



A guide to a year in **EXTENSION**

MSU Extension provides unbiased research-based education and information that integrates learning, discovery and engagement to strengthen individuals, families and communities.

Ravalli County



population 40,212

median age 46

27% of children under 18
are living in poverty

median household income
\$42,902

1,438 farms averaging 163

agriculture and horticulture

Extension supports the efforts of experienced and novice land managers through forage and soil testing, pest identification, management recommendations, personalized land management plans and many other science-based resources to



One in five households use resources provided by MSU Extension in Ravalli County.

education

In 2016, MSU Extension in Ravalli County provided educational services including workshops, seminars, and one-on-one assistance on topics ranging from controlling rodents in alfalfa to making



2,498 hours of
instruction
provided



11,682
individuals
served

4-H youth development

Having one of the largest 4-H programs in Montana, Ravalli County reaches 2,408 youth ages 5-18, providing them independent and community learning experiences to achieve their goals.



155 adult volunteers
contribute a value of
\$156,980 in
personnel time



2 of 5 Ravalli County
youth receive
educational services
from MSU Extension
staff and volunteers

Supporting Future Leaders

Leadership development. Problem solving skills. Learning by doing.

4-H Mentoring Partnership: connecting youth with a caring mentor

The 4-H Mentoring Partnership connects youth in Ravalli County who are considered at-risk with an adult or teen in the community to create a mentoring relationship. Most of the mentoring experiences take place during afterschool hours, either on school campuses or at organizations in the community, such as public libraries.



The 4-H Mentoring Partnership offers a wide variety of experiential activities with a focus on STEM, which is short for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Experiencing STEM through our mentoring program, at-risk kids can find a purpose and potentially secure job in the STEM fields.

Currently, Ravalli County has 22 mentors serving 56 youth in the Hamilton, Darby, and Corvallis school districts. The mentoring program has not extended to other communities due to funding constraints, though collaborating with other non-profits to reach out to area youth has been beneficial. Through partnerships with organizations, resources are leveraged to expand services to provide summer workshops and Family Night Out activities. Currently, the program collaborates with Rotary International, The Bitterroot Cares for Kids Network of Ravalli County, Darby Library, as well as the schools in the served communities.

This past summer, the youth in the mentoring program attended the Ravalli County 4-H summer camp for the first time since the start of the grant six years ago. Many of these children do not regularly experience the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors, learn how to navigate a canoe or have the social skills to meet and secure a best friend. 4-H Camp provided these opportunities and created lifetime memories. The mentoring program recently received a substantial grant to provide a Family Summer Camp for the mentored youth to attend with their family. The camp will focus on family bonding through fun and experiential learning. As a result of the 4-H Mentoring Partnership, youth and adults create a stronger, community in Ravalli County.

Safe Food Preservation Education

Food preservation is a popular pastime in the Bitterroot Valley, especially with new families who move to Montana for the country lifestyle. Raising homegrown produce and preserving it safely is a goal for many. For some, it is a way to save money during tight economic times; the cost savings in one growing season is easily accounted for and helps to save money year round.

Consumer who preserve their food not only help family finances, they help facilitate a healthy lifestyle of eating nutritious, homegrown fruits and vegetables. Families are growing their own vegetables and preserving their garden bounties for use year round through one-on-one conversations, self-learning publications and educational classes available through MSU Extension. Over 175 youth and adults learned how to properly preserve produce by partnering with Hamilton High School, Corvallis High School and adult education classes.

The Extension office also provides free canning pressure gauge tests. In 2016, over 75% of the tested gauges would have resulted in under processed food. Additionally, eight gauges had significant errors and the test protected approximately 40 people from the deadly toxin of botulism. This free service is an important tool to educate and empower constituents to preserve food safely.

MSU Extension provides a holistic approach to saving money by growing a garden and saving the produce to enjoy after the growing season is gone. The lessons learned are of value throughout a lifetime and can be passed on to generations.



Food preservation has been taught by Extension in partnership with the schools to educate them on safe canning practices with hands-on experience.

Building Healthy Communities

Fork to Farm: a win-win event for agriculture and the local economy



Fork to Farm riders enjoy local hard cider and a variety of apples at Frost Top Orchard in Corvallis, MT.

The Bitterroot Valley is famous for our apples, irrigated pastures and quality hay, but the climate offers opportunities for much more including wine grapes, a variety of berries, vegetables and opportunities for small acreage enterprises. In addition, the valley is a nationally-recognized recreation area for cyclists and home to a community interested in promoting non-motorized transportation as a means of healthier living.

Recognizing this, MSU Extension office in Ravalli County partnered with Bike Walk Bitterroot, local small acreage producers and the Western Agriculture Research Center (WARC) to host a bike ride showcasing the valley's potential to be a destination for agritourism, a benefit to the local economy and agriculture. The bike ride, Fork to Farm, included stops at four farms where meals prepared from local produce was served. In addition riders received tours of each farm and learned about the diversity of agriculture in the Bitterroot from grape growing, to cheese making to apple and berry production.

The ride raised over \$2,000 to support Bike Walk Bitterroot's efforts to increase safety for non-motorized transportation in the valley. The post-survey results demonstrated that the event provided marketing opportunities for local producers and attracted new riders to the Bitterroot, strengthening the local economy. For example, 49% of participants said they would seek out the farms and products they learned about on the ride; 48% said they are more likely to choose the Bitterroot as a cycling destination while the remaining 52% reported it is already a destination for them. One rider noted, "This was an awesome ride and a real eye opener to the farms in the Bitterroot. Well done! Excellent ride! Do it again and let me know when." Plans are already being made for spring and fall 2017 rides with greater opportunities for producer participation to help boost CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and summer sales.

SNAP-Ed: Integrating healthy living into everyday life

Entering its fourteenth year of funding, the SNAP-Ed Nutrition program is continuing to build momentum through community partnerships. In 2016 new relationships were formed with the O'Hara Commons Sustainability Center, SAFE (Supporters of Abuse Free Environments), Bitterroot College, Master Gardeners, and School Wellness Policy Boards at Hamilton and Darby school districts.

These partnerships leverage funding by recruiting adults, providing space for classes, and partnering on engaging projects broadening the clientele served through the SNAP-Ed Nutrition program. For example, SNAP-Ed coordinator Laura Henderson partnered with SAFE, the Extension office, Master Gardeners, and Huls Dairy to help start an onsite garden (pictured below) for residents of SAFE's housing program. Participants learned to grow and harvest their own food from seed to table.



Another project integrating classroom concepts into the daily lives of participants is the 22 Group. This group is a HeadStart partnership in which parents meet once a week and walk 22 minutes. After strong summer participation, the group will continue into the fall.

SNAP-Ed classes continue to provide nutrition education to youth and adults. With the help of Bitterroot College, the adult 'Nutrition Made Simple' classes have been a major success. The college listed the class in their Fall 2016 catalog reaching an audience of over 20,000 Bitterroot residents. The class filled up immediately and will be held on the college's campus near the Extension office.

With updated curriculum, the youth program is engaging students and their parents with realistic and relevant scientific information about food. Stevensville third grade students and teachers loved it. Teachers gave it rave reviews on surveys. Parents consistently remark how excited their child is when they come home from the nutrition class and report the family is making changes at home because of it.

The Ravalli County SNAP-Ed program is looking forward to continuing this momentum into 2017 as they provide free nutrition education to income eligible adults as well as first, third and fifth grade students in Ravalli County's Title 1 schools.

Exploring new opportunities for Montana small acreage producers

Known as the banana belt of Montana, the Bitterroot Valley enjoys a milder climate than many locations in the state. However, dramatic temperature fluctuations throughout the year can be hard on several varieties of specialty crops. Growers often turn to high tunnels to extend the growing season for annual crops, presenting challenges for soil fertility management. For perennial fruit growers, discovering suitable new varieties is often a game of trial and error.

In 2016, the MSU Extension office in Ravalli County and the Western Agriculture Research Center received two grants to assist small acreage specialty crop producers address issues around season extension and navigate the frontier of fruit production.

Six growers with high-tunnels received comprehensive soil tests in their tunnels and fields, getting baseline information on pH, organic matter, nutrients and soil health parameters. The producers then received one-on-one assistance with evaluating soil results and participated in a Soil Health Workshop with speakers from MSU and WSU who discussed cover cropping, reduced tillage and livestock integration for soil fertility. The workshop was attended by producers from Lake, Missoula, Ravalli and Gallatin Counties. Survey results indicated that over 90% of participants would change their soil management approach.

The second grant provided monetary resources to explore new varieties of apples to be used in cider production. While producers have attempted to plant cider apple varieties, many have been damaged by disease and sudden temperature fluctuations. Hard cider producers often buy juice from out of state.

Several heritage orchards remain in the forests of Montana and Idaho, many of which contain lost apple varieties or new wild seedlings. These established apples have developed in our region and may be more suitable to the climate than apples from the East Coast and Europe. Three orchards along the North Fork of the Salmon River were sampled in addition to several locations around the Bitterroot Valley. Scion wood from promising varieties was grafted at WARC for future variety trials. Forty-eight fruit samples were pressed and the juice was analyzed for cider qualities. In addition local apple producers and hard cider makers participated in a flavor panel to determine priorities for future propagation. Participants were excited about several apples sampled and plans have been made to continue exploring the region and these orchards for potential cider fruit.



Producers learn about specialty crop trials currently underway at WARC as part of the Soil Health Workshop.

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