The MSU Extension Office

The role of MSU Extension in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County is to build leadership capacity with emphasis on community economic development, consumer horticulture, city beautification, 4-H youth development, and family consumer science.

The social, economic and environmental well-being of a community is the intricate work of the whole and the civic responsibility of each individual. County by county, Montana State University Extension strategically moves Montanans toward long-term solutions and success.

MSU Extension is a valued partner for community economic development work in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County.

Deer Lodge County has the smallest land area of Montana’s 56 counties (pop. 9,300), consisting of 741 square miles of scenic, mountainous terrain, with the highest population density in the city of Anaconda (pop. 7,700).

Anaconda-Deer Lodge is a consolidated city-county government with an ageing, declining population, where about 19% of the population are living below the federal poverty level. Anaconda, once an industrial boomtown for the Anaconda Copper Company smelting operation, has a service driven economy, enriched with cultural pride and potential for growth through jobs, housing and tourism.

In 2016, the office welcomed Paula Arneson as administrative assistant to the Deer Lodge County 4-H program and MSU Extension operations. Paula has been working for the city/county local government for eight years. MSU Extension is a great fit, where Paula can apply her years of adult education, social services case management, and volunteer community work.
Community Walking Group

A healthy community is defined by more than access to health care. We are the product of our lifestyle choices, fueled by access to nature, active infrastructure, social connections, and wholesome food. In Anaconda, MSU Extension hosts a daily community walking group from May to November. Participants complete 30 minutes of moderate walking and stretching Monday-Friday. They develop caring relationships with their fellow walkers and learn about aspects of their community, ranging from seasonal plants, tree species, wildlife behavior, community events, and planning initiatives to improve streets, trails, and neighborhoods.

Ray Loftin, an Anaconda resident and most senior walker in the group at 80 years old, has been walking with the community group for two years. Ray reported, “It is good to meet people in the community who share a common interest (like walking). I’ve always been into physical fitness, as it makes many outdoor activities possible.” The community walking group deepens social connections, “Listening to others in the walking group share their interests and experiences helps me learn more about this community and its needs. I’ve been impressed by and become acquainted with all the Chamber of Commerce does. I’ve been privileged to meet great people, become more fit and broadened my view of the community and how I fit into it.”

Master Gardener

A vibrant community engages its residents in co-creating a better future. Public horticulture education prepares people as leaders and stewards of their natural resources. The MSU Extension Master Gardener program in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County is a nine-module, university-caliber course that covers the basics of landscaping, gardening, and integrated pest management for the local climate and ecology. Participants demonstrate learning through a comprehensive test and completing 20 hours of volunteer community service related to gardens, parks, urban forestry, and food banks.

Participants report that the Master Gardener level one class is a good refresher that expands their gardening knowledge and skills. They value having a variety of MSU Extension experts present on horticulture topics. In-depth greenhouse and tree workshops have been identified as a community need for future education.

Anaconda Master Gardeners have more confidence and opportunities to assist elderly residents with their home landscaping and to volunteer with the urban forestry street tree project. “On my evening walks, I carry my hand pruners to cut the suckers on street trees. I chat with property owners to educate them on the importance of pruning, raising the canopy, watering, and how to contact local tree experts,” one participants said.

The “Walking to Wellness” group met each Monday through Friday during the noon hour. Classes met May through November 2016.

Residents participated in a tree planting and care workshop at the Anaconda Common in September 2016.
Beginning Farmers and Ranchers: Planning for On Farm Success

Montana Local Food initiatives seek to infuse rural development with new strategies for job creation, food production, income, and well-being. Special provisions in federal and state legislation (i.e. Farm Bill and Cottage Food Law) help farmers, ranchers and food businesses diversify their enterprises and participate in new markets that will bolster rural development and help alleviate food sovereignty issues.

In February 2016, MSU Extension in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County offered a four-day “Planning for On-Farm Success” course to farmers, ranchers and food businesses within a five-county region through partnerships with Headwaters Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D), the Food and Agriculture Development Center (FADC), Small Business Development Center (SBDC), MSU Ag. Economic Dept., National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA), Community Food and Agriculture Coalition (CFAC), and Rural Employment Opportunities (REO).

Participants valued the networking, the instructors, and the information. The participants reported that the class increased their knowledge of available services to finance farm operations, and new marketing tools. Also, their confidence and ability to manage financial records increased. As a result of the connections that participants made in the workshops, they met and attended additional workshops on small scale energy production. Among the participants, there was a high level of interest in future roundtable discussions and tours that focus on marketing local food products, as well as commercial composting and greenhouse food production.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

The Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) project has been active in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County for two years.

In Montana, extended families living under one roof may be considered traditional, however today, the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren without parents is increasing. Also, grandfamilies that are made up of grandparents, some or no parent(s), and children, are trending in our community.

Since 2010 in Deer Lodge County, there has been a significant increase in the number of grandparents living in the same household as their grandchildren (US Census). Grandparents are helping single and dual parent households meet financial obligations, care for the children, attend the child’s school and doctor appointments, and in some cases have full responsibility, for example foster care, adoption, informal or formal guardianship, for their grandchildren.
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren continued

Thirteen families have attended group meetings and classes with MSU Extension and the Anaconda School District. Through community partnerships like the Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Best Beginnings Coalition, 250 local leaders have learned about the GRG project. The program offers monthly support meetings where grandparents, relatives, close family friends, and advocates can gather, learn, and build relationships with one another that promote self-care and build the leadership capacity of grandfamilies.

GRG Irma Ward the legal guardian of her two Granddaughters, who are all smiles at their Halloween Celebration.

Irmada Ward recently moved to Anaconda and joined the Deer Lodge County GRG group; she is a grandmother raising two granddaughters and living in one house with her daughter and third granddaughter. “Being a second time parent has been fulfilling and enjoyable, as I am more mature and experienced than the first time around, able to be more patient and more relaxed with my girls. It is very comforting to be raising them instead of a foster family.

The most challenging aspects are my age, my health, and my relationship with my son, the girls’ father. I miss having time to spend with friends. I am excited to meet other GRGs and to form an excellent support system for each other. We don’t have to feel alone. There are resources available to us to navigate this wonderful but sometimes stressful, scary and overwhelming life change.”

4-H Youth Leadership Development and Camp H2O

The Deer Lodge County 4-H Youth Development Program membership increased from 74 to 166 in 2016. The program is made up of four community clubs, one school-based program for students in grades 9-12 (Anaconda Leadership Academy), and two summer programs for ages 5-12 (Boys and Girls Club Summer Gardening) and ages 12-18 (Camp H2O) accounting for approximately 160 youth. Two 4-H project areas experienced significant growth in 2016: Horse Project Western Games and Shooting Sports, attracting new membership, adult volunteers, and teen leaders.

Deer Lodge County youth participate in a Camp H2O exercise that encourages team building while developing analytical thinking skills.
Youth Leadership Continued

Seamus Hoolahan is a sophomore at Anaconda High School and a first year 4-H member in leadership and robotics. He reflects on his experience as a counselor at Camp H2O. “I saw how much our community is willing to give and stands to benefit by making Camp H2O possible for kids. I am an only child, so working with younger kids for multiple days to effectively communicate and work together to achieve a common goal taught me valuable people skills.”

High school counselors provide stability. “I became close with the other high school and adult counselors and realized how people with different opinions, communication styles and strategies can be successful together.” Today, Seamus is a youth leader with the community organizations that sponsored camp.

The benefits of camp can follow youth to school. Seamus goes on to say, “At camp, peer groups get mixed, and we develop new relationships and shared experiences that lead to fewer bullying problems at school. It’s easier to stand up for another person once you’ve seen them at their best. I have made connections with younger students who I mentor when they are struggling in their classes. I also tell kids to get involved with the fun camp experience. I want to see Camp H2O keep getting bigger and better.”

Anaconda Community Market

The Anaconda Community Market is an outdoor, public market where western Montana culture mingles with the flare and flavor of local businesses. Market-goers enjoy live music, goods, and mule-drawn wagon rides.

At the market, more than money exchanges hands. Gloria O’Rourke, the director of the Anaconda Community Foundation, the organizational market sponsor, values the time and conversations she is able to have with nonprofit leaders and prospective donors during markets.

Market manager Tess Kohoutek staffs the point of sale table and displays the token system for SNAP EBT. She is an AmeriCorps VISTA service member with the Anaconda Community Foundation.

The market is a community incubator, where people catch-up on local happenings, share ideas and learn about available services. The market season runs July through September at the Kennedy Common on Main Street.

MSU Extension serves on the Anaconda Community Market planning committee and has helped to establish the first Point of Sale (POS) for SNAP EBT (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Electronic Benefit Transfer) through a grant totaling $1,312.92 from the National Farmers Market Coalition and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT).
Anaconda Community Market Continued

Only 25% percent of all Montana farmers/community markets offer SNAP EBT at their markets. The Anaconda Community Market is proud to provide this service, which has shown to increase local access to fresh, quality food, where an estimated 19% of our residents live below the federal poverty rate.

A founding committee member, Lydia Janosko, understands the potential impact on the local economy and community health, “Most of the money spent at the market stays in our community and state. The SNAP EBT program at market brings locally grown, nutrient-dense foods that lengthen lives, make us happier, and prevent disease.”

According to the national Farmers Market Coalition, “of every $100 spent at local markets, $62 stays within the community and $99 within the state.” Further, the POS boosted shopper convenience and spending through debit/credit transfers for “same as cash” tokens.

The market is growing. There were five more fresh food vendors offering eggs, beef, vegetables, fruit, lentils, jams/jellies and baked goods. In combined sales, fresh food vendors earned an estimated $8,000, and they report a high level of interest in returning for the 2017 season.

Amanda Dour sold Montana grown lentils; “It was a wonderful opportunity to feel involved in the community. The lentils came from a quality source; I felt proud to sell them at the local market. Many buyers commented on how hard it was to find fresh lentils and appreciated being able to buy them locally. I loved being outside and seeing people laughing and talking; my six-year-old son had a great time at market playing and helping out.”

Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden

The Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden is part of a local food movement that will inspire community solutions to public health, hunger, hopelessness, and decay by creating leadership opportunities, leveraging resources and developing gardens with families and individuals where they can safely grow food in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County.

MSU Extension partnered with the Water & Environmental Technology (WET) engineering firm and Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden to plan and implement a nine-week gardening project for 4-H Youth and Boys and Girls Club of Deer Lodge County that included 13 youth, four adult volunteers, and 27 hours of lessons and gardening. The youth grew 50 pounds of potatoes, garlic, zucchini, onions, carrots, turnips, greens, and herbs. They tasted the produce in spinach smoothies and garlic toast with fresh parsley. Some produce was sold to earn $65 dollars at the Anaconda Community Market to pay for their rent and seeds.
Cherry Street Garden Continued

Phyllis Erck, landowner and director of the Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden, has connected with neighbors, children, and their families. “Community members have purchased the garden’s produce at the Community Market and attended our fundraiser concert. They get excited about turning urban blight into green space. Next year, I would like to see residents renting boxes and actively growing their own food. This model could be duplicated all over the town of Anaconda, where the population decreased from 30,000 to 8,000, leaving a lot of abandoned houses and buildings. Abbie Phillip demonstrated crops that grow very well in our high altitude climate, teaching adults and the kids how to grow and harvest a garden.”

It is within one mile of three schools, several churches and businesses. The directors of the garden plan to double the number of raised beds, continue public outreach, and publish a local guide to establishing community gardens as a remedy for urban blight.

The Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden is Anaconda’s first fully public garden. It plans to rent to individuals and families 200 square feet of clean soil for safe food production in six raised beds with easy access to water. The garden is centrally located on a residential lot where a dilapidated house was removed.

Children from the Deer Lodge County 4-H Clubs and Boys and Girls Club are working in their vegetable gardens at the Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden.

Phyllis Erck mentors the young gardeners of Cherry Street Neighborhood Garden. Phyllis guided the youth in salesmanship during the selling of their vegetables at the Anaconda Community Market.

One of the youngest Cherry Street gardeners has a look of amazement as he sees his harvested potatoes for the first time.
SNAP Education

According to the 2016 ADLC Community Health Needs Assessment, nutrition, lifestyle education, and community wellness programs are valued by our residents. The “Buy Eat Live Better” SNAP-Ed programs are nutrition education and obesity prevention designed for individuals and families who are eligible or participating in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps). SNAP-Ed offers adult classes, “Eating Smart Being Active,” and youth classes, “Youth Understanding MyPlate (YUM).”

Molly Viall joined the MSU Extension team in June 2016 as the new SNAP-Ed Program Manager for Anaconda-Deer Lodge (ADLC) and Butte-Silver Bow. This is a shared position being housed in the Butte-Silver Bow MSU Extension office.

She has provided technical assistance on policy, systems and environmental change for a healthier community. For example, working with the school wellness committee, public health, the hospital and a local economic development nonprofit on the Food Corps Farm to School initiative.

In 2016, 130 community members were exposed to SNAP-Ed information through adult and youth classes and community partnerships. Fifteen youth at The Boys & Girls Club of Deer Lodge County and 43 youth at Fred Moodry Intermediate School participated in the YUM Program.

Contact Us

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION
Deer Lodge County

Abbie Phillip
Community Economic Development Agent

Paula Arneson
Administrative Assistant

Molly Viall
SNAP-Ed Program Manager

Deer Lodge County Extension
Anaconda, MT 59711
Phone (406) 563-4035
E-mail deerlodge@montana.edu
Web www.adlc.us