

Empowering Yellowstone County Citizens

Extension Programs Enrich Education

County Fair Culminates 4-H Year

Ask anyone who is even vaguely aware of the 4-H program about what 4-H is, and most people will talk about the county fair. While participating in the county fair is often part of a 4-H member's experience, 4-H is much more than kids and animals competing for ribbons. 4-H is a positive youth development program whose purpose is to engage youth in activities that build skills and competencies in a supportive and empowering environment.

Through research studies that examined 4-H youth's involvement in fair and project work, responsibility and cooperation were rated high across all areas and showed the most impact. Because of their 4-H experience, 83% of Yellowstone County 4-H teens surveyed feel it is important to complete tasks to which they have committed themselves. 100% of those teens surveyed like to work with others to help them reach their goals. These skills are particularly valuable in today's workforce, where high value is placed on employees who are responsible and work well with others.

County fairs offer youth the ability to build skills and have fun, but they are also a wonderful setting for the development of social connectedness – with other youth,

parents, 4-H leaders, auction buyers and community members.

Although sometimes criticized, competition lends support for developing sportsmanship and time management, it is not just about who wins. Life at fair develops skills such as helping others, communication and independence. Herdsmanship supports the development of teamwork and organization; and market animal participation supports the development of decision-making skills.



Worden Riverdale 4-H Club's Horse members with their trophies and ribbons won at the 2010 MontanaFair.

Food Safety Certification for Women in the Passages Program

Job training for those incarcerated in the Montana Correctional System is important to prepare the inmate for gainful employment as they transition back into society. Passages, a part of Alternatives Inc., houses women who are connected with the Women's Prison in Billings. A Culinary Arts Program was started at Passages to provide food service training and employment support for offenders with special referral. These women offenders are within 24 months of release eligibility. They receive classroom instruction, in-house food experience, work release in the community, and job placement assistance.

As part of the Culinary Program, the women have completed the ServSafe course from the Educational

Foundation of the National Restaurant Foundation. Bernice Mason, MSU Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent and a certified ServSafe instructor, teaches the eight hour workshop for the women and administers the exam. The ServSafe workshop usually has a registration fee of \$85 when offered to students, but with the use of donated instruction manuals for the participants, the only cost to the Passages Program was the \$30 fee for the certification exam taken by the women at the completion of the class.

Two groups of women have completed the training. All fourteen participants passed the difficult exam and have received the ServSafe Food Safety Certification which is recognized all over the United States. This certification is valuable as more food service establishments are requiring a recognized food safety certification for all managers and chefs. By earning the certification, the women have become qualified to obtain employment. Four out of seven of the

women in the first group have now been released from the correctional facility. Of those four, two are now gainfully employed and supporting themselves in the food service industry.

Invaders Attack Yellowstone County

Mountain Pine Beetles invaded Yellowstone County in 2009 and 2010. As the infestation of Mountain Pine Beetles moved eastward from western Montana it was certain they would move into Billings and surrounding areas. Preparation and education of the public was foremost in trying to minimize the death toll of trees in both agricultural and urban areas.

Distinguishable timber damage resulting from the Mountain Pine Beetle. (Not actual size)



To agricultural producers, preventing the loss of pine trees was important from both a financial viewpoint and quality of life. Agricultural producers value the trees for the timber and also for an aesthetic standpoint to maintain the value of their property. Preservation of the trees is also important for wildlife habitat, windbreaks, and recreational uses. Urban citizens value tree preservation to enhance their property and the quality of their surroundings.

Extension played a role in correcting misinformation and rumors regarding control methods for the Mountain Pine Beetle. Methodology of beetle prevention education came from several fronts. The combined efforts of Yellowstone County Horticultural Assistant Amy Grandpre and MSU Agricultural Extension Agent Steve Lackman provided television, radio, newspaper articles, MSU specialist seminars, on-site assessments, telephone visits, online information, literature handouts, and direct client contact to help prepare the populus for the invasion before them.

During the months of April, May and June, Extension fielded between 7-9 calls/walk-in visits each day. Through the conduit Extension provided, several hundred desired trees were left intact and their value preserved for the citizens of Yellowstone County.

Buy, Eat, Live Better

Four hundred ninety-one homemakers attended classes presented by the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Classes were held in many locations around Yellowstone County. Participants learned to stretch their food dollars and donated food items, to plan and prepare meals based on myPyramid (USDA food guidelines), and to make healthy food choices.

Clients enthusiastically returned each week for the information, recipes and friendship. Participants eagerly shared ideas and encouraged each other in preparing healthy meals and snacks for their families. As a result of homemakers taking the classes, 1,515 people were impacted by the information distributed. There are 68 families continuing in the classes held through December 2010.

EFNEP continues to partner with the Montana Beef Council, the Yellowstone County Cattlewomen and the Billings Heights Wal-Mart to provide a roast, vegetables, and a slow cooker to all program graduates. Homemakers appreciated the ideas, efforts and supplies provided so they could prepare meals for their families using less expensive cuts of meat and more efficient use of their time.

Of those graduating from EFNEP, over 50% increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while reducing the number of ounces of protein foods to the recommended six ounces per day.

Kids Learn to Make Healthy Choices

Yellowstone County Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) began October 1, 2009, when a SNAP-Ed educator began taking the program into limited resource, or Title 1 schools. First and third grade classrooms were targeted and received a series of six lessons over a period of six weeks. The lessons reached 327 youth in 16 classrooms.

First graders enjoyed a story about fruits or vegetables each week and had a snack that went with foods highlighted

in the book. They also enjoyed learning about different kinds of activities which could help them achieve 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Third graders learned about myPyramid (USDA food guidelines) when reading labels, eating foods from the five food groups, and identifying how physical activity fit into their lives.

Throughout the lessons, newsletters were sent home with the student to be shared with family. The weekly newsletter told the parents what had been studied that day, included a recipe to prepare at home, and offered ideas on ways to be physically active as a family. At the end of the sixth lesson each student received a certificate of participation and a grade appropriate cookbook.

Data calculated from pre/post testing showed that of the students that completed the program, 5% began eating a daily breakfast, 11% chose healthier snacks, and those eating whole grains increased by 22%. Teachers also reported more discussion about foods among students when choices were presented in the cafeteria and discussed in the classroom.

Facelift for County Demonstration Garden

The County Demonstration Garden, started in 2003, is located on the midway at the Yellowstone County Fairgrounds. Each year this garden is planted and maintained by the County Horticulture Assistant, Agricultural Agent, and the Master Gardeners to demonstrate the Square Foot Gardening technique as well as a few of the local agricultural crops. The Square Foot Gardening technique maximizes production from even the smallest of gardens, and is extremely valuable knowledge to city and apartment dwellers who have limited or container gardening areas.

The garden educates visitors about what grows well in our climate, including produce and floral, garden layout ideas, cultivating methods, weed and insect control. Additionally, the more commonly planted agricultural crops such as sugar beets, alfalfa, and corn are also grown.

The goal of the garden is to attract as many fairgoers as possible and the location is perfect. Visibility is crucial for such a venture, and for many years the garden had been bordered by fencing which greatly limited visibility. Another local garden provided the fencing idea we needed

Former Master Gardener Demonstration Garden on the MetraPark grounds.



Construction of the new Demonstration Garden fence. Photo: Steve Lackman, Extension Ag Agent, Larry Watson, and Liz Riley, Extension Summer Intern.



The Demonstration Garden's improved look. (August 2010)

and fence construction began. The change was immediate and most dramatic with the garden clearly visible from all angles, inviting people to enter.

Fair provides a workable alternative setting to demonstrate how gardening can be affordable and efficient. An information booth, staffed by Master Gardener volunteers, showed a square foot gardening video and distributed Extension MontGuide bulletins which contain research based topic specific information. This year a record breaking number (over 232,000) of fairgoers had the opportunity to learn how to plant a workable garden without needing lots of space and learn how to save money by growing their own produce.

4-H and the Military: Partnering on the Home Front

Montana has over 6,500 military youth. When military parents deploy, their children have unique needs for special support. To meet these needs, the Operation Military Kids (OMK) program in Yellowstone county relies on strong community partnerships and 4-H Extension connections. Together we provide a program that is committed to delivering educational, recreational, and social events for youth of military families. The OMK grant provided funds to hire a program manager.

4-H's mission mandates programs in the areas of Citizenship, Healthy Living and Science, Engineering, Technology (SET) help ensure our young people are prepared for the challenges of living in the 21st Century. Two hundred forty-five military youth have been impacted this year alone in Yellowstone County and Eastern Montana by being involved in the following workshops and events offered through the OMK partnership:

- **S.E.T.** - Robotics, Aerospace, Wind Energy, G.P.S. and Bio Fuel – Engage children in research, engineering, problem solving, and teambuilding.
- **Healthy Living** –Two workshops taught youth how to build life skills which led to healthy lifestyle choices, while preparing nutritious meals and focusing on fun activities from the 4-H Health Rocks curriculum.
- **Citizenship** – By spending time in open court and visiting a youth detention center, this educational seminar helped kids become aware of the laws and consequences for their actions.



Melody Harris, 4-H Military Club Program Manager, presents Hero Packs to military youth.

Through OMK, Hero Packs serve as an expression of support and a “Thank You” to the military children for their sacrifices. With generous donations from local 4-H clubs and hand written letters from youth at the Boys & Girls Club, Yellowstone County delivered items for assembling Hero Packs at State 4-H Congress. One school counselor made the comment, “Hero Packs are such a great gesture and they will help the boys feel extra special during a hard time of transition.” In 2009-2010, over 300 Hero Packs were presented to military youth.

Because of these 4-H/Military partnerships, our service members are better prepared to focus on the mission at hand, confident their children and families are in safe and nurturing environments. These partnerships model the best of the Land Grant mission –reaching out to meet the needs of citizens wherever they are.

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