

Agriculture Programs

Agricultural Services

Prairie County Extension offers services to assist producers including: forage testing, insect and plant disease diagnostics, plant variety information, ration balancing, feed analysis, range monitoring, Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage certification, and the use of a portable, electronic livestock scale.

Extension performs nitrate quick tests in the office to test for the presence and concentration of the toxin nitrate in forage. The quick test was especially useful to growers while their crop was still standing in making the decision whether or not to delay cutting. Extension also sends forage samples to laboratories for quantitative nitrate results and helps producers make management decisions based on test results.

Farm Bill Decision Making

With the passage of the Farm Bill in February of 2014, programs for commodity crop growers changed, becoming more like crop insurance programs in that payments are not automatic. Participating growers needed to elect one of two new programs in order to have protection against price and/or yield losses.

Prairie County worked cooperatively with the local Farm Service Agency County Director to educate growers on the new programs in the Farm Bill and accompanying decision tools. The first educational session offered was a webinar presented by state FSA staff and MSU Extension Specialists George Haynes and Kate Fuller in the fall of 2014. Fifteen people attended the webinar. As a follow-up, a local meeting was held in January in Terry for local growers. Thirty-nine growers attended the session. The local FSA County Director gave a presentation on basics of the Price Loss Coverage and Agricultural Risk Coverage programs. Prairie County Extension Agent, Sharla Sackman, demonstrated online decision tools to aid producers in selecting the program that would best fit their needs.

Three growers came to Prairie County Extension for assistance in inputting their farm numbers into the online decision tool. One of those producers found that it would pay for him to update his base acreage based on the scenarios run. Another grower reported using the web-based decision tool at home to aid in his program selection after attending the local meeting.

Extension Winter Series

Extension agents in Prairie, Dawson, Wibaux, Fallon-Carter, Powder River, Rosebud-Treasure, McCone, Custer, and Garfield counties cooperatively plan the annual Extension Winter Series. The last week in January, guest speakers traveled to 10 towns in Southeastern Montana. In Terry, 45 men and women attended Winter Series. Speakers were Dr. Emily Glunk on alfalfa management, Dr. Megan VanEmon on winter supplementation strategies for cattle, Dr. Lance Vermeire on determining stocking rates, and Brad Sauer on the Sage Grouse Initiative. Winter Series is the largest adult education event in Prairie County. Producers report that they appreciate being able to hear from university experts and request topics to be presented throughout the year.



Prairie County growers learn about soil fertility options at a crops tour.

Crops Tour

Prairie County farmers have the opportunity to grow dryland crops such as dry peas, chickpeas, lentils, safflower, corn, and sunflowers in addition to small grains. In cooperation with local growers, a field tour was organized for growers to have the opportunity to see these crops grown in Prairie County and to learn about best production practices.

Kent McVay, MSU Extension Cropping Systems Specialist, discussed recent research about crop rotation including crop selection, weed management, and economics. Bill Wilson,

Agriculture Programs

J.R. Simplot Specialty Products Representative, discussed soil fertility and fertilizer options. Matt Smith with Bayer CropScience discussed cropland weed and disease management and control including herbicide and fungicide selection and crop rotation considerations.

Several growers new to alternative crops attended the tour, asking questions of the guest speakers and exchanging information with fellow growers.



Tri-County Weed Tour participants learn monitoring weed populations when using biological control insects.

Tri-County Weed Tour

Prairie, Fallon, and Wibaux Counties have worked together since 1990 on the Tri-County Leafy Spurge Project. Each year, an annual tour helps educate producers about noxious weed management.

Twenty-five producers attended the Tri-County Tour in 2015. Tour topics included medusahead wildrye and annual grass management by Jane Mangold, MSU Extension Rangeland Weed Specialist; biological control of noxious weeds by Melissa Maggio, Montana Biological Weed Control Coordinator; vertebrate pest management by Stephen M. Vantassel, Montana Department of Agriculture Vertebrate Pest Specialist; and sprayer calibration by Travis Lacquement, Prairie County Weed Coordinator.

The Tri-County area of Prairie, Fallon and Wibaux counties is a location where leafy spurge is and will continue to be a permanent problem. Twenty-five years of educational programs and sustained integrated weed management efforts on the part of landowners have

helped contain the leafy spurge infestation to the same area of Cabin Creek and slowed the spread to outlying areas.

Prairie County Range Tour

Prairie County Extension works cooperatively with the Prairie County Grazing District and local producers to select topics of local interest for an annual range tour featuring researchers from Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory.

Dr. Mark Petersen discussed location effects on water quality and management recommendations as well as upcoming research that will focus specifically on reservoir water quality. Dr. Richard Waterman shared his research on management and supplementation strategies for developing heifers in semi-arid environments. Dr. Lance Vermeire discussed research findings on the effects of fire seasonality and frequency as well as new drought research being implemented at Fort Keogh. Dr. Tom Geary shared new measures of fertility evaluations for beef bulls. Dr. Andy Roberts reviewed research on how nutritional influences during heifer development affect production and longevity. Jennifer Muscha discussed how soil types affect plant communities. There was also a round table discussion on cattle vaccination strategies where Fort Keogh staff shared their vaccination protocol and fielded questions from producers.

This annual tour has been a great way for Prairie County livestock producers to form a relationship with scientists at Fort Keogh. Thirty-four producers engaged in active discussions at the tour, asking questions about research and seeking advice about their own operations.



Range Tour participants learn about how soil type affects plant communities from Jennifer Muscha, Fort Keogh Rangeland Scientist.

4-H and Youth Programs

4-H Program

Thirty-two members and 13 adult volunteer leaders were enrolled in 4-H for the 2014-2015 4-H year. Prairie County's total school enrollment for the 2014-2015 school year was 142, hence 4-H members constitute approximately 22% of the school population. Prairie County 4-H provided members many opportunities for young people to learn leadership, citizenship, and life skills.



Outdoor Adventures workshop participants learned about local history, wildlife predators, plant identification, photography, and Dutch oven cooking.

County Events

All Events Day is an annual event that provides 4-H members with opportunities to showcase their skills and talents in sewing, public speaking, demonstrations, and food preparation. The day is planned and implemented by a team of teen 4-H leaders under the guidance of the county agent. Three Prairie County 4-H members went on to compete at State 4-H Congress in Stir-Ups and Quilt Revue as a result of their participation in All Events Day.

One of the goals for the 4-H program locally has been to provide educational opportunities in a wide variety of projects. As a result, five separate workshop sessions were planned throughout the course of the 4-H year plus a series of Shooting Sports and Horsemanship workshops. Members gained skills in project areas such as food and nutrition, sewing, market livestock, horse, arts and crafts, photography, shooting sports, wildlife, range, and small animal projects. Volunteer leaders and 4-H teen leaders were en-

gaged to lead the project workshops with the county agent. Ninety-four percent of 4-H members participated in at least one project workshop during the 4-H year.

Prairie County 4-H volunteer leaders participated in leadership training taught by the County Agent in conjunction with 4-H Council meetings on topics such as Effective Communication Techniques, Conducting Effective Club Meetings, and Temperament Theory and Your Contribution to 4-H.

A new event for 4-H families in Prairie County this year was a 4-H family orientation and training. The training explained the basic organization and procedures of 4-H in Prairie County and how they help accomplish the positive youth development goals of the 4-H program. It also outlined the primary county, regional, and statewide events in which 4-H members and leaders can participate.

Regional and State 4-H Activities

Prairie County 4-H members participate in a number of regional and statewide 4-H activities such as the Southeastern Montana Junior High Oreo Trip, Eastern Montana Regional Small Animal Judging Day, state-wide shooting sports competitions, and Montana State 4-H Congress. These experiences provided an opportunity for 4-H members to travel, network with members from other areas, and gain valuable communication skills and take on leadership roles outside of the county.



4-H members Sean and Jason Loomis prepare their Stir-Ups dish.

Family & Consumer Science Programs

Horticulture

Extension provides community members with information on seeding and fertilizing lawns, lawn disease identification, transplanting trees, tree selection, tree disease and abiotic issue identification, selection of garden plants, and plant and insect identification. One of the most frequently used services that Extension offers is assistance with horticulture-related questions, and tree care ranks among the highest areas of concern.



Bruce Smith, MSU Extension Agent in Dawson County, discusses characteristics of trees suited for our arid climate.

Prairie County Extension organized two different educational opportunities in the area of horticulture, attended by 25 people. The first was a workshop focused on growing trees in Eastern Montana. Bruce Smith, Dawson County Extension Agent, shared tips for growing trees, including varieties suited for Eastern Montana, common pests and diseases, and care after planting. Workshop participants viewed a 9-year-old shelterbelt planting with a drip irrigation system with 24 varieties of trees plus a new wildlife tree planting and the equipment used to plant the trees and install landscape fabric.

The owner of the 9-year-old shelter belt has implemented pruning techniques that he learned at a pruning workshop hosted by Prairie County Extension in 2012.

The second workshop was on exhibiting flowers, vegetables and fruits at Fairs. The Ag, Horticulture, and Floriculture Superintendents at the Prairie County Fair requested this workshop based on questions from Fair exhibitors. Sherry Corneliusen, a frequent judge at area fairs including the Prairie County Fair, presented the workshop with tips on selecting and preparing the best specimens to display at the Fair.

Financial & Estate Planning

Over the next ten years, the Montana Community Foundation estimates that Prairie County will transfer over \$16 million to the next generation. Prairie County Extension hosted a Transfer of Wealth Event, with guest presenter, Amy Sullivan from the Montana Community Foundation, giving a presentation on planned giving. Sharla Sackman, Prairie County Extension Agent, reviewed Montana and Prairie County transfer of wealth statistics and opportunities. If 5% of that \$16 million was endowed by community foundations, it could generate \$40,000 per year for community improvement projects. Board members from two local non-profits were in attendance in addition to other interested community members.

Prairie County Extension participated in the Solid Finances webinar series by hosting a site for community members to participate in the webinars. Estate planning was the focus in the Spring of 2015 with sessions on probate, beneficiary deeds, trusts, and non-titled property.

One hundred percent of participants of the webinar on transferring non-titled property said they intend to make a list of non-titled property. Additionally, one participant shared ideas with a local civic group and has started making her list with her daughter.

Contact Us



Sharla Sackman
Prairie County Extension Agent

217 West Park
PO Box 7
Terry, MT 59349

Amy Lewis
Program Assistant

Phone: (406) 635-2121
Email: prairie@montana.edu
Web: www.msueextension.org/prairie/