

Teton County



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Sunrise on the Rocky Mountain Front in Teton County, by Jane Wolery.

MSU Extension serves Teton County in the areas of wellness, mental health, family consumer science, 4-H and youth programming. We provide services to agricultural producers focusing on crops, forage, and livestock. Agricultural diagnostic services, including nitrate testing, hay certification, insect and plant identification are available. Small acreage landowners and homeowners take advantage of services related to landscaping, shelterbelt management and horticulture. The economy is influenced by agricultural production, small business ownership, cooperatives, and e-commuting. The communities of Teton County -- Choteau, Dutton, Fairfield, Power, Pendroy, and Bynum -- are bordered by the Rocky Mountains to the west and plains to the east. In 2021 the team included Karen Forseth, Jane Wolery, Jamie Smith and Sharla Hinman. We are dedicated to meeting the needs of and serving people in Teton County.

Youth and Mental Health

MSU Extension provides a 5-session mental health series for public high schools in Teton County. In 2020, youth suicide attempts in Teton County were at 12%, almost double the percentage in the United States.

In 2021, Wolery facilitated six Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) programs reaching 30% of enrolled high school students in the county. Wolery works with schools in Choteau, Dutton-Brady, Fairfield, and Power to ensure that each ninth-grade student receives the YAM training.

YAM is an evidence-based program for mental health promotion and suicide prevention. YAM was found effective in reducing new cases of suicide attempts and severe suicide ideation by approximately 50% and reducing cases of depression by 30%. YAM creates awareness of mental health and equips students with ways to respond through seeking and offering support. Three months after participating in YAM, students report an increase in general mental health knowledge, significant decrease in depressive symptoms and a trending decrease in anxiety symptoms. Almost half of students reported they would seek help from school staff for assistance with feelings of suicide and 79% said they would seek help for depression.

2021 Teton County YAM students said:

"I learned that there is always someone there, and I won't always be able to solve people's problems, but I can be there to help and listen."

"I can be myself no matter what. I can always reach out for help if I need or want to."

“I learned to watch for hints that people are thinking of suicide and what to do.”

“The YAM class showed me there can be joy if you see past the anger ...it showed me ways to help my friends if they are struggling and how to contact someone or approach a situation.”

“I learned that I’m not alone with the problems I have.”

MSU Extension-Teton County Provides Agricultural Resources to County Residents

Newly hired agent Karen Forseth serves Teton County through her MSU Extension position in the areas of agriculture, natural resources, horticulture, 4-H and youth development. Though the pandemic continued, 2021 was a busy year with Forseth fielding a variety of requests and providing diagnostic services. Client requests were 38% agricultural-related, 36% horticulture-based and 26% were related to the 4-H livestock program.

Forage was the leading agricultural topic for which producers contacted MSU Extension in Teton County in 2021. These inquiries and diagnostic services accounted for 57% of the agricultural calls. Nitrates, forage sampling and inspection of acreages for the Montana Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage program are included in this data. Acres inspected for weed free status totaled 590 with an estimated 1100 tons of hay and straw. In addition to forage, many producers requested assistance in renewing their private applicator licenses. New applicants were directed to initial trainings or offered testing opportunities to receive their licenses. Other questions in the area of agriculture included leases, blister beetles and grasshoppers.

Tree health and tree information inquiries accounted for 37% of all the horticulture calls. This included disease diagnosis, pruning techniques and information on the DNRC Shelterbelt program. Teton County provided two educational opportunities for homeowners to receive training and consultation with the MSU Extension Forestry Specialist. The first was a seminar on proper pruning techniques. These techniques were demonstrated on participants’ trees. One participant proudly reported harvesting 30 pounds of apples after applying the techniques learned. The other opportunity was a tour of different properties with problem trees where homeowners could discuss those issues with the forestry specialist. Homeowners expressed gratitude for the knowledge gained from the specialist and through MSU Extension that will result in improvements in the areas of tree health, shelterbelt conditions, fruit production and aesthetics.



Top: Jane Wolery of Teton County educates a group of students during a Youth and Mental Health session, courtesy of Jane Wolery; **Bottom:** Testing for nitrates in a forage sample in Teton County, by Karen Forseth

Teton County Staff

Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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