



Moving Forward with Extension

MSU Extension Programs in Mineral County Empower Residents

The Mineral County MSU Extension program creates local capacity to meet the needs of the people who choose to call this county “home”; providing viable, pertinent information and expertise to assist these residents make informed decisions and “move forward.”

Extension facilitates several organizations that address needs in Mineral County. Among those are:

- Mineral County Shooting Sports Association provides fund raising support for youth and community shooting sports activities, equipment and locations
- Small landowners, forest landowners, ag producers, orchardists and gardeners receive educational opportuni-

ties, services and information as the desire for locally-produced food increases

- Local Governments, State Representatives, Appointed Boards, local Community Foundations, other non-profit entities receive access to information, education, facilitated public forums and contacts.

“Moving Forward” has always been a primary function of Extension. When combined with a cooperative and service spirit, Extension proves essential by bringing large resources to small rural communities.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Master Gardeners Learn by Doing

New this year, Superior residents interested in better gardening techniques requested formal Master Gardener program instruction. It had been nearly 20 years since the last

Master Gardener program was offered in Mineral County by Extension and previous interest had not warranted formal instruction.

In total, 13 adults enrolled in the Level 1 Master Gardener program, meeting weekly on Wednesday nights for two hours

of formal instruction. Over the course of eight weeks from February to April, Extension Agents taught classes in basic soil and nutrient science, yard and garden installation, vegetable, flower, and fruit tree care, and yard and lawn maintenance. These classes not only aid attendees with their own gardening needs but also train volunteers in unbiased, research-based, home horticulture practices to benefit their local community. Successful completion of the Master Gardener program includes volunteer service to the local community and increased expertise in horticultural practices as enrollees progress through the three levels of instruction offered.

The Master Gardener program in Mineral County this year was a success with 11 enrollees successfully testing.

To date, 148 hours of volunteer service have been logged and 20 pounds of food donated to community needs. Several participants have expressed interest in continuing with Level 2 instruction and there is considerable interest in repeating the Level 1 classes in 2016.

Crops for the future

Exploring both non-traditional crops and cropping systems in Mineral County is not only a challenge to Extension but also to the producers themselves. Financial risks and lack of knowledge are serious constraints to producers in an area so removed from other agricultural centers of the state. To aid the efforts of some innovative producers, Extension provides research-based information and support from Specialists at MSU and beyond.

In 2013, a producer looking to diversify and better utilize the resources available, planted camelina, an oilseed crop never before grown in Mineral County. Camelina offers sufficient benefit to producers and the demand increased enough in 2015 that more acreage was prepared for planting camelina in 2016. Mineral County Extension works closely with these producers to research site preparation, weed control, fertilization, and harvesting techniques in order to maximize yields with this new crop.



Camelina sativa.

Economic and Community Development

Powering Economic Development in Mineral County

MSU Extension is about identifying and meeting local needs. Small rural counties cannot begin to provide the variety of services and amenities of the larger metropolitan areas. Residents of rural areas are accustomed to doing without and making things work.

The Extension office strives to fill those gaps and create local capacity to address some of the essential services not readily available. One such example is Extension's role in local economic development. Mineral County had no economic development entity that worked exclusively for county interests. Extension created two such entities; the Mineral County Office of Economic Development, to manage the county's revolving loan fund and provide assistance to local businesses, and the Mineral County Economic Development Corporation, a private non-profit 501(c)3, assisting other community organizations.

This year, Mineral County saw the receipt and implementation of another Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for economic development. This \$176,376 grant will bring 3-Phase power to the Mineral



Crews from Missoula Rural Electric Co-op prepare to bring 3-Phase power to the Mineral County Airport east of Superior.

County Airport and Superior Meats, thereby retaining eleven jobs and adding five new full-time positions in the next three years. This also provides expanded infrastructure to the airport for future development as industrial and light manufacturing. Missoula Rural Electric Co-op, contributing \$70,000 in matching funds, is expanding service to this area for expansion of existing businesses and allowing future development on County owned airport land and sustainability.

Other services offered through Extension's work in Economic Development include:

- A revolving loan fund offering assistance to diverse clients ranging from startup loans to working capital and expansion loans.
- Business planning and loan packaging for new and established businesses.
- Grant writing and administration for county efforts. Since 1992 the Extension Office has written, received, and managed over \$2.36 million in grant funds and over \$3.8 million in total project costs for Mineral County.
- Regional representation on economic and community development boards and coalitions brings a multitude of state, regional and federal financial and technical resources to the residents and businesses of Mineral County.
- The current economy has caused a slowdown in business startup, but we have seen an increase in expansion of existing businesses and former clients of the revolving loan fund.

In 2015, 17 business inquiries, three loan packages and requests, and four business startup clients received assistance with planning, marketing and initial projections.

Mineral County Resource Coalition

With 82% federally-managed land and 8% state land in Mineral County, natural resource issues are on everyone's mind. Decisions made regarding the management and activities taking place on these lands directly impacts all local residents. A large component of the agencies decisions regarding the management of public lands relies on input from the public and concerned citizens. To enable and facilitate input from Mineral County citizens, MSU Extension, and the United States Forest Service (USFS) Superior Ranger District have established a working collaborative called the Mineral County Resource Coalition (MCRC).

Approximately 25 people attend monthly meetings held at

the USFS Superior Ranger District Office. Topics of discussion include information for citizen participants as to the workings and procedures with the USFS, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes, funding issues, constraints (budgetary, personnel) that prevent the level of activity desired by local government and community. A large part of the discussion revolves around community input processes and modes of contribution and assistance to the federal agency responsible for the management of public lands in Mineral County. Relationships, conversations, tours, questions and answers are the functions and products of this collaborative effort. This process has brought the forest back to the community and lessened the sense of disenfranchisement felt by local residents and the sense of separation felt by USFS personnel. County and town governments, Congressional staff,

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, industry, schools, health industry, recreationists and citizens at large all contribute and participate.

This first year effort has already brought direct results on the ground in increased planning for future projects at all levels, a more informed participatory public, and agencies through meetings, tours and guest speakers; attention to immediate on-the-ground concerns such as blown down timber after a wind event, rapid access regained after culvert failure by the installation of a bridge, and fuels treatment and hazard tree removal along service roads after a fire. This is the beginning of this process and given the synergy created, we look forward to many more successes as Extension supports and sustains this effort.

4-H Youth Development

Making the Best Better

There is an old saying, "Lead, follow, or get out of the way," that may best describe the efforts of adult volunteers this past year in the 4-H program for Mineral County. Adult volunteers and 4-H parents expressed a need for an improved food service booth for 4-H on the Mineral County fairgrounds. The 4-H Council allocated funds and 4-H volunteers solicited donations and labor. Over the course of three weekends,

adult and youth volunteers built a new, spacious food booth that will serve 4-H for many years to come. Youth working alongside and learning from caring adults has always been a hallmark of the 4-H program and this continues to be



so here. Youth involved with this project learned responsibility, planning, and community service skills in addition to hands on skills necessary to finish this project. In addition, the sense of pride in a project that will serve 4-H families and the community for years to come.



Forward Ho!

The Mineral County 4-H program current enrollment consists of 57 youth members and 25 adult volunteer leaders. There are three organized clubs in Alberton, Superior, and



St. Regis. Livestock projects, especially market swine, remain the most popular with 4-H youth with cooking and shooting sports following close behind. Looking to the future, the robotics project has garnered strong interest in St. Regis and new enrollments in that project are up for the new 4-H year.

Again this year, there has been an increase in adult volunteer leader participation which is an encouraging sign, as youth learn and participate more effectively with active involvement from adult leaders. An increasing number of adult volunteers are interested in sharing their time and life experiences with youth members of 4-H. Likewise, community support for the 4-H program remains high which is also encouraging in these times of strained economic conditions.



Camo Critters 4-H club members planted flowers in the Memorial Garden at the St. Regis Park as a community service project.

Studies have shown that participation in 4-H has a positive impact on the choices youth make, both in their daily lives

and future careers. The positive environment of adult volunteers working with youth fosters active learning and enriches self-esteem, all of which builds a strong foundation for youth development and achievement.

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Changing Faces in the Extension Office

Emily Park Joins the Extension Staff

On December 18, 2015, Sharon Patterson, Administrative Assistant for the Mineral County MSU Extension office, will retire after 17 years in the position. Sharon has been a valuable asset over the years, serving every aspect of Extension programming that has been offered. Sharon plans to continue volunteering with the Camo Critters 4-H club in St. Regis as well as other 4-H Council special projects. In addition, she will continue some volunteer work for the Mineral County Economic Development Corporation. Mostly she plans to spend time with her grandchildren and relax a bit.

In October, 2015, Emily Park joined the office on a temporary basis to learn the role and scope of Extension work in Mineral County before she transitions to the Administrative Assistant position full-time. Emily is very excited to join our staff and become familiar with all of the programs that Extension offers.



Emily Park (left) joins the Extension Office as the new Administrative Assistant, replacing Sharon Patterson (right) who is retiring after 17 years in the position.

Contact Us



EXTENSION

Mineral County



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

Kevin Chamberlain

Extension Agent; Agriculture/Natural Resources, Community & Economic Development
kchamberlain@montana.edu

Dave Brink

Extension Agent; Agriculture/Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development
dbrink@montana.edu

Sharon Patterson

Administrative Assistant
mineral@montana.edu

Emily Park

Administrative Assistant
mineral@montana.edu

MSU Extension, Mineral County

301 2nd Ave. East
P.O. Box 730
Superior, MT 59872

Phone (406) 822-3545

E-mail mineral@montana.edu

Web <http://www.msuextension.org/counties/mineral/mineral.htm>