Connecting Expertise Across Distances:
A Leadership Project to Strengthen Communication and Collaboration in Montana Extension

1 MSU Extension Communication & Collaboration Needs

Identified through the 2023 Agent and Specialist Communication Survey in the Agriculture, Horticulture, and Natural Resources Program Area

Desire for more opportunities to build relationships

County Agent Needs



- Awareness of available expertise
- Knowing who to contact
- Understanding ongoing MSU research

Communication & Collaboration Challenges

Specialist Needs



- Understanding county trends and needs
- Identifying resource gaps
- Identifying emerging educational priorities

Interest in statewide collaboration and information sharing

The survey results identified a need for new mechanisms that facilitate regular communication, information exchange, and relationship-building across the MSU Extension Ag, NR, Hort Program Area.

2 The Specialist Coffee Hour: Connecting Colleagues across Montana

Purpose and Approach

- **Extension-wide Participation**: County agents, Specialists, MSU Researchers, and other experts
- **Timely and Useful**: Monthly meetings addressing relevant topics in Agriculture, Horticulture, and Natural Resource Management
- **Discussion and Knowledge Sharing**: Regional updates, seasonally relevant information, dedicated time for questions and discussion
- **Live Sessions and Archived Content**: Meetings hosted virtually on Microsoft Teams; presentations recorded and shared on YouTube

One-Hour Monthly Format

Welcome & Statewide Updates 15 mins → 1st Presentation & Questions 15 mins → 2nd Presentation & Questions 15 mins → Discussion & Questions 15 mins

YouTube Videos

3 Program Delivery & Participation

6 sessions hosted | **12 presentations delivered** | **22 attendees on average (54% agents, 32% specialists)**

April	Managing forages in a drought Growing potatoes in Montana	32 (18/9)
May	Soil and tissue testing Mite issues in winter wheat	17 (8/7)
June	Tips for controlling mice Troubleshooting lawn issues	30 (18/8)
July	Invasive annual grass management Crop disease update	16 (8/5)
August	Conservation easement programs Diagnosing herbicide injury	17 (9/6)
September	Palmer amaranth in Montana Garden winterization	22 (14/7)
October	Indoor Pest Nuisances SCH Summary 2026	TBD

4 Awareness, Connections & Collaborations Outcomes

Based on responses to the Specialist Coffee Hour (SCH) Evaluation Survey conducted in September 2026, with 17 respondents: 67% County Agents, 27% Specialists, 6% Admin & Staff.

Increasing Awareness & Knowledge

- **52%** became more aware of expertise they were previously unfamiliar with.
- **65%** learned information relevant to their work.
- **82%** became more familiar with colleagues outside their program area or region.

Supporting Extension Programming

- **47%** shared information from SCH with colleagues or stakeholders.
- **65%** improved their ability to respond to client or stakeholder questions.

Building Relationships & Collaboration

- **24%** identified opportunities for collaboration.
- **71%** reported higher levels of connection with specialists and agents across Montana Extension.
- **86% would like to see the SCH continue.**

What Respondents Say:

"This is an excellent way to communicate concerns, trends and information, and it's an efficient use of time."

"I liked the regular connection with field faculty. The real value of the SCH was the more informal discussion."

From identifying communication gaps to creating new connections, the Specialists Coffee Hour demonstrates how a simple, intentional program can strengthen communication, information exchange, and collaboration across Montana Extension.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY | EXTENSION

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