**Winter Series**

2016 was a busy year for MSU Extension Agriculture Agent Colleen Buck. The year started with the continuing of Winter Series programming that was started in November 2015. In January and again in April, specialists from the MSU campus came to give talks on winter nutrition for beef cattle, alternative forage options, saline seeps and range management techniques. These topics addressed concerns that were identified as needs or topics of interest by Buck during conversations with producers.

**MonDak Pulse Day**

In February the MonDak Pulse Day was held in Montana to update producers who grow pulse crops in Montana and North Dakota. This event is a joint venture between Montana State University Extension and North Dakota State University Extension. Montana led the nation in pulse production in 2015 and Sheridan county is one of the top three pulse producing counties in Montana. This year the program reached over 100 producers in the MonDak area. Buck is part of the MonDak Pulse Day organizing and planning committee.

**2016 Agriculture Highlights**

Spring came relatively early in Sheridan County and farmers were in the field seeding crops by the last week of March. This early spring caused some concern since rain was scarce, but come mid-May, the rains started and the crops blossomed. The hay crop, however, was stunted and yields off fields were lower than normal. With all the rain, rangeland grew and regrew, allowing producers to leave cattle on rangeland until November. Harvest success varied this year depending on producer. All the moisture caused crops to grow tall and thick, but because of the thickness of the canopies, molds developed in lentils that caused a significant decrease in yield. Also an issue this year was vomitoxin in the Durum fields, resulting in lighter test weights and decreased yields. Even though producers struggled with disease and insect pressure on crops, Sheridan County yields remained on par with previous years. To help producers, Buck sent multiple samples to the Schutter Diagnostic Lab on campus and wrote multiple news articles throughout the summer to alert producers of what to look out for.

**Plant Identification**

Expanding on the Plant Identification workshop from last year, Buck added new plants and an identification activity to the workshop and invited the County Weed District Coordinator to talk about the five noxious weeds of importance in Sheridan County. Narrowleaf Hawksbeard was also talked about as the “new” plant to watch for in Sheridan County.

**Wheat Midge**

Buck again participated in the Wheat Midge monitoring project that was being conducted around the state. Five traps were placed around the county this year, and although there is wheat midge in the area, there are also parasitoids present that prey on the wheat midge. The wheat midge is a continuous concern for farmers in the area, and by monitoring their numbers, actions can be taken to reduce the impact they might have on grain yields. Trap monitoring allows for a quick response as populations can change throughout growing and harvest seasons.
Private Applicator Tour

2016 was the last year for Region 4 private pesticide applicators to recertify with six continuing education credits. Since Sheridan County lies in Region 4, Buck offered to host the Integrated Pest Management Team as they made their way around the region putting on programs. The program was held at the Sheridan County Civic Center and there were 45 participants. Buck will also present at initial pesticide trainings that are taking place in Sidney and Plentywood in December.

Buck continues to encourage producers to stop into the office or give her a call. She is continually looking for programming areas and projects to be a part of that will benefit the producers of Sheridan County.

Arthritis Foundation Exercise Class

“I’m here because Dr. Stoner told me to,” was the reply from a sassy little lady. The question – in reference to the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Class – Why do you keep coming here? Now in the third year of completion, arthritis exercise classes are still going strong and many of the participants have been attending the entire three years. The classes are offered twice a week in two locations and total participation has stayed constant at about 30. Inquiring minds wanted to know, so Extension Agent Sheila Friedrich sat with the eager exercisers one day and asked, “Why do you keep coming here?” Here are some of the responses, which confirm the importance to county residents.

“I need this for my legs; I’ve had two hip replacements and the exercises help both my lower and upper body.”

“I have improved upper body strength and agility.”

“I feel it improves general health; I have a better attitude; it’s good being around people.”

Almost every person commented on the social aspect of the program, which is a secondary benefit. They enjoy the company and have become great friends. They build muscle and flexibility while they share children and grandchildren stories and support each other during birthdays, holidays and other life events.

4-H Shooting Sports

Due to the increasing amount of youth involvement in the 4-H Shooting Sports program in Sheridan County, a training was held in Plentywood with three shooting sports disciplines offered. MSU Extension Agent Colleen Buck, along with fellow northeastern Montana agents, organized the training that was attended by 17 participants from seven different counties from the east side of the state.

Montana 4-H Leaders’ Forum

Buck traveled to Lewistown to present at the Montana 4-H Leader’s Forum. She teamed up with Wibaux County MSU Extension Agent Danielle Harper to present livestock nutrition on a basic level to 4-H leaders from across Montana.
Adopt-A-Cow

What do dog biscuits, toothpaste and marshmallows have in common? They are all beef by-products. That’s just one of the lessons learned during the Adopt-A-Cow Ag in the Classroom program. Sparked by the concerns of parents that their kids were being told at school not to eat meat, a group of local citizens joined together to form an Ag Education Council, with the main objective of bringing Ag topics back to the classroom. The Adopt-A-Cow program was organized by MSU Extension Agent Sheila Friedrich and the Chairman of the Sheridan County Stockmen’s Association. It was developed to teach students about the cattle industry and the importance of nutrient-dense beef in their diet. Fifty-three second and third graders participated in a morning-long program during which they adopted a cow and learned important aspects of its life such as tagging, branding, handling, sheltering, and the rumen and digestive system. They also learned about the biggest cheeseburger; the nutritive value and how all parts of a cheeseburger come from Sheridan County farms and ranches. The morning ended with the students being treated to a cheeseburger lunch, donated by members of the Sheridan County Stockman’s Association and prepared by one of the County Commissioners.

National Ag Week Bread Fair

It’s not unusual to see flour flying through the room, but it’s all part of the fun and learning during the annual Fourth Grade Bread Fair, a cooperative effort between MSU Extension and KATQ Radio. Each pair of students made whole wheat bread dough in a plastic bag, enough for each to go home with a loaf of bread ready to bake. It may have seemed to this year’s 39 students that this was an opportunity to get their hands in to something sticky and gooey, but what really happened is they are learned about wheat – from the field to the finished product. There was also a bit of a science lesson involved in that students experienced how yeast mixes with water and sugar to form carbon dioxide, a gas that makes bread rise. The reward for their labor was a loaf of bread they took home in a box with instructions on how it should be baked.

Ag Production in the Classroom

MSU Extension Agent Colleen Buck and two local producers put together a presentation that highlighted agriculture production in Sheridan County. The three presented to sixth and seventh grade students in the Plentywood School to give the students insight into what and how agricultural products are produced in the county they live in. The presentation was well received and students participated by asking questions and being active learners. The presentation went over some facts about Montana agriculture, start to finish on a livestock operation, and seeding to export of crops on farming operations.
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation Meets Montana History Murder Mystery

Modern day Crime Scene Investigators have the latest and best technology and forensic science available to investigate and solve crimes. But how does that compare to crime scene investigations in 1922? This year’s summer teacher workshop provided an opportunity for participants to explore, apply and compare forensic science of today to a Montana murder case of 1922, which could quite possibly be Montana’s own unsolved murder mystery. Each year, MSU Extension Agents in northeast Montana collaborate to provide a two-day workshop for teachers. Offered in two locations, 55 educators from five counties participated in the 2016 workshop. Teachers report the benefits of participating in the workshop as being: “no-cost, low-cost activities, lessons & curriculum” (80% of respondents), “availability of an undergraduate and graduate credit” (45%), “availability of Office of Public Instruction (OPI) renewal units” (65%) and “not having to travel out of the area to find a for-credit class” (75%). Sixty-five percent of participants reported they have used the curriculum, lessons and/or activities in their classroom and 90% indicated they intend to. One educator responded, “What a wonderful opportunity to gather as teachers, to learn, to visit, and to become better educators for our students! Thank you!!” Another commented “It was so much fun, and so engaging and interesting. I look forward to using some of the activities when I do a CSI section in my Spanish 1 Class.”

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