

Results from a seed grant to support an Extension booth for Montana State University at the Bozeman Farmer's market (\$500)

Dr. Mary Burrows, Extension Plant Pathology Specialist, Montana State University



A booth to provide information about MSU Extension activities to the urban community was set up each Saturday at the Bozeman Farmers market (Fairgrounds, Bozeman, MT) from 23 June to 25 August, 2007. As seen in the pictures above, we set up a table with an Extension Banner, distributed MontGuides and fact sheets from Montana State University, had displays to draw people in to ask questions about each topic, and answered questions from the community. A press release was sent out each week and used in the local paper to popularize this activity. An example is attached below.

The booth was staffed by either Mary Burrows or Nina Zidack from the Schutter Diagnostic Clinic to accept diseased plant samples, insects and weeds for identification as well as a special guest (see table below). A new topic was presented by the guest each week. We recorded the number of people asking questions during each week. The lowest week (21 July) was the weekend of the county fair, and farmer's market attendance was low overall. Attendance also started dropping towards the end of the market season, and I decided to stop setting up the booth on labor day (market ended 16 Sept). The highest attended week was when Jack Riesselman and Hayden Ferguson from Montana Ag Live! attended. The first guest that weekend said that 'the only reason' she had come to the farmer's market that day was to meet her favorite television personalities.

Date	Guest & Topic	Questions
06/23/07	Will Lanier, Insects	50
06/30/07	Clain Jones, Soil Fertility	51
07/07/07	Dave Baumbauer, Bees Bill Hoch, Trees and Shrubs for the Home	61
07/14/07	Landscape	59
07/21/07	Jack Riesselman, Plant Disease Jack Riesselman and Hayden Ferguson, Montana	32
07/28/07	Ag Live	104
08/04/07	Will Lanier, Insects Tracy Dougher, Native grasses for the home	95
08/11/07	landscape	89
08/18/07	Fabian Menalled, Weeds	54
08/25/07	Fabian Menalled, Weeds	33

Total = 628

Some of the most common questions asked this year were about cottony ash psyllids, how to control ants, diagnosing and control of fire blight in apples, spruce budworm control, and weed identification and control. The audience was diverse, from homeowners who wanted to control weeds on their property without using herbicides to those who wanted to know what insecticide to drench their harmless ants with. Another common question was: ‘What is Extension?’

Some of the most popular MontGuides people picked up were horticultural, including how to grow tomatoes, raspberries, and garlic and spruce trees. Richardson ground squirrel control was a concern, and Carolyn Nistler provided a nice fact sheet for that. Clain Jones prepared a list of soil testing agencies which was very popular. The most common weed concern was how to control knapweed, and we distributed a number of the color booklets on knapweed identification and control.

By far the most popular display was the insects. This was particularly popular among the children, who thought the maggots and spiders were the coolest. We distributed a large number of MontGuides on spider identification.

I used this booth as an example of a high-profile, low-input extension activity at the American Phytopathological Society meetings in San Diego, CA (M. E. Burrows, Lanier, W. 2007. Where the rubber meets the road: Timely information delivery to farmers with and without the internet. *Phytopathology* 97:S15). I also talked about it at the Great Plains Diagnostic Network meeting in Manhattan, KS, Oct 2-4, 2007.

Positive aspects of this activity:

- Highly visible.
- Reached an audience that might otherwise not be aware of Extension activities.
- Provided a friendly and convenient location to get the public’s questions answered, especially plant disease and insect diagnoses.
- Increased public awareness of the Schutter Diagnostic Clinic for their plant disease, insect, and plant identification needs.
- This was a good opportunity for specialists to interact and learn more about each other’s programs.
- The questions helped us to identify and prioritize needs for publications and press releases.
- The farmer’s market coordinators liked the booth because it drew people to the farmer’s market who otherwise may not have come.
- Each special guest enjoyed their time and expressed a willingness to do it again next year.

Negative aspects of this activity:

- Setting up and manning the booth each week was tiring, but I perceived it as a very worthwhile activity.

Changes for next year:

- A greater diversity of guests, including community development, food stamp and farmer's market program, nutrition, and food safety.
- I will set up the booth each week so it looks consistent and reduces the hassle of transferring the materials needed, but get more diagnostic clinic representatives such as interested graduate students to sit at the booth from 9-12.
- Some bigger extension displays would be nice – suggestions would be welcome! We did get a nice banner for the back of the booth in the last couple of weeks, but a few people still had to ask where we were at the farmer's market information booth. I think our booth location was perfect and hopefully we can get the same spot next year.

Funding for next year:

I would appreciate funding to purchase a card table and chairs (I used my own this year), as well as a collapsible fact sheet rack – then we could use more of the table space for displays. I did purchase an extension 'latte mug' for each guest, as well.

Budget: Table and chairs: \$100

Latte mugs (\$3.95 each, one case of 24 mugs) = \$94.80

Fact sheet rack: ~\$200 (such as

<http://tradeshows.com/StoreModules/ProductDetails.aspx?ProductID=300358&CID=13&SCID=0>: collapsible, fact sheets won't blow away – suggestions welcome)

I would like to extend my thanks to Extension publications, the staff was very helpful this year – Rick Jackson sent over a box of pens for distribution and Sara Deutscher and Millie Veltkamp were very helpful in designing and ordering the banners I wanted. MontGuides always came very quickly through campus mail.

Future directions:

I plan to prepare a publication about my experience for the Journal of Extension or a similar journal. I have polled diagnosticians and extension specialists across the United States about their awareness of similar activities. I have not found an example of using a booth at the farmer's market to promote Extension *per se*. Many states do have Master Gardener's who have a booth to answer gardening questions at farmer's markets.

Conclusions:

Setting up a booth to promote MSU Extension programs was a relatively inexpensive and very high-profile activity. Six hundred and twenty eight questions were asked by the public, and uncounted MontGuides and fact sheets were distributed. Additionally, the public brought disease, insect, and plant samples for identification. It is difficult to measure the full impact of this activity in the community, but overall I think it provides many benefits to the public, to the specialists, and to the MSU Extension Service.

A press release for the Extension booth, prepared by Carol Flaherty:

Plant or yard questions? Extension booth at Farmer's Market has experts

August 08, 2007

Montana State University Extension's booth at Saturday's Farmers' Market at the Gallatin County Fairgrounds will feature a horticulturist talking about using native grasses in home landscapes, and a plant pathologist.

The specialists will answer questions and provide Extension fact sheets on related topics. Extension Plant Pathologist Mary Burrows said people can bring in plant samples for diagnosis or identification.

For Saturday Aug. 11, the booth will feature Tracy Dougher, an MSU horticulturist, and Burrows.

Burrows can also be contacted at MSU's Schutter Diagnostics Lab, (406) 994-5150 or mburrows@montana.edu.

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