoting high populations of Alfalfa Weevils. The standard management practice is to scout the fields and utilize a broad-spectrum insecticide to prevent economic

damage from this pest. Resistance by the weevil to available insecticides has been identified, and the need for an alternate management strategy is imminent. Crop rotation is a tool commonly used for insect management, and sainfoin is a potential legume rotation for alfalfa acres.

Sainfoin has similar production capability with comparable forage quality to alfalfa. Weevils do not impact this crop and it has the additional benefit of being a non-bloat species for livestock grazing. To analyze the potential of sainfoin, in May 2020, three one-acre irrigated plots were seeded to three varieties of sainfoin. The goal of the trial is three-fold: demonstrate sainfoin as a legume, irrigated, rotational crop for this region; evaluate varietal differences for our conditions; and develop weed management/control recommendations.

Although we have adequate stand establishment with all three varieties, weeds pressure from weed seeds introduced with T & Y irrigation water is a concern. Although sainfoin is not a Round-up Ready crop, there are reports of natural resistance to this chemistry. Trial plots were established in October to apply three rates, 12, 22 and 44 ounces of glyphosate. Evaluation for damage to sainfoin plants is on-going with plans to apply an appropriate rate in spring. Production data will be collected for forage harvest.

Incorporating sainfoin as a rotational crop in just the T&Y irrigation district has a potentially large economic impact. There are 6,305 irrigated hay acres that commonly receive at

least one insecticide application annually. Cost of application and product averages \$16/acre. Rotation to sainfoin to reduce insecticide application in 1/3 of the acres would result in less chemical impact and cost saving of \$33,500 annually for growers in the irrigation district.

Virtual Arthritis Classes

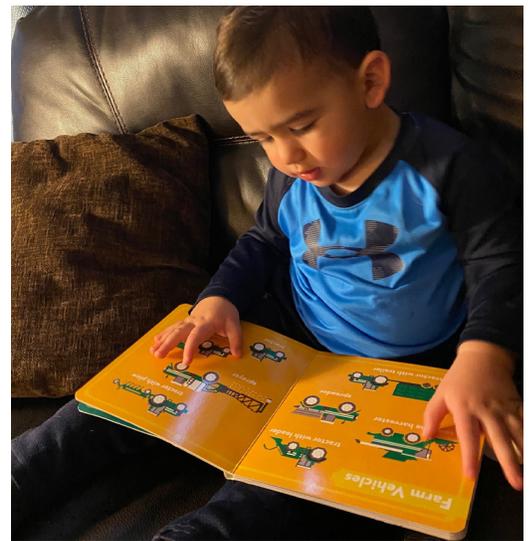
Arthritis Exercises have been offered in Custer County for over five years, with an average of 30 participants in each 10-week session. In March when quarantine began, the decision was made to teach classes virtually, especially important for participants who range in age from 66-93. It took a week to make the transition so that the best system could be used to teach online, to help participants figure out their technology, and to get class supplies to all the participants. It was also important to get them comfortable with the system we would be using.

All classes were recorded and could be watched at any time, but many individuals still tuned in during regular class time. The unexpected benefit was the inclusion of a group who had stopped coming to class because of their own health or because they were caring for a spouse, and due to the online format were once again able to participate in class. It also provided a human connection for those quarantined at home alone.

During the summer live classes resumed, but in November due to increased cases of coronavirus, a transition was made back to online classes, and now in addition to Custer County participants, we have individuals joining from as far away as Thompson Falls, Glasgow and Wibaux.

Imagination Library in Custer County

In December 2019, at the invitation of Custer County MSU Extension, a group of parents, teachers and librarians met to explore the possibility of starting an Imagination Library affiliate in Custer County. The program provides a book each month to children birth to 5 years old, and works in conjunction with the Dolly Parton Foundation. By June, the Imagination Library of Custer County was ready to start enrolling children with a goal to enroll 100 children by June 2021. As of November 2020, 137 children were enrolled, which is over 10% of the children age 0-5 in Custer County, and over \$21,000 was raised. The cost of the program to the local affiliate is \$30 per year, per child. Through this program a child will have 60 books in a home library by the time they start school with no cost to their families.



Top: Sainfoin plots at Keith Holmlund property, by Michael Schuldt; **Bottom:** A boy enjoying his first book from the Imagination Library, by Jonette Doeden

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