

ROC

Recharge Our Communities

“Recharge Our Communities” (ROC), has been brought to the Lewistown community by several community partners. Denise Seilstad, Jennifer Saunders and Bertie Brown, from the MSU Extension office are participating in this workshop series that aims to re-charge, re-build and re-discover the community. The workshop is made up of 75 people interested in moving Central Montana forward. Under the direction of the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), several formed committees are currently in the process of applying new knowledge and skills to an immediate, real community project, sector or business.

The first four meetings have brought the community together to identify “Value Chains”, which are businesses/services that are linked together to help take a product, service, or sector to the consumer/market.

Lewistown’s value chain sectors identified by the group are: (not in any particular order)

- Labor/Work Force
- Housing
- Downtown Revitalization
- Youth Engagement

- Financing-Capital Development Plan
- Nature/Tourism

As the group continues to work on these value chains, not only will this benefit the 6,000 people living in the Lewistown community but will have an impact on 6,000 people living in the outlying communities as well.

From the MSU-Extension Office, Denise and Bertie are working with the Labor/Work Force group and Jennifer with Youth Engagement. Each group is working on plans to bring a new business, project or event to Lewistown. The plans will be implemented within three years, with the support of both the RCAC facilitators and the local Snowy Mountain Development Corp. MSU Extension staff is finding ways to provide services, i.e. customer service training, food safety training, financial management training, that will aid in the long-term success of these projects and the community.

Welcome to Fergus County

Fergus County is Montana’s 16th most populous county with 11,442 residents according to the 2014 census. Lewistown, the county seat, is located at the geographic center of Montana, and is the state’s 15th largest city with a population of 5,867 in 2014. Other cities and towns include Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred.

The majority of Fergus County consists of rolling prairie, aside from the Big Snowy and Little Snowy Mountain Ranges to the south. The Missouri River forms the northern border of Fergus County, and much of the surrounding land has been designated part of the Upper Missouri River Breaks



Picture of downtown Lewistown, Montana

National Monument. The southwest corner of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge is also located within Fergus County.

Family and Consumer Science

Living Life Well

Living Life Well is a six-week workshop series developed by Stanford University for anyone living with ongoing health problems. Six people in Fergus County participated in the workshop offered by Extension agent Denise Seilstad and volunteer Linda Majarus. The workshop does not address specific illnesses; rather it addresses the challenges common to many long-term illnesses, such as pain, fatigue, physical limitations, and difficult emotions. The participants demonstrated significant improvements in exercise, ability to do social and household activities, less depression, fear and frustration or worry about their health, reduction in symptoms like pain, and increased confidence in their ability to manage their condition. One participant shared that through this workshop, she realizes that evenings are difficult for her, so she has learned to be productive earlier in the day. Another participant shared that his favorite part of this workshop was the sharing and hearing everyone else's struggles, and learning from each other. One participant knew that light exercise was important for her illness, but through this workshop has finally gotten herself in a routine, and reports feeling better.

Strong Hearts for Montana

Despite declines in heart disease mortality in the United States since 2000, it remains the leading killer of both men and women—accounting for about one-third of all deaths in the U.S. Cardiovascular Disease remains the leading cause of death in Montana and CVD risk factors are on the rise, including obesity, high cholesterol, hypertension and diabetes. Montana State University Extension is taking part in the Strong Hearts, Healthy Communities study, a research project with Cornell University. Fergus County is one of the research sites. The objective of this grant is to develop and test a comprehensive program designed to: improve diet and physical activity behaviors, promote and improve local food and physical activity enctors and policies, and shift social norms about active living and healthy eating through programming. Thirteen women from Fergus County are participating in this study under the facilitation of Extension agent Denise Seilstad and her outreach coordinator Bertie Brown.

ServSafe Training

ServSafe is a nationally-recognized food safety training program for food service industry personnel. Created and managed by the National Restaurant Association, it combines critical information, exclusive tools, and real world resources to transform knowledge into action. ServSafe has evolved to meet the most urgent food safety training challenges in the food service industry and offers the highest standard of food safety training and certification. Extension agent Denise Seilstad continues to offer trainings across Fergus and Petroleum Counties. This past year, 508 people were trained in food safety, either taking the two-hour, four-hour or eight-hour training. These people include food service employees, concessionaires, church members, assisted living housing employees, and family members from the Nexus Treatment Center. Of those taking the eight-hour training, 78% passed the exam. 92% of the participants taking the four-hour training, leave with a passing score on the final quiz, and 100% of the participants in the two-hour training report that they have increased their awareness of food safety.

Powerful Tools For Caregivers

The baby boom generation is aging and our population is aging. The fastest growing age group is individuals over 85. Along with extended life expectancy comes a variety of chronic illness. Most older individuals live on their own or with a spouse, yet they often require a certain level of caregiving. MSU Extension agent Denise Seilstad along with trained volunteers Brenda Wilmont and Lynette Salee, facilitate a *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* course designed to help the caregiver learn self-care so that they can provide care – either direct care or managed care to a loved one. This six-week program has helped 31 caregivers in Central Montana take better care of themselves while serving as a caregiver.

Ag Extension

Forage Yield and Quality

Fergus and Petroleum county producers rely heavily on forage production, either for a winter feed source for livestock or as a cash crop. Yields in the area have been around 1.4 tons per acre for Fergus and Judith Basin Counties in the past, which is considerably below the potential for the area, given rainfall and soil resources available.

MSU Extension is teaming with the Central Montana Research Center with the goal of increasing the average yields for forages to 1.6 tons by the year 2016. Through research and education on proper weed control and fertilization, we are seeing encouraging results. This year, we put out some fertilizer plots to demonstrate the benefits of proper fertilization. An increase of 0.2 tons per acre will increase total forage production in Fergus County by 5,000 tons. This would be valued at over half a million dollars, and could winter an additional 2000 head of mother cows.

In addition to forage yields, the quality of that forage is very important. We are continuing our efforts to increase the number of producers who test their hay and use the results to help provide balanced rations for their livestock in the winter months. We have three core sampling probes for loan at the Extension Office, and they have been getting a lot of use.

Urban Forestry

Lewistown and the surrounding area's urban and residential trees have had many challenges in the past few years. Mountain Pine Beetle, Bronze Birch Borer and Dutch Elm Disease have combined to decimate the urban forest and shelterbelt plantings in some areas. Extension is working with community members and city government to improve our urban forests.

The recently completed tree inventory in the town of Lewistown shows that we have lost many of our elms, and our primary tree species is Green Ash at nearly 60% of the tree population. Due to this fact, MSU Extension is training local community members to start monitoring for the Emerald Ash Borer, a potentially devastating pest of Green Ash. So far, there have been 30 people trained to help monitor for this pest.

MSU Extension is also focusing on rejuvenating the urban

forests by planting new trees to replace dead and dying specimens. We worked with the City of Lewistown to start new plantings on public property to help increase species diversity and showcase some of the species of trees that will do well in this area. The City received a grant and planted new trees in the spring of 2015. In addition to city efforts, there is a new group working on trees in Lewistown called Sow, Grow, Share. MSU Extension has helped this group acquire funding and start establishing public orchards and berry patches in parks and along the trails system. Through education on planting, species and proper maintenance, there are three new plantings this year with nearly 30 trees that will bear fruit in the years to come. The fruits of this labor will be free for the people of Lewistown to utilize, and the orchards will serve as a great educational tool to help those who want to start some fruit trees in their own back yards.

Farm Bill Education

2015 was the year for farmers who participate in federal crop assistance programs to make some decisions about which programs they want to enroll in for the next 5 years. This Farm Bill rolled out some new programs and required producers to make complicated choices about how they want to utilize the farm programs to help them manage their risk.

Montana State University Extension in Fergus and Petroleum Counties worked with the FSA office to provide seven workshops to help producers learn more about the programs. These programs provided a lot of background information to producers to help them start to prioritize their risk management needs.

To follow up on the workshops, Extension offered individual consultations with producers to help them sort out which of the farm programs would be most beneficial to their operation and how to create a valuable safety net for years that may see low prices or poor weather conditions resulting in reduced yields. Over 200 producers came in for help in better understanding the farm programs and how they best fit into a comprehensive risk management plan.

Fergus County 4-H Program

Chokecherry Jam Street Dance

For the past two years Fergus/Petroleum County 4-H has banded together with the Lewistown Boys and Girls Club and the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch to organize the Chokecherry Jam street dance. It has successfully fulfilled several purposes. It has raised a total of \$22,200 in profit, divided evenly each year between each of these Central Montana Youth Organizations. It has provided family friendly entertainment and fun being described as “a wedding dance without the bride and groom.” It has extended the already successful Chokecherry Festival weekend in Lewistown by another day, bringing visitors to town staying in motels, eating in restaurants and shopping downtown. It has brought some great, up and coming young entertainers to perform in downtown Lewistown: Chancey Williams and the Younger Brothers Band the first year and Bart Crow last year. Best of all, it has provided an opportunity for all three youth organizations to spend time in the spotlight, before a large audience, explaining our programs and the opportunities we provide for Central Montana Youth.

Camping For All Ages

In Fergus and Petroleum County, we like to camp! We begin with Cloverbuds, six-to-eight year olds, and spend a day making crafts, playing games and singing songs. The Cloverbud Day Camp is led by both parents and some of the younger teen leaders. Next we offer a “Tweeny Trip” for 4-H members in grades 6-8. Traveling along with Meagher, J

Judith Basin and Wheatland Counties we have enjoyed destinations in Glacier Park, Cody, Wyoming and Virginia City. The whole family is invited to a 4-H Family Campout that begins with a Dutch Oven Dinner on Friday night. Workshops on Saturday focus on range, wildlife, shooting sports and outdoor projects. The last week of June wraps up the “camping season” with Junior Camp for members up to 11 years of age at Camp Maiden. This camp is planned and implemented by teen camp counselors who begin meeting in February. They learn leadership, organizational and team work skills through this process and provide a three-day camp experience for the members that attend.



Tweeny Camp participants taking a break during one of the Glacier Institute activities.

Contact Us



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