



Welcome to Stillwater County

As MSU Extension Agents, our job is to provide information and education to the people of Stillwater County. Often this takes the form of a phone call or office visit. The service provided can be as simple as looking up a safe internal meat cooking temperature, or as complex as balancing a least-cost ration for multiple classes of cattle. These calls range from horticulture to holiday cooking and from food preservation to farm financial management.

These contacts often lead to a more in-depth home or ranch visit and provide guidance on needs for in-depth training, linking Stillwater County to subject matter specialists on the Montana State University-Bozeman campus as well as to resources in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In Stillwater County, MSU Extension has been an integral part of local education since 1914 when the first agriculture agent arrived in the county, followed in 1917 by the first Family and Consumer Sciences agent.

Stillwater County MSU Extension is proud to serve the people of Stillwater County. MSU Extension is a partnership of Stillwater County, Montana State University and the United States Department of Agriculture. The three-way partnership provides funding for educational resources 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.

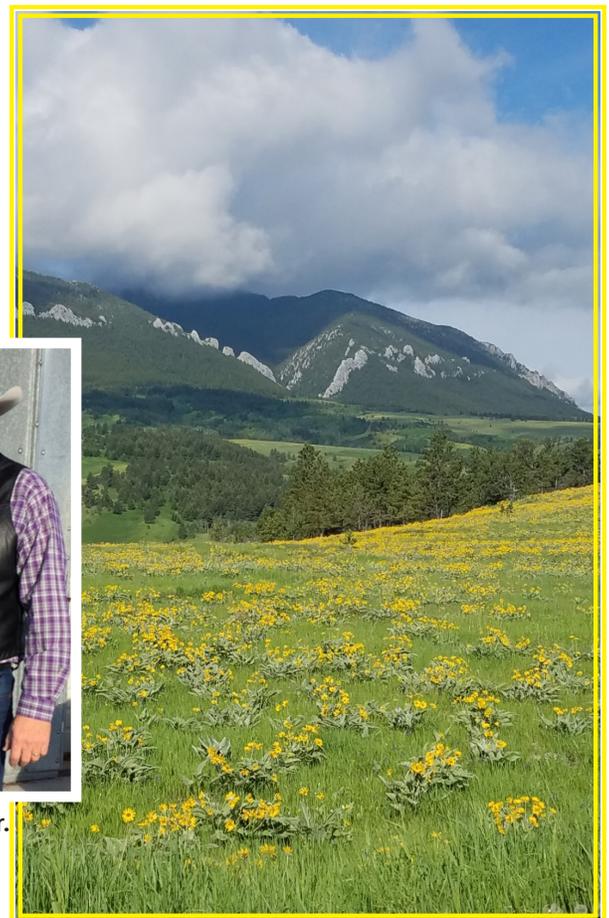


ABOVE, L to R: Karen Marts, Ashley House, Lee Schmelzer.
RIGHT: Beartooth Mountains. Photo by Ashley House.

The Stillwater County Family and Consumer Science agent uses expertise in food and nutrition, housing, health, family issues, personal finances, and environmental health to provide innovative and targeted programs based on the needs of Montana families, individuals, businesses and communities.

The Agriculture agent works with farmers, ranchers, small landowners and researchers through field demonstrations, workshops, and individual visits to help producers and landowners remain profitable.

Stillwater County 4-H strives to provide ample opportunities to the 176 enrolled 4-H members. 4-H members in market animal projects and Cloverbuds (youth ages 5-8) continue to have the highest enrollments.



Montana Mesonet Weather Stations

Weather phenomena can be sudden and violent. Drought, although less dramatic, can cause even more damage. From 1997 to 2006, Montana was in a dramatic drought. In Stillwater County, there were 12 years of declining precipitation totals. The effects of this drought had an enormous impact on Stillwater County. While not as long, recent droughts have also affected Stillwater County. Real-time drought monitoring is essential for adaptive management to mitigate the negative impacts of drought on the people, economy, and ecosystems of Montana. Cumulative rainfall data alone is a poor predictor of drought impacts. Short-term soil moisture deficits can occur in years of average or above average rainfall. Resource managers need reliable information on the available reserves of soil moisture to enable effective management (e.g. crop marketing contracts, cattle stocking rates, hay purchases, fertilizer rate adjustments).

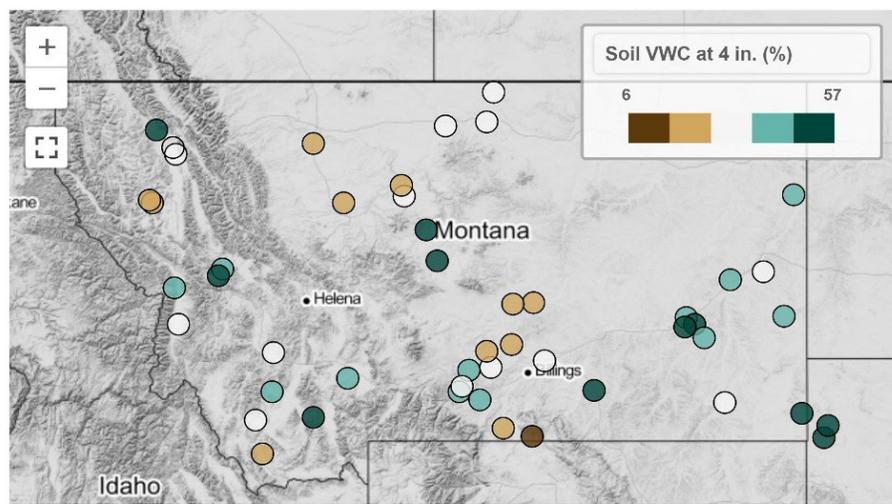
To obtain the detailed monitoring information, weather stations (picture at right) were installed to measure soil moisture and temperature. With a grant secured by Stillwater County MSU Extension from Western Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE), and the support of the Stillwater County Commission, a total of seven stations were installed in Stillwater County. The weather stations report a full suite of current weather conditions as well as soil moisture and temperature at four depths, transmitted instantaneously from the sites to the Montana Mesonet.

The Montana Mesonet is Montanan's first early drought warning tool that integrates sensor outputs and site-specific soil properties. It was released in November 2018. A partnership valued by both sides has been formed between Stillwater County MSU Extension and the newly formed Montana Mesonet. During 2019 and 2020, Stillwater County MSU Extension will be developing additional tools that use the soil moisture and weather information to help farmers and ranchers make critical decisions.



ABOVE: a weather monitoring station.

Montana Mesonet



Soil Moisture Conditions

Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) Program

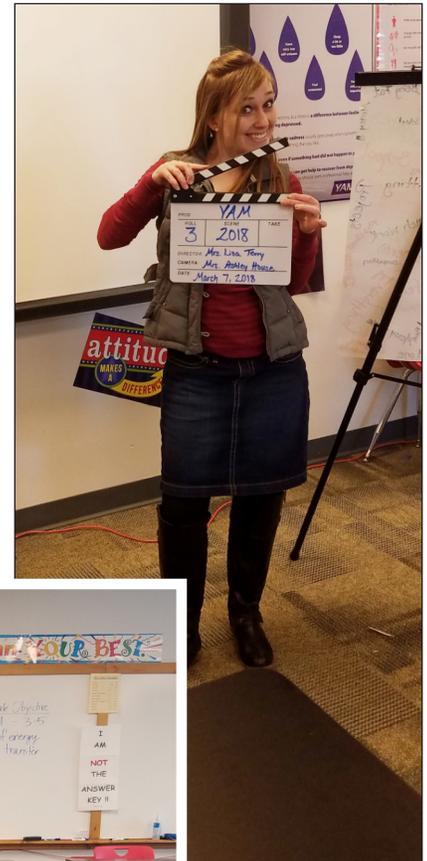
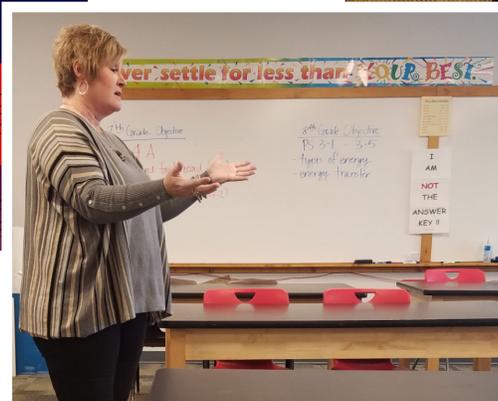
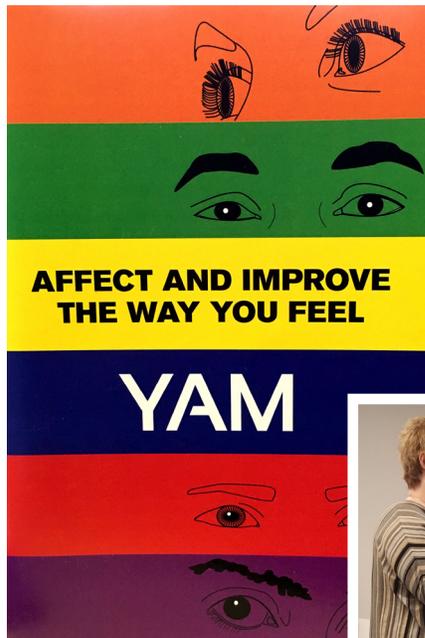
In 2018, Stillwater County MSU Extension had the opportunity to facilitate the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program in local seventh grade classes with 44 youth. This unique program is designed for youth and their mental health needs. YAM is an interactive program promoting discussion and knowledge about mental health and development of problem solving skills and emotional intelligence.

Facilitators guide youth participants through important topics such as: the meaning of mental health and information that mental health is not a negative thing; self-help advice, ways to feel better, how to make sense of feelings, what to do if someone is being bullied or bullying, parents are fighting, and more; stress and crisis, understanding stress isn't always bad, how to cope with stress and crisis; depression and suicidal thoughts, how to know if you are depressed; helping a friend in need, identifying common communication phrases and knowing what to say to them when they are in need; and lastly who can they contact for advice if they are suffering.

With facilitator guidance, the youth led most of the discussions and expressed their feelings, reactions, etc. through discussion and role plays. The youth were very open to talking and opening up to the class as there were no teachers, counselors or school staff present, and confidentiality around the discussion is encouraged (unless it was a life threatening matter).

Youth were able to open up about their feelings and thoughts on tough topics because of the confidentiality this program offered. The program illustrates a positive impact on youth as they participate. These youth grew closer to each other after knowing what they may be going through and knowing how to handle certain situations. At the conclusion of the five week course, youth were disappointed the program was complete and we would not be coming back to teach them more. They requested the program returns to the schools to continue, as they benefited tremendously and wanted others to benefit from it as well.

RIGHT: Ashley House starting role play for the day. Below: Lisa Terry leading a class.



4-H Ideas Have Been Firing, Now They Can Ignite

With increased 4-H program recruitment and enrollment, the need for an extra position became apparent for MSU Extension and 4-H office needs. We welcomed Karen Marts in January of 2018 and have benefited from her assistance. Having Marts on the team has allowed Ashley House, the 4-H Program Administrative Assistant to accomplish more. In the new 4-H administrative role, House has been implementing new ideas to benefit and grow the 4-H program in Stillwater County.

With the additional staff, the 4-H program was able to involve more kids through fun Cloverbud workshops, Easter egg decorating contests, pumpkin carving contests and more. Cloverbud (youth ages 5-8) participation has increased by 25% for fair entries, nearly 30% increase for their participation at fair, and almost 5% increase in overall fair entry participation, totaling 906 fair entries for 141 participants. MSU Extension 4-H staff have been able to visit the clubs and sit in on demonstrations and take a more active role in making connections and helping the clubs be the best they can be. 4-H program staff are looking forward to 2019 as there are lots of new and exciting things happening in the county 4-H program and the MSU Extension office.



contact us:



EXTENSION

Stillwater County

431 Quarry Road
P.O. Box 807

Columbus, MT 59019
(406) 322-8035

stillwater@montana.edu

<http://stillwater.msuextension.org>



Lee Schmelzer
Agriculture and
Natural Resources
Extension Agent



Karen Marts
Administrative Assistant



Ashley House
4-H Assistant and
Administrative Assistant