



Central Montana producers attend first session of MSGA M Bar Academy

By KRIS DESCHEEMAER
Special to the News-Argus

Three area cattle producers have been chosen for the inaugural class of the Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA) M Bar Academy. Stan Olson of Hobson, Leoma Wells of Roy, and Amber Sitz of Lewistown attended their first class for the M Bar Academy in Butte the second week in June along with 12 others from across the state of Montana.

The Academy will foster and grow leaders in the Montana ranching industry and provide individuals with the opportunity to improve leadership skills, gain understanding of industry issues and develop the expertise needed to provide leadership in the Montana Stockgrowers, its partner organizations, in public service and in the cattle industry.

Olson grew up in Mount Vernon, Wash., where his family worked in the dairy business selling DeLaval milking equipment and milking Jersey cows. After college, he and his parents owned and operated a retail ag supply business, specializing in hit-tensile fencing materials and high-quality livestock hay.

Olson married a Montana ranch girl and moved to Montana where he bought into the family ranch near Hobson. Stan and Audrey now run a custom grazing program in the summer and fall months where they contract

with neighboring ranches to run cow/calf pairs. They manage the herd's movements and pasture usage, which enables the Olsons to pursue their interests in regenerative agriculture.

"The M Bar Academy is a great opportunity to train future leaders and key communicators in the cattle industry," said Olson. "We need more people in our profession to confidently and clearly articulate how we positively contribute to feeding the world."

Olson is hoping his attendance at the academy will increase his understanding of the beef industry and help him articulate both the benefits and challenges the industry faces.

Leoma Wells has been a resident of Roy for a short time and is grateful to be in a smaller community, similar to where she grew up in central California. She had spent the last 16 years in Bozeman, where she worked for the American Simmental Association up until 2015 when she created her own business, Data Genie LLC. In 2018 she started working for NEOGEN as a strategic account manager and continues in that role along with the Data Genie business.

Data Genie LLC is a cattle data management service that takes care of the reporting and or registering process for registered cattle operations. Wells can assist with implementing data collection meth-

ods, offers DNA testing guidance, and targets the needs and goals of individual operations. In her role at NEOGEN, Wells works in the bovine genomic division managing beef breed association business across the U.S.

"I would like to become more involved with the Montana Stockgrowers long term and am always interested in expanding my network and working together on ways we can advocate and promote our industry," said Wells when asked why she applied for the M Bar Academy. "The Academy will provide the tools and training necessary to empower us to step into roles, either on the ranch or off, and lead from a place of confidence and self-awareness."

Wells looks forward to learning about the legislative process, and how she can assist with securing the future of agriculture and helping others navigate through the many disruptions facing the agriculture industry.

Amber Sitz grew up on a registered angus ranch in Dillion. She attended Montana State University-Northern, where she obtained her nursing degree and has been working at the Central Montana Hospital while also doing social media work for her family ranch.

"I make it back to the ranch as much as I can to help out my family," said Sitz.

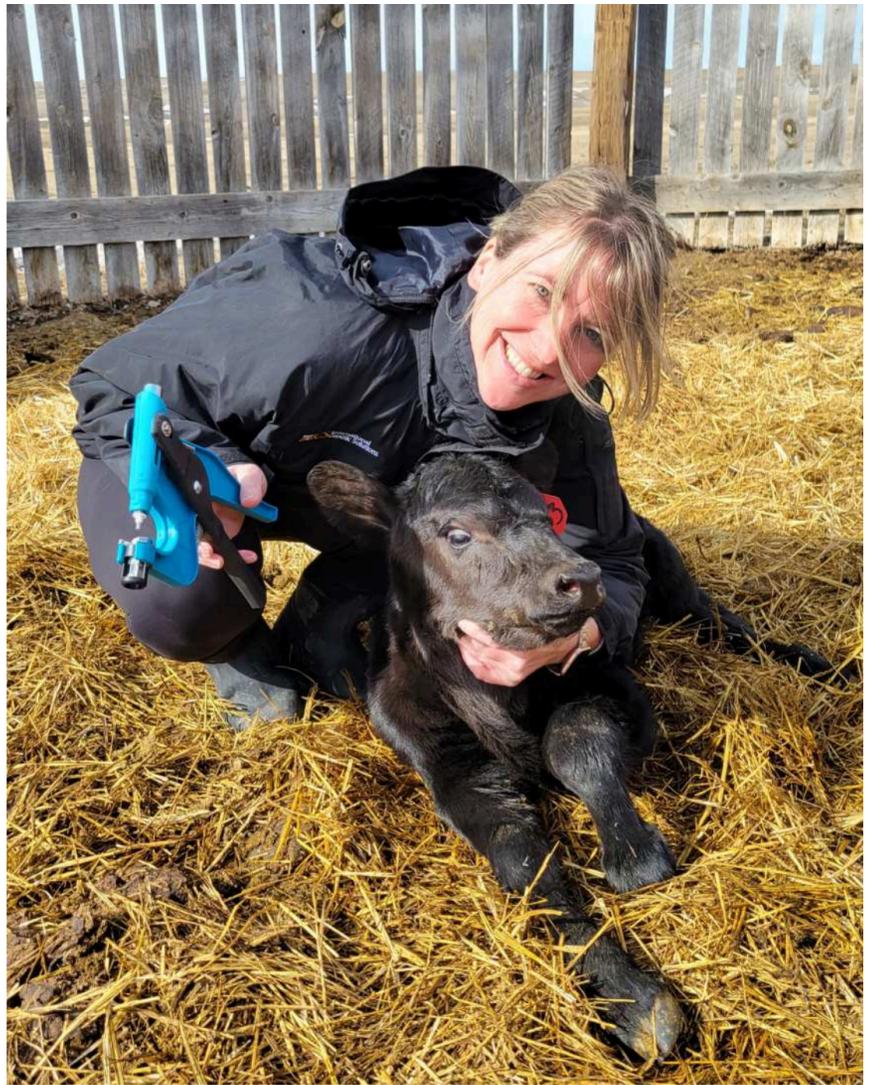
She will be moving back to Dillion to help more on the family ranch and will continue her nursing career at Barrett Hospital and healthcare in Dillion.

"I applied for the M Bar Academy because I am interested in networking with like-minded individuals who are interested in the agriculture industry," Sitz said. "I also applied to gain knowledge about how I can become a better leader in this industry while also learning about the industry itself."

The first session of the M Bar Academy started with the process of getting to know fellow participants. Karen Eddington from the Under Pressure Project led the group in a mental health discussion and provided tools and methods to incorporate into everyday life to help with conflict and workloads. Jim Bishop from Conjunction Leadership reviewed a personality and strengths assessment test each participant had completed before the start of the academy.

Sitz noted that after one session, she feels like the program is pushing her out of her comfort zone and will help her be a more confident advocate for the agriculture industry.

"I believe that it will help encourage people to get more



Leoma Wells, M Bar Academy participant, collecting a DNA sample from a calf born this spring.
Photos courtesy of Kris Descheemaeker

involved in the agriculture organizations, including Stockgrowers," explained Sitz.

On the docket for future sessions of the Academy

include attendance at the 2022 and 2023 Montana Stockgrower annual conventions held in Billings in December, the 2023 legislative session in

Helena and the 2023 MSGA summer meeting, ranch tours and more working sessions held in various cities around the state.



Amber Sitz, MSGA M Bar Academy, takes a break from working cattle on her family ranch to snuggle "Millie."



The inaugural class of the MSGA M Bar Academy meet in Butte in June. A meet and greet for class members, mental health discussions and personality test results were on the agenda for the two day session.

MSU Extension, GoatMT to host public field days about meat goats

The organizers of a new program to educate Montanans about meat goats as an income opportunity are hosting two free, public field days that will focus on meat goat production, marketing, predation, regulations and related topics. Registration is required by Wednesday, July 27, for both events.

The workshops are the initial offerings from GoatMT, a two-year collaboration between Montana State University Extension and Bar 88 Consulting and Livestock. The goal is to provide training and support for Montana meat goat producers and those interested in starting, expanding or diversifying their operations.

A commercial meat goat workshop is scheduled from 1 to 4 p.m. Friday, July 29, at the Mountain View Co-op Feed Store, 1111 Smelter Ave. NE in Black Eagle. Topics include general production information and a producer panel that will compare production of meat goats to hair goats and production of wool sheep to hair sheep.

A second workshop is set for 1 to 7 p.m. Sunday, July 31, at 150 N. Frontage Road in Park City. Directional signs will be posted. Topics at this workshop include prescriptive grazing considerations, health protocols, a tour of the Hollenbeck ranch facilities and a goat barbecue with tips on how to prepare goat meat.

Speakers at both events include Reid Redden, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension sheep and goat specialist; Carl Whitworth, a Texas rancher and meat goat producer; and representatives from Wildlife Services, MSU Extension, the American Goat Federation and the Montana Wool Growers Association. Goat pro-

ducers will host a marketing and production panel at both workshops.

Over the next two years, program leaders plan to hold workshops, webinars and on-farm trainings, as well as provide mentoring across the state to address the need and growing demand for information about goat production, said Brent Roeder, MSU Extension sheep specialist.

"Goat production has expanded over the past 20 years, from the traditional production areas of the desert southwest into almost all areas of the U.S.," Roeder said. "Small-acreage producers and larger cattle operations are now adding goats for weed control and income diversification."

Meat goat kids are selling for \$3 to \$4 per pound, he added, leading producers to explore adding goats as another source of revenue.

"The same markets fueling the strong demand for lamb are

now also leading the demand for more goat meat than the U.S. can supply," Roeder said. "In the past, the U.S. has been the world's largest importer of goat meat at 50 million pounds per year, mostly from Australia, but with proper genetics and management, goats can be successfully run in Montana."

To register for one or both workshops or for more information about the workshops, email Denise Hoepfner at denise.hoepfner@montana.edu. For more information about Goat Montana, visitgoatmt.org.

Lewistown Precipitation	
July 2022:	2.62
Oct. 1, 2021 to Date:	11.41
2022 Year to Date:	9.65
Normal Oct. 1 to Date:	13.91
Normal Year to Date:	11.46

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Upcoming Sale Calendar

Tues. August 2 - All Class Cattle Sale
Tues. August 9 - ** NO SALE **
Tues. August 16 - All Class Cattle Sale
Tues. August 23 - ** NO SALE **
Tues. August 30 - Yearling Special & All Class Cattle Sale
Tues. Sept. 6 - ** NO SALE **
Tues. Sept. 13 - Anniversary Sale Yearling Special
Tues. Sept. 20 - ** NO SALE **
Tues. Sept. 27 - All Class Cattle Sale

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Office 406-535-3535	83 Stockyard Lane Lewistown, MT	Kyle Shobe 406-366-0472
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