



MSU Extension Education & Research Improving the Quality of Life

In Judith Basin County

Crops Education

Cropping Seminars – crop producers were educated in following areas (cooperated with Fergus County on some of these efforts):

- *Weed Seedling Identification* – before normal growing season, the Ag agent brought in about 30 growing weed samples from MSU Weed Lab in the 2-leaf stage for producers to practice ID in March. About 50 producers participated.
- *Insect Pest Control Training* – It was felt grasshoppers would be a major pest threat, due to years of drought. MSU specialist Sue Blodgett came to assist in workshop in early May that taught hopper ID, chemical control methods, insect counting with about 40 participants.
- *Economics of No-Till Farming* – a great share of farming is now done with no-till or reduced-till management, but does it pay? MSU specialists Duane Griffith and Grant Jackson assisted in discussing methods and economics of no till/reduced till farming with about 20 participants.
- *GPS Training* – GPS technology can be applied by today's farmer to help in many ordinary tasks such as weed mapping, fertilizer application, salt block location, etc. MSU resource, Van Shelhamer, followed by individual assistance from the Extension Ag agent, conducted a two-day training session for 8 participants.

Livestock Education

More than 50% of Judith Basin County is in rangeland and forage production. Livestock-related income is the major ag income source in our county. Following are some of the educational opportunities Extension provided to producers, some of which are ongoing:

- *Annual Fall Range Tour* – producers enjoy the opportunity to get out together on the ground, see new things and be presented with educational opportunities. For second year, the ag agent organized a day tour to see weed control success, look at a local ranch facility, then gather for supper and educational presentations on embryo transfer technology and USFS grazing regulations. MSU specialist John Paterson assisted for about 45 participants.
- *Ag Issues Update* – joined with other local county agencies to provide breakfast and special speakers for 3-hour update on wolf recovery impacts, national animal ID, FSA programs, economics of haying/grazing CRP, tax implications of herd dispersal for about 45 participants.
- *Clean Water Education* – federal clean water regulations affect many small and medium sized livestock producers located on streams. MSU specialist Gene Surber came to assist in leading a ranch tour, and discussed the application of federal rules how producers can comply. There were 15 participants.

Judith Basin County Extension Office is located at the Courthouse in Stanford

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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.

- **Hayground Fertilizer Plots** – forage producers often ponder the economics of paying to fertilize hayground. Does the increased production pay off? We have laid out 5-acre test plots on hayground to test application rates and production increases. Last spring was our first application; we clipped and tested yield in July. We did fall application of fertilizer recently, and will continue this test for the next several years. I presented this year's results to local producers in an Alfalfa Management Workshop and in the newspaper.

Added-Value Opportunities

Providing producers with the opportunity to add just one processing step to the raw commodities they produce could provide a significant boost in income, as well as some local job opportunities. Currently, all raw commodities produced are shipped out, waiting for someone else to process them.

- **Judith Basin Baking & Research Club** – provided the initial encouragement, organization and support for a group of interested individuals to look at the raw commodities produced in Judith Basin County, and what potential products could be made with them locally. Several grants have been received with which to purchase grain grinders and commercial mixing equipment. About 8 individuals now meet every other month, to grind locally-grown traditional and alternative grain into flour, and the group experiments with different recipes. Recently MSU nutritionist Mary Stein talked to the group about nutrition, market trends, labeling laws, etc.
- **Agriculture Innovation Council** – going hand in hand with the Baking Club, the Ag agent organized this group of producers to meet frequently and consider the agronomic characteristics of raising traditional and alternative crops, market opportunities for these crops, feasibility of producer cooperatives, feasibility of local processing plant, etc. About 6 producers actively participate, two of whom are principle farmers in the county. The Ag agent provides this group with educational information, tours of other facilities in Montana, guest speakers, etc.

Community Development

Like many eastern Montana counties, Judith Basin County is slowly losing population and local businesses. One of our first efforts must be to keep local businesses now in place, with a secondary focus on new businesses.

- **Local Shopping Preferences Survey** – our small businesses are mostly run by the owners themselves. Their time is limited, and doing even basic market research is difficult for them. Because of the lack of basic research, most of them don't really have a clear idea about what customers like or dislike about their business, or what niche there might be to expand in. With the help of MSU specialist Dave Sharpe, the agent met with business owners, designed a basic market research questionnaire, and sent it out to 50% of the households in the county in late 2003. A great response was received from consumers, and the process of going back to our businesses with the results to help them see how they could improve their business is ongoing.
- **Mosquito traps** – because of the local concern over the West Nile Virus, the agent cooperated with MSU researcher Greg Johnson to put up and monitor mosquito traps in our county. This was intended to gather information for our local community leaders to help address concerns over the virus.