



# MSU Extension Education & Research Improving the Quality of Life

## In Flathead County

*Flathead County has been **without** a 4-H agent since May, **with** a newly hired agent taking over early in 2005. Despite this, the 4-H program has maintained its membership and activities. A newly funded **agricultural** agent position was filled in July, 2004, so those programs are just beginning to be effective.*

### 4-H Updates

The 47<sup>th</sup> annual 4-H Leaders' Banquet was a success thanks to the efforts of the Teen Council. This event was dedicated to honoring and expressing appreciation to volunteer adult leaders. This annual program serves dinner and a quality program of entertainment to recognize 85 leaders that are instrumental in encouraging the youth to strive for achievement. Over 30 teens are recruited by the Teen Council to assist in decorating, serving, and performing entertainment at this fun-filled function.

4-H teenage participants attended the Teen Retreat held at the Darrel Fenner 4-H Camp in Ferndale. During this activity, 60 youth underwent extensive youth development training.

Four 4-H delegates in Flathead County were selected to attend the state recreational laboratory in Choteau. The lab was designed to help youth learn about operating and organizing recreational activities at the county club level.

From January through May, several educational programs were implemented to assist youth in their market livestock projects. Youth were instructed in the various aspects of caring for swine, sheep, and beef. 4-H participants were able to learn important skills necessary to successfully show their market animal at the Northwest Montana State Fair. Youth also gained valuable life skills by dedicating themselves to the demanding requirements of following through with a market animal project.

One of the highlights of the annual 4-H program was the participation by Flathead youth in the state 4-H congress in Bozeman. Flathead County sent 12 youth to the Montana State University campus where they competed for four days in several contests including speech and livestock judging. These competitions helped Flathead youth to develop public speaking and reasoning skills that will help them to be the decision makers of the future.

Hundreds of county youth enrolled in the highly competitive 4-H Market Livestock and Carcass evaluation projects. Youth attended seminars and workshops on selection, feeding, housing, and health requirements for various classes of livestock. Instruction on record keeping, fitting and showing were also provided by MSU extension specialists, agents, local veterinarians and producers. The strengths of these educational programs are fully realized in the highly competitive classes at the Northwest Montana fair, the top rated Carcass Evaluation Contest, and the 4-H/FFA Market Sale. Carcass quality is partly determined by the use of professional ultrasound images on all three species. A total of 213 animals sold at the Market Sale, 132 hogs, 35 steers, and 46 lambs for a gross of \$252,755.00.

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Flathead County Extension Office is located adjacent to the Courthouse in Kalispell Phone: 406-758-5553



**An educational resource 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.**

Over 200 youth, parents, and sale buyers viewed some of the top carcasses and reviewed carcass data from all three species at the annual Carcass Evaluation follow-up seminar. MSU certified evaluators and USDA graders evaluated carcasses from this year's sale and presented information on how the carcasses were evaluated.

The Leaders College hosted several 4-H leaders from the surrounding region at the Darrel Fenner 4-H Camp in Ferndale. During the retreat, state 4-H specialists and area MSU extension agents presented programs in personal communication, conflict management, and the latest in 4-H program updates to numerous volunteers. The weekend retreat also provided an opportunity for feedback from 4-H program participants to MSU staff regarding program needs, direction, and concerns.

This year at the state 4-H horse show in Dillon, five area youth attended and competed in various riding events. Participants were able to combine their knowledge and experience provided from their activity in the 4-H Horse project to channel their efforts to develop new skills and have fun.

For the past 12 years, the MSU Extension Program in Flathead County has been focused on the 4-H Youth Development only. This changed however in July with the appointment of a new extension agent to serve the agricultural clientele of Flathead County. Two Extension agents will be serving the County soon.

## **Ag Updates**

Since July, over 100 different clients have been served by the new agriculture Extension agent. Issues ranging from spider identification/management to economic concerns such as value-added agriculture and alternative marketing strategies of agricultural goods have been dealt with on an individual basis.

Depending on the issue, clients have also received consultations and service at their home. Usually it takes two to three weeks to get a particular issue diagnosed and to receive a qualified recommendation.

Most of the client interaction has originated from homeowners of no more than 10 acres. However, efforts are being made to gain attention from the production agriculture clientele.

Recently, a meeting was hosted by Flathead County Extension and the Montana Agriculture Innovation Center to help educate producers of other markets for their agricultural goods. Several producers attended and have since expressed interest in learning more about natural and organic livestock production.

Several programs are currently being developed for the coming year that will focus on the needs of horticulturalists, horse owners, and small landowners. These programs include the Master Gardener Program, Equine Management, and Small Acreage Landowner Stewardship.

The Master Gardener Program is slated to begin January 31, 2005, and continue once a week for eight weeks. Participants will receive training in a variety of areas ranging from understanding soil structure to fruit tree and maintenance.

While developing these programs, efforts are being made to not only bring in Extension expertise from MSU, but to also make use of expertise available from local state and federal agencies.