

Prairie County



217 West Park, PO Box 7, Terry, MT 59349-0422 | 406-635-2121 | prairie@montana.edu | <http://prairie.msuextension.org/>



The Old Milwaukee Railroad Bridge with Sheridan Butte in the background, by Amy Lewis.

Prairie County is a small, rural county (population 1,182) with an abundance of public land. In fact, just 53% of Prairie County's land is privately owned, while 41% is federal land and 6% is state-owned land.

Agriculture forms the basis of the economy in Prairie County. Just over 80% of Prairie County is considered range land, so it is not surprising that range livestock production is one of the most important agriculture sectors in the county. Major crops include alfalfa, barley, millet, winter wheat, spring wheat, lentils, peas, and corn. Other crops of importance are sugar beets, dry edible beans, chickpeas, and soybeans.

Although the population of the county is small, clientele needs are diverse. MSU Extension provides a wide range of educational opportunities and services for the people of Prairie County. Programming areas include agriculture, 4-H and youth development, family and consumer sciences, and community development.

MSU Extension offers agricultural services to assist farmers and ranchers

2020 began as a typical year with MSU Extension agents in Prairie, Dawson, Wibaux, Fallon-Carter, Powder River,

Rosebud-Treasure, McCone, Custer, and Garfield counties cooperatively planning the annual Extension Winter Ag Series in January. Winter Series is the largest adult education event in Prairie County. This year's program included presentations on combatting herbicide resistance, ration balancing, and range recovery after wildfire. In the days following Winter Series, two producers brought feed samples in for forage nitrate testing based on the recommendation given in the ration balancing presentation. One of those samples tested high enough that the producer was advised to not feed the forage to pregnant cows, protecting them from nitrate poisoning.

Nitrate quick tests are performed in the Prairie County MSU Extension office to test forage for the presence of the toxin nitrate. As a result of educating producers about the importance of testing their small grain forages for nitrate, producers brought 26 feed samples to Extension to be tested. Twenty-three percent of the samples tested positive for nitrate, with four percent of those samples testing high enough that producers would have to dilute the ration in order to feed safely.

Shortly after Winter Series, the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions made it difficult to plan traditional seminar-style programming, so informal, one-on-one educational efforts became more important than ever. MSU Extension in Prairie

County offers many services to assist agriculture producers. Issues of particular importance in the spring and summer of 2020 were alfalfa weevil monitoring and treatment, weed identification and sprayer calibration, forage nitrate testing, forage analysis for feeding and marketing feed for sale, ration balancing, livestock water testing, soil nutrient analysis, and grasshopper management.

Prairie County 4-H provides members opportunities to learn leadership, citizenship, and life skills

The Prairie County 4-H program provides educational opportunities in a wide variety of 4-H project areas. 93% of 4-H members participated in at least one project workshop during the 4-H year. Projects highlighted were horsemanship, scrapbooking, photography, cooking, visual arts, and livestock. 4-H members demonstrated competence and confidence in these project areas during the 4-H interview judging process at All Events Day and the Prairie County Fair.

In 4-H we are intentional about providing youth opportunities to gain communication, leadership and teamwork skills to enable them to become contributing citizens. Volunteer leaders and 4-H teen leaders were engaged to lead project workshops with the county agent. 91% percent of Prairie County 4-H members over the age of 13 served in county-wide leadership roles during the 4-H year by coordinating county events and teaching at project workshops. Prairie County was proud to have 4-H Ambassador Chay VanDyke serve as the State Ambassador Officer representative to the Montana Extension Advisory Committee.

Each year, 4-H members look forward to participating in regional and statewide 4-H activities. The COVID-19 pandemic limited or altered some of those opportunities, however Prairie County 4-H members were able to participate in the Junior High Ski Trip, Eastern Montana Regional Small Animal Judging, and virtual Montana State 4-H Congress. Southeastern Montana 4-H Camp did not take place, but teen counselors recorded videos and organized activities so each participating county could implement their own local “camp” program. Prairie County’s camp counselor Molly Eaton recorded a video tutorial on a dream catcher craft project to go along with videos recorded by other counselors presenting a flag ceremony from Camp Needmore and interactive team building games. These experiences provided an opportunity for 4-H members to network with other 4-H members, gain communication skills, and take on leadership roles outside of the county.





Previous Page: (top) 4-H foods workshop, by Sharla Sackman; **(bottom)** Swathing a millet field in Prairie County, by Sharla Sackman ;
This Page: Landscape of the Prairie County Houndstongue Project Cooperative Weed Management Area, by Sharla Sackman

MSU Extension helps landowners with invasive pest management

The noxious weed houndstongue has become an increasing problem in Prairie County due to the easy nature of seed spread via wildlife and livestock. MSU Extension wrote a Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) Grant to aid private landowners, public land agencies, and the Prairie County Weed District in coming together to educate producers about houndstongue management as well as implement a concerted effort to reduce spread of the weed.

In the fourth year of the Prairie County Houndstongue project, the Weed District has reported success with control efforts utilizing recommended herbicides. Since 2017, 12 landowners plus three commercial contractors applied recommended herbicides to 405 acres of houndstongue and 243 acres of Canada thistle. By applying for a NWTF grant, Extension helped landowners and the Prairie County Weed District secure \$16,667 in grant funding to cost share herbicide and commercial application costs.

Prairie County Staff



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

Sharla Sackman
Extension Agent

Amy Lewis
Extension Program Assistant