Agriculture and Natural Resources

Blaine County is one of the leaders in producing ag commodities in the state of Montana. Its reported yields in grain and hay typically rank in the top ten in the state along with high quality commercial and pure bred cattle herds. Blaine County MSU Extension is multi-faceted in its efforts to meet the needs of these producers.

Livestock and forage producers in Blaine County consult with Blaine County MSU Extension throughout the haying season and during fall and winter to evaluate forages. Many of these clients utilize the Nitrate Quick Test service to get a qualitative test of nitrates in forages. Over 40 producers visited MSU Extension in 2016 requesting a qualitative or quantitative test of the amount of nitrates in their forage or wanting additional analysis for nutritional value. These one on one consultations often lead to discussions about safely feeding hay and other forages that contain nitrates, livestock nutrition, forage quality analysis, and how to balance diets using the quantitative report from a lab. This information can potentially save livestock producers thousands of dollars by reducing the risk of losing cattle from nitrate poisoning, or saving them from buying expensive supplements or excess forage. Blaine County MSU Extension was also able to reach producers by hosting seminars and in-field demonstrations that covered topics such as forage sampling methods and feed report analysis, livestock supplementation, forage species selection and establishment, and grazing management.

Cash crop growers faced multiple challenges during the 2016 crop year. Along with traditional challenges such as weed control, growers saw increased disease in crops this year. This was attributed to an abnormal abundance in rainfall in the spring, and winter wheat infection of wheat streak mosaic virus in the fall of 2015. Blaine County MSU Extension worked with producers to diagnose wheat diseases and provide management options to the grower. Many of these farmers benefited from individual farm visits or by bringing samples to the office for evaluation.

The annual Cederberg Crop Tour was held in July for area farmers to talk with and learn from researchers from the MSU Northern Ag Research Center and other parts of Montana. Currently the focus of the field trials is to evaluate the performance of various small grain varieties as they are affected by infestation of the insect pest Wheat Stem Sawfly and to determine the overall suitability of spring wheat, winter wheat, and durum varieties for this particular area of Montana. Producers have indicated that this information is important so they can make profitable cropping decisions with the best variety selection to maximize their profits. The plot typically attracts an average of 30 producers representing over 35,000 acres of Blaine County farmland each year.

Welcome to Blaine County

Blaine County is located in beautiful North Central Montana between the Missouri River and the Canadian border. The population in Blaine County stands at just over 6,600 people, with approximately half of these individuals residing on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Agriculture is the major industry in the county, with the major enterprises of cattle and wheat production. Over 8.3 million bushels of wheat are produced each year from Blaine County’s 235,500 acres of farmland. There are over 60,000 mother cows in the county supported by an irrigated hay base located along the Milk River, enhanced by irrigation supplied by the Corps of Engineers St. Mary’s diversion project.

Blaine County MSU Extension has a strong partnership between Blaine County and Montana State University. This unique partnership provides research-based information and educational programs in the areas of Agriculture, Family & Consumer Sciences, and 4-H Youth Development. Blaine County MSU Extension is dedicated to improving the quality of people’s lives by providing unbiased research-based education and information. Call or stop in and find out what Blaine County MSU Extension can do for you.
Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Blaine County residents consult with our Family and Consumer Sciences Agent throughout the year to answer questions ranging from food preservation and safety to financial planning. During canning season, clients utilize the Pressure Canner Gauge Test service to assure their pressure canner is working properly, while others take advantage of the research-based information and one-on-one consultations to help them safely can at home. Such information and training helps to reduce the chance of under processing or unsafely canning foods, thus reducing the risk of foodborne illness.

Food Safety education is an important step to prevent the spread of foodborne illnesses. It is important that everyone who works in the food service industry, from concession workers to kitchen managers, to obtain food safety education and training. Blaine County MSU Extension has provided over 55 hours of training through 13 different ServSafe® classes. In the past year, 185 people were provided ServSafe® Food Safety education. 122 of those received the Basic Food Safety Course designed for concession workers, and 13 received the ServSafe® Food Handler Course. Blaine and Hill County MSU Extension teamed up to provide ServSafe® education to 50 residents along the Hi-Line who were in need of the ServSafe® Food Protection Manager Certification.

Extension is one of the main educators who are offering Food Safety training. We try to offer all of our classes at as low of a cost as we can. We don’t want the cost to deter people from receiving important education. Those requiring the ServSafe® certification benefit from having local trainings available, making it convenient and economical.

In an effort to increase participation in the Annual Sugarbeet Festival Dutch Oven Cooking Contest, Blaine County MSU Extension put on a Dutch Oven Cooking class. There were 16 participants who joined in the hands-on cooking class, preparing and sampling 11 dishes. At this year’s event, there were four two-person teams, compared to one team last year.

Health and Wellness is a strong focus in Blaine County’s FCS programming. Several classes are offered for a variety of topics and audience members. During this year’s Summer Reading Program in Harlem, Blaine County MSU Extension was invited to teach nutrition for children, “Fuel Your Engine,” to nine children ages 4 to 10. During this class, participants learned about MY Plate and the various food groups and sorted foods into ‘Slow, Go, Whoa’ categories.

As with many communities across the state, Blaine County has a large number of people who have chronic diseases, such as depression, Diabetes, Parkinson’s, and Multiple Sclerosis. Blaine County MSU Extension and the Blaine County Health Department team up to offer the Living Life Well—Chronic Disease and Self-Management program to help those living with a chronic disease, along with those who live with or take care of someone with a chronic disease.

Blaine County MSU Extension participated in a Healthy Hearts for Rural Women, (Strong Hearts) research project with Cornell University. Eleven women from Blaine County completed the program. Cornell University is currently compiling the data.

Participants in the Dutch Oven Cooking class take advantage of the moment to socialize and share cooking tips and tricks while they wait for the meals to finish cooking.

This “Order the Fridge” interactive visual aide has been a great hands-on activity during ServSafe® trainings. It helps teach cooking temperatures, along with the order food should be placed in the fridge to help prevent cross-contamination.
Blaine County 4-H Youth Development

The Blaine County 4-H Youth Development program served 117 youth ages 5 to 19 during the 2015-2016 4-H year. There were 45 adult volunteers who were enrolled as certified leaders.

Our 4-H members enrolled in a wide-range of projects. We had 147 4-H projects related to Animal Science, 56 in Family and Consumer Sciences, 24 in Communications and Expressive Arts, 16 in leadership and personal development, 14 in Engineering and Technology, 7 in Shooting Sports, and 26 in Cloverbuds.

7 counties along the Hi-Line come together to offer 4-H camp for youth ages 9 to 13. Of the 82 youth who attended camp this year, 18 were from Blaine County. 4 of our Teen Leaders were consolers; planning camp, putting on workshops, and being positive role models for the younger 4-H members. 4-H camp gives youth an opportunity to learn in a safe, different environment and participate in hands-on activities that may not normally be available to them such as canoeing, archery, and other projects that utilize STEM curriculum.

We offer a variety of workshops and learning opportunities through our 4-H programming: horse, dog, cat, poultry, and livestock clinics, along with Shooting Sports workshops. These opportunities give youth a hands-on experience to learn by doing.

Over 97 youth and adults participated in ServSafe® training for concession workers. This was the first year we’ve started to implement this training for all of our 4-H Chucwagon workers who help serve food during the fair. With a rising concern for food safety, and our desire to set a trend for other fair concession food booths, our 4-H program decided to be proactive and require food safety training for all of our 4-H youth and adults.

The Blaine County MSU Extension Office handles the entry and implementation of the 4-H Division and the Youth Livestock Division of the Blaine County Fair in Chinook. Forty-three youth participated in Livestock Quality Assurance trainings. The workshop taught participants how to evaluate an animal's carcass after slaughter. Youth learned what factors can affect the quality of an animal's carcass. The workshop also included a hands-on exercise, to give 4-H youth training and experience evaluating different cuts of meat. Participants learned how to identify the quality of meat, and what impact feeding, environment, and other animal husbandry practices have on carcass quality. After this course, 4-H youth were better prepared to deliver high quality animals to slaughter. Blaine County 4-H youth who participated in market shows at the county fair were able to see the results of their hard work during the county wide carcass contest. Youth members achieved statewide honors in all three species of market animals that are shown at the Blaine County Fair. Most of the animals shown at the county fair are purchased and raised locally including 4-Hers raising market animals from their own stock. Both steers that received Steer of Merit recognition were raised from the 4-Hers own breeding stock.

Two Blaine County 4-H youth participating in 4-H camp activities.

A 4-Her practices measuring and evaluating a beef ribeye for quality.
Supplemental Nutrition Education

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) offers a free educational program to all SNAP, WIC, or Head-Start eligible adults, along with nutrition and physical education to youth in qualifying schools. The SNAP-Education program provides hands-on nutrition education with a research-based curriculum through a series of lessons. Joann Beard, Blaine County’s SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator, has been providing this important program in Blaine County for the past fifteen years.

In the schools, Joann teaches a series of six action-packed lessons, from the “Youth Understanding MyPalte” (YUM) curriculum to first, third, and fifth grade students in qualifying schools. During these lessons, youth learn about the importance of food safety, MyPlate, Grains, Fruits and Vegetables, Dairy, Protein, and physical activity. There are six schools who qualify for SNAP-Education in Blaine County. Over the past year, 172 youth received the Extension nutrition and physical activity curriculum here in Blaine County. The series of lessons in the adult curriculum presents individuals with information and practical tips for choosing healthier foods, preparing meals, learning appropriate food safety practices, modeling good food choices for family members, and incorporating ways to be more physically active. Along with learning healthy nutritional information, the participants also learn financial tips to help them stretch their food dollars so they can afford to buy, eat, and live better. Participants stated that they were willing to try new fruits and vegetables as a result of the program. They also noted that they are making better food choices and making fruits and vegetables more available within their homes. Youth participants have shown an increase of snacking on fruits and vegetables as a direct result of trying them within the program. SNAP-Ed is an important program for many individuals and is an important factor in creating a healthy community.

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