



# MSU Extension Education & Research Improving the Quality of Life

## In Ravalli County

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### **Living On the Land**

A dynamic workshop for new or small acreage landowners in the Bitter Root Valley was offered in May and June 2004 with 25 landowners attending. The six-session course was designed to give participants the tools to inventory their property and their facilities so they could develop goals for their acreage. In addition, the class emphasized soils, vegetation, water and keeping animals. The Ravalli Extension Ag Agent partnered with Roxa French of the Bitter Root Water Forum to organize and provide this course opportunity.

### **Ravalli County Right to Farm and Ranch Board**

The Board successfully obtained a grant through Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) for a travel-study tour of southern Montana counties to see and analyze, first hand, the concepts and techniques being used for preserving and protecting farms and ranches that are striving to operate profitably while dealing with impacts of development and urbanization in their immediate area. The travel-study group, mainly Right to Farm and Ranch Board members, Bitter Root Stock Growers members, several Extension agents, a Missoula County Commissioner and two law school students participated. Featured host presenters included Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, Park County Commissioners, Park County Extension Agent, Park County Planner, Corporation for the Northern Rockies, Park County Environmental Council, the Gallatin County Open Lands Board, Open Lands Coordinator, Gallatin County planners, Gallatin County Extension agent, the new Gallatin County Commissioner, Joe Skinner, and the Sonoran Institute.

The first action for the Ravalli group will be to raise funds for a study of Bitter Root Valley Agriculture and the culture of farming and ranching in the area. Expected future activities will include providing awareness for, not only farm and ranch families, but also the entire community on preserving farms and ranches, estate planning and the tools for farmland protection, retention of working ranches and assisting community leadership to become knowledgeable on the costs and benefits of maintaining a viable agriculture.

### **Bitter Root Water Forum**

Mission-Obtain knowledge about water quality and quantity in the Bitter Root River Basin, explore impacts of rapid growth, seek to implement solutions through collaboration or consensus and maintain or improve the quality of life.

Several activities were done in 2004 to start work, including:

Formed a Board of Directors and contracted with River Network to train directors while developing a strategic plan

Received non-profit status from the IRS

Began a treasury and elected a treasurer

Saw the initial coordinator resign

Started the process of hiring an executive director

Hired a grant/project person to track projects which are increasing in number and size

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Ravalli County Extension Office is located at the Courthouse in Hamilton

Phone: 406-375-6245



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.

### **Weed Team initiated**

A new approach has come together to develop plans for unique and accelerated introduction of biological weed control using insects and education in combination landowners and Bitter Root Valley schools.

Modeled after the Whitehall school project, the effort involves:

- finding funding, to assist school science teachers and their students to initiate insectaries
- teaching entomology and insect rearing
- learn how invasive plants have become a near crisis in this country
- helping students and teachers understand which insects are affective on which species of weeds
- how these insects are imported from native lands of the invasive plant species where natural predators and parasites keep the plants in balance with other vegetation.

Two schools in the county will begin the program raising insects and their host weeds with the goal of having students release insects in the community to impact and destroy more spotted knapweed, leafy spurge and dalmatian or common toadflax. Some classes also plan to experiment with various techniques of raising and planting native or desirable grasses to fill the void of absent weeds where native grasses or forbs have been lost.

### **4-H Youth Activities**

During the 2003/2004 4-H year, there were 506 4-H members and leaders involved in 1724 projects, 119 of the 4-ers live on farms while 274 live in country and 113 live in towns. There were 1724 projects taken: 806 in the animals and plant category; while 170 projects focused on environmental education and earth science; 165 on citizenship, communications, and leadership; 104 in healthy lifestyles; 95 in science and technology and 79 in consumer and family science. Three hundred five unclassified were self-directed projects in a variety of subjects.

So what does this mean? Different professionals would have different opinion but on the surface it looks as though 4-H members are very interested in agriculture, citizenship, health and good living. They are well on their way to becoming good citizens. All these numbers are very interesting but they do not tell the whole story of 4-H in Ravalli County. 4-H has changed in the past two years. When the county officials cut the Extension support staff position, 4-H leaders and parents did not want the loss to affect the 4-H program. Leaders and parents have stepped in to do the publishing of the 4-H newsletter; and they are completely responsible for keeping the 4-H financial records. Many have taken the 4-H Leader College Course and can now teach to other leaders. Volunteers, at the present, do much of the work previously done by support staff.

### **Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program**

Ravalli County was selected to pilot a Food Stamp Educational Program in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms throughout the county schools. Janel Myers, a local woman, was hired be a nutritional assistant. She was trained to teach a nutrition curriculum developed at MSU. This curriculum was offered to local schools. The schools that were interested in incorporating this curriculum in their classrooms invited her to teach in their schools. Janel reached over 400 youth with the nutrition program. After having Janel in their classrooms, many teachers wrote to share how student's behavior changed around their hand washing and eating habits during the school lunch periods. Ravalli County Extension is pleased to offer this program for another year.

### **4-H Citizenship Washington Focus**

Kathy Hammer and her husband Bob were selected to chaperone the 4-H Citizenship Washington Focus trip. 4-H members from across Montana attended week long seminar at the National 4-H Youth Conference Center, near Washington, C.D. The 4-Hers got a look behind the scenes in our nation's capital, and a chance to meet senators and representatives. They heard motivational speakers and attended workshops and assemblies that increased individual commitments to citizen involvement and building lifetime skills for success.