



# MSU Extension Education & Research Improving the Quality of Life

## In Chouteau County

### Agriculture

With 1.3M acres involved in small grain production, primarily wheat and barley, Chouteau County comprises the largest number of acres of these crops grown in Montana. Total cash receipts for all agricultural products approach \$80M. In dealing with a biological system, machinery, farm ownership, farm size, residue management, soil moisture management, pest management, grain storage, variety selection, fertilizer and pesticide application and drought are but a few of the elements which can alter this living system. Decision making by producers occurs on a daily basis during the production cycle and they seek Extension assistance where applicable. With low commodity prices, producers are seeking sustainability by looking to Extension for information on alternate crops, cropping systems and marketing information. Farm stress has become a way of life with families splitting and one or more members seeking off-farm employment.

A few of the annual highlights of the Extension agriculture program include:

- Annual cropping seminar with four topics of major interest presented in a day-long program
- Stored soil moisture survey, conducted at 20 sites and sent to 795 producers via a newsletter which also includes historical (14 years) of survey data
- Three crop variety trials are conducted in Chouteau County by the Northern, Western Triangle and Central Agricultural Centers. Field days are hosted at each site where producers can see varieties growing side-by-side. Results are released in a winter newsletter
- Pheromone trap, at three locations, for the army and pale western cutworm adults. Survey the county in the spring for documentation of larval infestations
- Survey for the Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage program and certify fields free of certain weed species
- Offer pesticide recertification workshops for 341 private (farm) pesticide applicators to allow them obtain some of the required six hours of training on a variety of pesticide related topics
- Consult one-on-one with growers on an as needed basis

### 4-H and Youth

Youth at Risk is seen as a national concern. One way to impact youth is through special education and enrichment programs such as 4-H. Opportunities such as junior leadership, citizenship and public speaking help youth to develop and test their potential. Project work, demonstration and contests compel youth to turn their energies to constructive behavior.

Chouteau County 4-H membership includes 139 members assisted by 53 volunteer leaders, who are essential to the program. These members are involved in a total of 75 traditional 4-H projects. The animal projects, particularly those involving market animals and horses, continue to increase in popularity. Small animal projects, such as dog, cat, rabbit and poultry offer increased opportunity for urban participation and are increasing in enrollment.

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Chouteau County Extension Office is located at the Courthouse in Fort Benton

Phone: 406-353-2205 Ext. 484



**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.**



### **Public Safety & Tourism/Community Development**

Chouteau County is currently facing two major “challenges”, especially in regard to public safety planning. The Chouteau County Extension office has played a lead role in addressing those issues.

### **Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commemoration**

In June of 2005, Chouteau County will host one of only 15 national signature events for the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial. We have the most miles of Lewis & Clark trail (with over 125 river miles) of any county in Montana. The last signature event that was held in North Dakota in October 2004 had 50,000 participants. We are expecting at least that number to visit during our event. One of the challenges in planning for public safety is the fact that the event will last 34 days and will have multiple events each day. In order to assure a safe and pleasant visit for tourists, there have been numerous meetings and training programs over the past two years - with emphasis on cooperative networks with Cascade and Fergus counties. One major undertaking was a full-scale exercise held this past summer. The exercise had 167 participants - including over 15 different federal and state agencies; 5 neighboring counties; all of the Chouteau County fire departments, ambulance and quick response units, sheriff’s department and search & rescue; both local hospitals; and 47 public volunteers as “victims”. The exercise itself was a full day event simulating the opening ceremony at Decision Point in Loma.



### **Homeland Security**

Homeland Security planning has been extensive with emphasis on all phases of public health and safety. The county has received over \$219,000 in grant funds so far and will be receiving another \$111,000 in the next year. The County Agent serves as the chairman of the Local Emergency Planning Committee. This committee has been in charge of completing the grant applications, risk and vulnerability assessments and strategic planning. All of the county emergency agencies have worked cooperatively to make sure that funds are spent wisely and effectively to provide for daily operational needs; as well as to purchase equipment that will serve in a multi-purpose capacity. The largest percentage of grant funds have been utilized to replace radio communications equipment that was 30 years old, rapidly failing and seriously outdated.



### **Health**

The Chouteau County Extension office plays a lead role in promoting healthy lifestyles. Following are just two highlights of that program:

**Community Health Fairs** held in Fort Benton, Big Sandy & Geraldine every other year - over 600 participants - cost savings to participants last year estimated at over \$235,000 for the blood screening and osteoporosis screening. Results from the past couple of years indicate that the coronary risk ratios of participants throughout the county have been decreasing.

**“Walk Across Montana” - fitness program** promoting walking and utilizing pedometers to help with motivation. Over 165 individuals are now utilizing step pedometers to keep track of their walking efforts. Forty participants have “walked” enough steps this past year to make it all the way across the state. Total miles covered by all participants are over 62,000 miles.

