Weather and Disease Impact Phillips County

Crop disease major economic impact
Wheat Streak Mosaic Virus (WSMV) expanded its impact across Phillips County in 2016. The Extension agent submitted eight samples to the Schutter Diagnostic Lab. Another seven producers were consulted on the phone about the possibility of WSMV in their crop. Direct crop losses ranged from 100 to 50 percent. It is estimated that WSMV affected over 60,000 acres.

It appears that 2017 is shaping up to be another year of WSMV. Fall moisture was significant enough to germinate weeds and volunteer on summer fallow, and the nine and one half inches of precipitation during September through October was enough to keep farmers out of the fields due to wet soils. Consequently, many acres went into the winter with significant vegetative growth, creating a green bridge for WSMV in the 2017 crop year.

Weather becomes challenging
Weather continues to be a factor in agricultural production. Though the winter of 2016 was dry through April, from April to October of 2016, Phillips County received between 25 to 30 inches of rain. This provided challenges during haying as well as delayed small grain planting. In early October we received a four to five inch rain event on saturated soils that caused widespread flooding of crop and hay ground. The Extension agent has provided advice on forage quality issues to livestock producers when feeding wet hay.

Agent continues to work with livestock producers
Every winter, Extension agent, Marko Manoukian works with livestock producers at a daylong educational program. The Jim Schumacher Memorial Livestock Day has been an annual event since 1989. In 2016, 45 producers learned about the Veterinary Feed Directive, proper usage of a dart gun for remote vaccination, as well as the market outlook from a cattle feeder from Minnesota.

Additionally, Manoukian has performed 19 nitrate tests on forages and formulated rations for 10 producers. A listserv has been used to make producers aware of upcoming events and important impacts to the livestock sector, like the recent decision by United State Department of Agriculture to import fresh beef from Brazil.
Educating Landowners about Pesticides

The Phillips County Extension agent plays a vital role in the certification and recertification of private landowners with pesticide licenses. Every five years, Phillips County must recertify farm and ranch pesticide licenses. Producers must receive six credits over the five-year period to maintain their license. In November, a daylong meeting was held for the 36 producers who needed additional credits to maintain their private pesticide applicators license.

The pesticide license is important so that producers can purchase restricted use pesticides for weed, insect, and or fungicide control. The role of the Extension agent is to provide education in the areas specified by the calibration, environmental concerns, identification, safety and biology related to pesticides. In addition to the daylong educational event, the agent provides smaller two credit educational opportunities throughout the year and over the five-year recertification time frame. Without these local educational opportunities, producers would be forced to travel greater distances to receive their recertification credits or attend limited regional trainings. For the daylong certification program, the agent cooperated with Steven Vantassel, Montana Department of Agriculture, small vertebrate pest specialist, Cecil Tharp, MSU Extension Pesticide Specialist and Shelley Mills, Valley County agent to provide educational topics. This also allows producers to learn about pesticide issues from a wide range of specialists.

Additionally, the Extension agent works to coordinate other speakers for educational opportunities. An example includes Peter Kolb, Montana State University Forestry Specialist, presenting on shelter belts to include a discussion about pesticide use in shelterbelts and safety. This workshop provided two recertification points.

Noxious weed grant for Houndstongue

The Phillips County Extension agent is working with four landowners in the southeastern part of the county in the Larb Hills to address the expanding presence of houndstongue, a noxious weed. Houndstongue is a biennial weed that reproduces by seeds. When the seeds dry they are covered with sharp hook structures that stick to livestock, humans, and wildlife.

The noxious weed project allows for producers to be compensated for half of chemical costs. In 2016, the four producers sprayed or controlled houndstongue on 35 acres within the 14,000-acre project area. Also in 2016, the cooperators and the county agent hosted a weed tour of the project area. Fifteen producers learned about houndstongue control options, how to calibrate a backpack sprayer, as well as discussed the current status of noxious weeds in Montana. Unfortunately, noxious weeds in Montana continue to move at their biological potential, as if no action is being taken. Grazing loss from the houndstongue infestation is low. However, we have reached a critical point in its distribution in the project area, that if control measures are not taken, houndstongue will continue to expand annually at an exponential rate.
Shooting Sports is thriving

The Phillips County 4-H Shooting Sports program is going strong. In 2016, the program had 69 youth competing in 78 disciplines, some youth take more than one discipline. Youth ages 9 to 19 participated in air rifle, air pistol and archery. The special program runs for about 12 weeks, with youth shooting 8 to 10 weeks. Youth learn the proper way to handle the equipment, safety rules, eye dominations and marksmanship skills. Youth practice under the watchful eye of certified leaders in a shooting discipline. Leaders must become certified by attending a two day training. Phillips County currently has 14 certified leaders, two youth leaders and five helpers.

Youth continue their skills by competing on the state level in Bozeman the first weekend in March. Twelve youth from Phillips County competed in 26 events. The County had two youth that received first place in their discipline.

Teen Youth teach other

Teen youth take time to teach younger 4-H members about the importance of interview judging. Eight teen leaders put on a mock interview judging activity for first time 4-H youth. Teen’s provided the youth with an interview showing everything that you should not do, versus a proper interview. Youth then were put through a mock judging to prepare them for the fair. Youth learned the appropriate ways of talking, dressing and expressing themselves. They learned how to tell an adult about their project, what they learned, liked, disliked and even if they made a mistake. This is an important part of the life skills that the 4-H program teaches all youth in preparing them for their adult life.
Youth Quality Assurance

Youth who participate in a market animal project must attend a Youth Quality Assurance (YQA) class once every three years. Youth learn the best management practices in the areas of herd health, livestock handling, facilities and nutrition. The Extension agent helps educate youth concerning their role as a livestock producer. Providing the best quality product for their buyer is the main focus. The program takes into account all livestock, beef, swine and sheep that youth may raise.

Above: The Extension agent assists youth in counting the dots.
Left: Youth examine a photo of a rib area of beef.

This year the Extension agent chose to teach youth what the role of the carcass grader is in the harvesting portion of the food chain. Youth reviewed a power point on grading a carcass and were provided a hands-on demonstration of how to measure the size of a beef rib and loin chop in a swine. Most participants had a better idea of how a carcass is graded for quality and quantity of lean meat, and ways to improve carcass quality.