**Agriculture**

McCone County MSU Extension offers programming that addresses production issues, nutrition, and marketing for livestock producers. Programming is also offered for crop producers dealing with specialty crops, weed control, rental rates, and general crop production topics. Face-to-face programming is done through producer meetings and workshops, as well as one-on-one consultations in the office and/or at the farm or ranch.

A very effective means of communicating with the producers about a wide variety of issues is the weekly newspaper article, “Notes from Nelson.” The focus of this weekly column is current agricultural issues. The issues addressed often result in calls or visits to the Extension office to further discuss topics addressed.

McCone County MSU Extension agent also teams with several other Extension agents who present current issues and information via a weekly radio spot on a Miles City radio station.

Late winter and early spring brought a number of questions about current land rental rates. Efforts were made to assemble available resources to be used in determining fair rental rates for the area. Newspaper columns and radio programs were used to address area land rental rates.

A very popular service of MSU Extension continues to be in the area of weed, plant and insect identification.

Samples are brought in on a regular basis. Samples that cannot be identified immediately are submitted to the Schutter Diagnostic Lab. Although not as many as in previous years, a number of forage samples were also brought in for nitrate content analysis.

Livestock water quality continues to be a local concern. Educational efforts were put forth to help make livestock producers aware of water quality concerns. Extension personnel were also active assisting MSU researchers by involving local cooperators in the wheat sawfly parasitoid distribution and Orange Wheat Blossom Midge monitoring.

A major programming focus for the past year has again been in the area of All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) safety. ATV’s are widely used on most Montana farms and ranches. Farmers and ranchers, as well as their employees and family members, are involved in too many accidents involving ATV’s resulting in serious injury and deaths. Approximately 400 youth and adults were involved in ATV Safety-related events through the McCone County MSU Extension office. Programs included ATV Safety Rider Courses, school presentations, and farm safety camps. Office staff were also involved in editing and reviewing script and film from the previous year’s grant funded online ATV Safety project. A special request was received from the University of Wyoming Extension for permission to use printed and web-based material previously developed by McCone County staff.

Other specific programming efforts included addressing Stocking Rates, Rangeland Noxious Weeds, Alfalfa management and cover crops.
McConne County has four 4-H clubs with 57 members and 15 leaders. 4-H continues to offer opportunities through a number of events and activities throughout the year.

Enhanced life skills are gained through club meetings, project work, judging events, summer camp, mini-congress, market quality assurance, Rec Lab, club trips and outings, special interest group meetings, shooting sports events, trainings and educational workshops, County Fair, fundraising events, a livestock jackpot show and the achievement program and banquet.

Involvement in 4-H allows for hands-on experience through project work. That hands-on experience forms the basis for post-secondary institution selection and, ultimately, career choice and development.

The 4-H Cloverbud enrollments continue to rise with increased interest and participation. The 2015-2016 year we had seven Cloverbuds. We have added many new options to work on throughout the year and to bring to fair. 4-H Program Assistant promotes 4-H and gives hands-on efforts working with each member to introduce them to what 4-H is about as well as working diligently to meet the needs of each member within their project.

Nikki Heide, Kama Urton and Candy Milroy have been a great asset to our Horse program. During the winter months they meet to work on books and this year they hosted a Horse Clinic. During the summer months they meet at least once a month to work on horse and rider assessments, showmanship, and general riding skills, maneuvers and reading and memorizing riding patterns for fair.

This year they will introduce a vet to discuss vaccines, worming problems and basic first aid. They will also host a Horse Clinic again.

McConne County has four active clubs. Ambitious Ants, Green & White, and Washington Warriors are our oldest clubs and the Redwater Wranglers is a fairly new club.

We have a few countywide fundraisers throughout the year including fruit sales in the spring and Greytak calendars in the fall.
Day-to-day office contacts in the area of Family and Consumer Sciences most often involve basic food safety, home canning, estate planning, home gardening, plant care and home weatherization. Many of the daily contacts address economic concerns. With today’s economy, making the dollar go further will be as important as ever in most households.

McCone County has four Family and Consumer Science Clubs with a total 37 members. Those members are active in a number of community functions such as: fundraisers, community service, nursing home resident functions, college scholarship, and providing Bingo, prizes and premium money at the County Fair.

Our local Homemakers groups include the Friendship, Prairie Elk, Brockway and the Triangle Club. Each club is active within the community and donate time and services as well as money to several charities.

In September the McCone County MSU Extension hosted a Canning 101 class with 16 participants. It was held at the Circle High School and Shiela Friedrich, the Sheridan County MSU Extension Agent shared the most up-to-date information about safely canning and freezing for the seasoned pro or the beginner. The participants were encouraged to bring their pressure canner lid for Ken Nelson to test the dial gauge.

The workshop focused on the basics of home canning and preservation and was appropriate for people with all levels of experience.

The emphasis was on the science behind preservation, so everyone who canned or froze fresh fruits and vegetables would understand why certain procedures must be followed precisely to ensure a high-quality, safe product that they and their family could enjoy.

The class addressed:

* Basic food safety principles

* How to use a water bath canner and a pressure canner

* Canning tomatoes, pickling, and making jams and jellies,

* Freezing fruits and vegetables

* Accessing resources from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, MSU Extension, and other research-based food preservation information.

The class broke into 4 groups and half of the class made salsa and the other half made apple pie filling. Each group worked together and made wholesome canned produce.
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