Liberty County Extension Influence Seen Across Generations

Liberty County Extension works with a diverse population throughout the county. These 2300 people turn to Extension for needs in agriculture, 4-H, family and consumer sciences and community development. Liberty County Extension works to meet all their needs and questions, from the first year 4-H Cloverbud to the budding 4-H club officer, and from the young growers seeking to make a living on family farms, to the home gardener seeking healthy gardens, and from the homemakers seeking current information on home food preservation methods to those throughout the county that serve on various advisory and governing boards. In agriculture that means getting out on farms to examine crops. For those home gardeners and homemakers it could involve teaching classes on how to raise and preserve garden produce. 4-H youth learn important life skills by participating in county demonstration days as well as specific project events. Community leaders learn how to lead meetings and work with the Extension office with over 35 samples showing signs of the virus. Other fields were diagnosed by personal visits. Newspaper articles, phone calls and e-mails also helped to distribute information to Liberty County growers.

There is no cure to the crop once infected with the virus. Extension was able to recommend several best management practices including saving fertilizer and operational costs for those growers with confirmed cases of WSMV as mites respond positively to nitrogen. Those with infected fields were also better prepared for the 2016 fall planting season as they made management decisions about delayed planting, longer times between spraying and planting and utilizing crop rotation practices.

Wheat Streak Mosaic Virus Impacts Liberty County Cereal Crops

The 2016 growing season saw a dramatic increase in the amount of wheat streak mosaic virus (WSMV) in Liberty County. This was largely due to a 2015 Independence Day hail storm that cut an approximate eight to ten mile swath through Liberty County. Crops hailed out were host to the wheat curl mite, which vectors the virus. Despite growers best efforts to spray out fields, the mite spread the virus. Early spring 2016 brought signs of disease spread in the form of striped leaves and the presence of the wheat curl mite on young wheat plants.

Growers submitted samples of wheat suspected of harboring the virus to the Extension office and Schutter Diagnostic Lab for positive identification. Approximately 25 growers from Hill and Liberty counties utilized resources at the Extension office with over 35 samples showing signs of the virus. Other fields were diagnosed by personal visits. Newspaper articles, phone calls and e-mails also helped to distribute information to Liberty County growers.

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4-H Leadership Wanted
Liberty County 4-H has seen a large jump in enrollment over the past six years, with enrollment reaching 73 youth and 35 adult volunteers in the 2015-16 year. Many youth and volunteers were new to 4-H, or within two to three years of joining. With this relative inexperience it has been necessary to provide leadership trainings to club officers, organizational leaders and project leaders to maintain 4-H expectations as set forth by 4-H policy and the Liberty County 4-H Council.

Many club officers in the three Liberty County 4-H clubs held office for the first time this year. Understanding of basic parliamentary procedure and parts of a meeting was lacking. Officer training included meeting with officers and using activities to reinforce parliamentary procedure that they would find in a club business meeting. Phrases such as “I move,” how to restate a motion and how to properly record meeting minutes were all reviewed and practiced in small group settings. This practicum, along with reinforcement and encouragement by volunteer club leaders has allowed 4-H clubs to return to how they need to be led, by the youth themselves. Youth have developed confidence in their abilities to lead and how to run effective meetings. As a result, participation in club meetings by individual members has also increased as they recognize that they are the ones making decisions for the clubs and not their parents.

In Liberty County, many 4-H club organizational leaders are also newer and hesitant about how they need to be organizing 4-H members in clubs to be effective. Club organizational leader training was conducted with the goal of helping club leaders understand the ages and stages of youth development and how to help the youth achieve their goals during the 4-H year. With youth ranging in age from five to 18 there are different needs to meet and plan for. Club leaders better understand now the need to encourage and plan different activities to engage all youth. Leaders also understand the importance of record books, and are prepared to work with youth at club meetings so record book completion is not left until the end of the year. This will have lasting effects on youth as they learn to keep accurate records during their lives.

Project leaders’ unique role in 4-H is to help youth meet individual goals. As such, leaders were trained about their role in helping youth set and achieve goals. With other expectations, project leaders now understand their role in 4-H and are better organized to hold productive, monthly project meetings with 4-H members.

Game of Carcasses
Youth that participate in the Marias Fair with large livestock have a responsibility to care for their animals for much of the year. The success of the Marias Fair livestock auction depends upon the quality product they bring to the fair. To help youth understand characteristics they need to be aware of in their recently harvested animals and what they can look for in future animals, there is a yearly carcass education class held after the fair.

In 2016 the carcass education was made into a board game based on the categories of animal selection, nutrition, management and circumstance. Approximately 70 youth from four counties had the opportunity to answer questions on game cards related to their animals, and then advance around the board if they answered correctly.

As a result of the game, youth better understand that decisions they make throughout their projects have long lasting implications, not only for themselves but for youth around the Marias Fair.
Don’t Forget About Alzheimer’s

Liberty County’s aging population keeps the small hospital in Chester busy meeting their needs. Liberty Medical Center partnered with Extension to offer a five part class on Alzheimer’s caregiving at home.

Classes focused on how caregivers can provide respite for themselves and adequate care for their loved ones. This included safe-proofing the home, creative solutions to dining, managing personal stress and legal and financial issues for caregivers. Classes also facilitate discussion among participants, acting as a therapy group to an extent. This proved to be the most beneficial part of the classes as caregivers were able to visit with each other about concerns they had or were facing. Using techniques and skills, they could formulate plans with each other on how to better help and cope with how the disease affected family dynamics.

Board Leadership Training

A resident of Liberty County once stated that, “Every resident a president,” meaning that every resident has an opportunity to serve somewhere. Many residents serving on advisory or governing councils have little in the way of practical training for the positions they serve in.

Staying in Hot Water

There has been an increased interest in home food preservation in recent years. For many people food preservation is a new concept and there are concerns about correctly preserving acidic and non-acidic foods.

A canning class in Chester focused on correct techniques for hot water bath and pressure canning. Nine participants learned about safe food handling, when and how to use hot water bath canners versus pressure canners and were able to successfully can samples of fruit and vegetables using both methods. Participants in the class and others outside of the class also took the opportunity to test their pressure canner gauges. Instructions on correct time and pressure for canning non-acidic foods could be altered accordingly if the pressure was only slightly off. If pressure gauges were more than two pounds per square inch off, the recommendation was made to discard the gauge. One participant gained confidence in pressure canning enough to seek out new foods to can that she previously had been scared to try. This allows her to better feed her family economically.

Dan Clark, Director of MSU’s Local Government Center, instructs local board members about Montana laws governing meetings.

Participants in the home food preservation class successfully preserved food using hot water and pressure canner methods.
Farm Safety Affects All Ages

Approximately 97% of Liberty County’s economy is agriculture. This also means that a large number of people in the county have some sort of job in agriculture, or live on a farm or ranch. Those that work in any aspect of agriculture, from driving large vehicles to spraying weeds need to understand how to be safe and responsible at their jobs and how to respond quickly and efficiently should an emergency arise.

Liberty County Extension, with Chester-Joplin-Inverness High School, Liberty Medical Center and Liberty County Emergency Medical Services, hosted a county-wide farm safety day to meet the needs of the local farm families and those that work there. Approximately 25 youth and adults participated in classes in tractor safety, basic automotive skills, weed identification, backpack sprayer calibration, and basic first aid practices. Individuals were able to take part in hands-on activities in several classes. Tractor safety included identifying important tractor safety features, while sprayer safety had youth demonstrating the importance of personal protective equipment through the calibration and use of a backpack sprayer. Individuals were also able to try their hand at weed identification and to learn about basic first aid techniques applicable as they work by themselves or with others.

All of these classes together worked to demonstrate that farming can be a safe endeavor for families and individuals as proper safety procedures are followed. Participants, whether youth or adults, were able to understand the importance of sprayer calibration for environmental and economic considerations, how knowing basic first aid techniques could save lives and how keeping farm and automotive equipment in proper running order can save money and improve efficiency.

Two young men prepare to calibrate a backpack sprayer by checking their personal protective equipment for a correct fit.

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