MSU Extension in Stillwater County
Providing Information & Education You Can Trust!
4-H, Agriculture and Family and Consumer Science

Welcome to Stillwater County

Stillwater County Extension is proud to be able to serve the people of Stillwater County. MSU Extension is a partnership of Stillwater County, Montana State University and the United States Department of Agriculture. The three-way partnership provides funding for educational resources dedicated to improving the quality of people’s lives by providing research-based knowledge to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of families, communities and agricultural enterprises.

The Stillwater County Family and Consumer Science Agent uses expertise in food and nutrition, housing, health, family issues, personal finances, and environmental health to provide innovative and targeted programs based on the needs of Montana families, individuals, businesses and communities.

The Agriculture Agent works with farmers, ranchers, small landowners and researchers through field demonstrations, workshops, and individual visits to help producers and landowners remain profitable.

Stillwater County 4-H strives to provide ample opportunities to the 245 enrolled 4-H members. Market animal, foods project and Cloverbuds had the highest enrollments.
Livestock Production

Agriculture Agent, Lee Schmelzer helped Stillwater County’s cattle, sheep, and horse producers with production and management questions. Producers were assisted with forage testing, ration balancing including water and trace mineral antagonist balancing. Additionally, 4-H members were assisted with their 4-H livestock rations.

Ration formulation and mineral balancing are extremely important in Stillwater County due to the high levels of antagonists that can block the uptake of required trace minerals necessary for healthy livestock.

When livestock consume forages such as small grains, sudan grass, sorghum, corn, and several common weed species containing elevated levels of nitrate, severe health problems can occur; including decreased weight gain, decreased milk yield, abortion, and death. New cover crop grazing methods increase this risk. Through the Nitrate Quik-Test and a new more accurate nitrate test, 1650 acres of winter wheat, barley, and oats were tested during the 2016 season.

Forage Crops

Producers received information and education on suitable grass species, alfalfa and grain variety selection, disease and pest management, and weed identification and control. Schmelzer provided educational material to eight producers on alfalfa establishment, which enabled them to plant the highest yielding disease-resistant varieties. He also assisted eight producers with crop disease problems, enabling them to treat the fields if economic thresholds were met.

Weed Ecology, Management & Identification

Schmelzer provided advice on weed management, identification, classification and integrated control methods in crops, range, gardens and yards. Field and office contact topics included pesticide recommendations, application timing recommendations, alternative pest control methods, and integrated pest management practices. Schmelzer identified and provided information on several species of poisonous plants.

Horticulture

Extension helps educate landowners about establishment, care, and management of their lawns, trees, and gardens; and provides assistance in the selection of windbreak trees and garden plants that will survive in Stillwater County. This education increases landowners’ awareness of plant species, insect species, and diseases, as well as their biology, control, and management, and gives them peace of mind and a chance to save economically or sentimentally valuable trees.

Impacts

15 producers used Extension's free, effective, accurate nitrate testing and have peace of mind to feed or sell their hay, while six producers were prevented from feeding high nitrate feed which could have resulted in abortion or death of cattle and sheep.

25 producers representing 1650 acres of hay saved a total of nearly $500 in testing and shipping.

All producers know what actions may be needed to protect his or her herd from nitrate poisoning.

By core sampling and analyzing rations, ranchers made more informed decisions and reduced costs when purchasing supplemental feed, using ranch-raised forages, making feeding decisions on cow nutritional needs, and improving cost and operation efficiency.

One producer testified that balancing rations saved him $35 per head or a total of $5000.

Community members are more aware of noxious weeds and the methods to manage or control them.

Gardeners have developed landscapes with adapted tree and plant species.

Master Gardeners gave 560 hours of volunteer service to their communities.

Landowners across Stillwater County increased implementation of water quality best management practices related to livestock production and animal agriculture.

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DEEP™: Diabetes Empowerment Education Program

The National Diabetes Education Program’s theme is: Managing Diabetes – It’s Not Easy, But It’s Worth It. This theme highlights the importance of managing glucose levels to prevent diabetes-related health problems such as heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, vision loss, and amputation. DEEP is an educational program which teaches self-management to people with diabetes and their families.

Initial results of the DEEP program shows significant improvement in two areas. HbA1c levels represents the average blood sugar a person has over a three month time period and is a good indicator of diagnosing pre-diabetes as well. Participants in the DEEP program saw their A1c levels drop from an average of 8.2 to 7%.

The second area of improvement relates to systolic blood pressure levels. Participants decreased their systolic blood pressure by 10 points which is outstanding, showing evidence of the effectiveness of the DEEP diabetes program.

MSU Extension Agent, Lisa Terry is now training other Extension agents and community partners throughout Montana to duplicate this program in their own county. To date, DEEP training was provided to 26 county or reservations by MSU Extension Agents or health care professionals reaching an estimated 5000 people with diabetes education.

Strong Hearts for Montana™

Strong Hearts, Healthy Communities

A new research study was conducted in Stillwater County with a program called Strong Hearts, Healthy Communities (SHHC). The number one cause of death in Stillwater County is heart disease. This program aims to reduce cardiovascular (CVD) morbidity and mortality, improve quality of life and reduce CVD-related health care burdens in underserved rural communities through a community-informed intervention. The SHHC program was a class that met twice a week for six months.

With this program, participants would:
- Get 15 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise twice a week
- Learn nutrition education based on dietary guidelines and Mediterranean diets as well as have healthy snack demos and tastings.
- Get 15 to 25 minutes of upper body, core, and lower body progressive strength training at least once a week
- Initiate projects to support community health to enhance sustainability of lifestyle changes.

Participants in this study were women 40 and older, physically inactive and overweight or obese. Behavioral aims of the program included increasing fruit and vegetable intake, increasing whole grains in the diet, increasing aerobic exercise and taking part in progressive strength training. It also aimed to decrease calories, desserts, processed foods, saturated fats, sodium and stress levels.

Preliminary results suggest a reduction in CVD risk as evidenced by weight loss and an increase in physical activity levels. There was also an increase in functional fitness in midlife and older women as evidenced by testing in strength and stamina. Blood pressure was also lowered.

Impacts

Statistically-significant weight loss averaging 5 pounds per participant.

Increase in muscle mass, bone density and strength.

Significant increase in physical activity levels averaging 30 minutes per day for at least 5 days per week.

Two-minute Step-test increased an average of 22 steps per participant.

Cups of fruit and vegetables consumed per day showed increase in nutrient-dense and fiber-dense foods and less consumption of processed and sugary foods.
What’s going on in 4-H in Stillwater County?

4-H is continually growing in Stillwater County. Efforts of the Extension staff in recruitment the past two 4-H years have resulted in an increase in membership. After large graduating senior classes decreased enrollment numbers, recruitment became necessary. The recruitment started out as an idea by our administrative assistant, Ashley House, to get enrollment numbers up. Her goal was to get the word out about all that 4-H has to offer.

Extension staff set up booths at the local Farmer’s Market and multiple school events in towns in our county. This led to a huge increase in 4-H interest and club membership. Potential members were contacted by Extension as well as existing club leaders. The excitement was overwhelming.

Plans are underway to meet the growing demand by hiring a 4-H Program Assistant. This will allow more recruiting and training efforts, giving members and leaders tools they need to organize and run a successful club and club meeting. More office help in the office will allow us to better meet the needs of our 4-H leaders and members, by providing additional club support. We are excited for the future.

What’s New?

We have a new enrollment software which allows members and leaders to enroll online. We also switched to a new Fair Entry software system to manage the 1134 entries in the fair each year, as well as manage a $153,000 livestock sale and the delivery of all animals. This was a learning process for everyone, however, we have heard great things about this change and are very glad to have made the switch. We are truly excited to see where our members, leaders and volunteers will propel 4-H in our county.

Impacts

Stillwater has the highest percentage per capita of youth ages 5-18 enrolled in 4-H in any Montana county.

4-H youth are more than twice as likely as other youth to contribute to their communities.

4-H youth are more likely than other youth to show the lowest signs of depression

4-H participation increases educational achievement, and motivation for further education.

4-H youth have a 41% lower risk for problem behavior compared to other OST (Out of School Time) activities.

4-H youth are less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol

Contact Us

When you visit the local MSU Extension office in Stillwater County, you may be surprised by two things:
1. We have resources to help you with nearly anything you would like more information about.
2. People from every walk of life and every stage in life either utilize the Extension services or attend Extension programming. We serve all people no matter who they are or what they do. Come and visit us today!

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