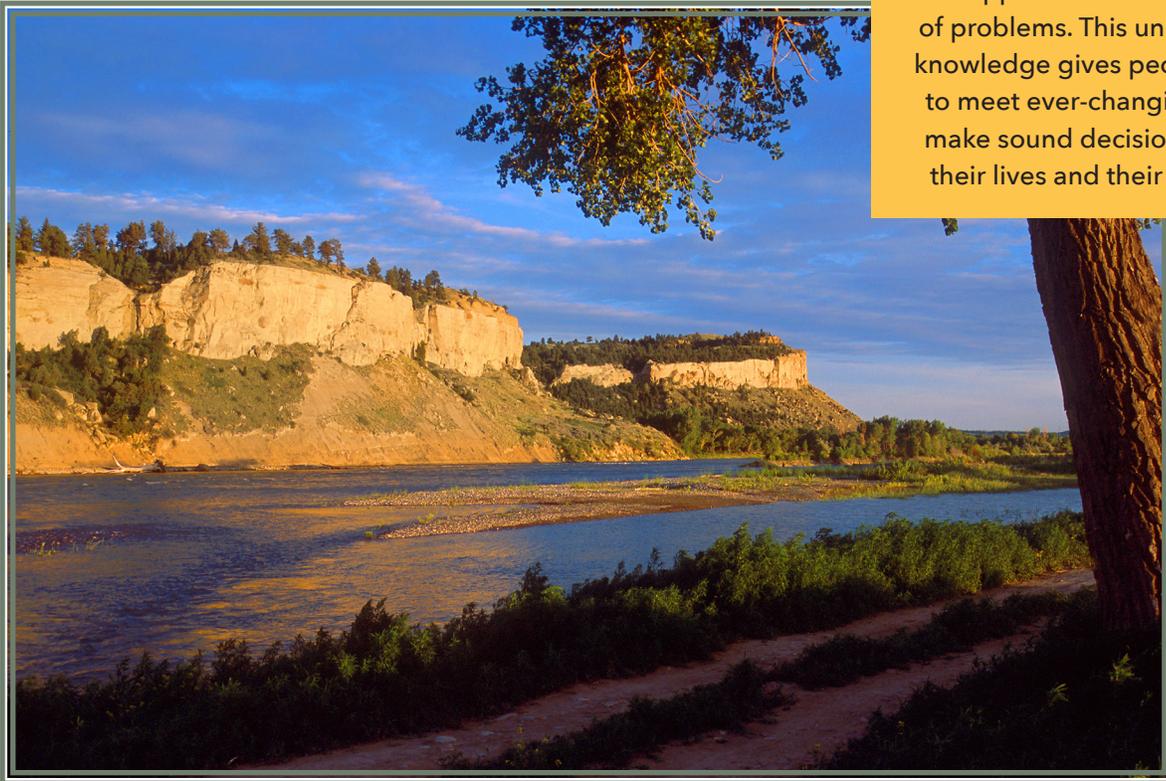




Welcome to Yellowstone County

Yellowstone County, the most populous in Montana, is home to a blend of urban and rural communities who work together to make it a thriving industry hub. As the population steadily grows, the agriculture, energy, and healthcare industries continue to lead economic forces and provide thousands of job opportunities. The agriculture sector is largely comprised of receipts from wheat, barley, sugar beet, alfalfa, corn, and beef production, while the energy market is led by oil, natural gas, and coal. Yellowstone County and Billings, specifically, also play a role as the regional healthcare destination for many individuals across Montana and Wyoming.

Yellowstone County MSU Extension is an off-campus arm of Montana State University. Our purpose is to provide unbiased, research-based information, educational resources and outreach programs through the land-grant university system. Agents help community members interpret information and encourage the application of it to the solution of problems. This unbiased base of knowledge gives people the means to meet ever-changing needs and make sound decisions that impact their lives and their communities.



View of the Yellowstone River and rimrocks from Coulson Park, Billings, MT.

2018 Square Foot Garden Upgrades

In 2003, Yellowstone County Master Gardeners were granted the use of a plot of land at MetraPark for a square foot demonstration garden. This technique reduces single row-sized gardens to a quarter of the size, without losing production. Row paths are eliminated, and plants are spaced the same distance apart as in row spacing.

In 2018, with hundreds of volunteer hours, the following upgrades were implemented in the demonstration garden:

- Nine raised-box growing beds installed.
- Weed barrier installed on walkways, covered with scoria gravel.

This demonstration garden, in place for 15 years, is a regular go-to spot for fair-goers, carnival workers and garden enthusiasts. Many community members commented on this year's improvements and how these gardens are a great addition to the noisy environment of the fair's midway.

The garden area was also used as a classroom this summer. Master Gardeners teaching a bee class said it was wonderful to have this outdoor location with all the seating options.

Plans for 2019 include installing raised-box perimeter beds and a rock garden along the front of the garden site to demonstrate xeriscape (low-water use) planting.

The purpose of this garden is to demonstrate the easy, square foot garden technique (usable no matter what the soil challenges are), to reduce garden size, eliminate tilling, and utilize smaller space gardens for maximum production. This style of garden can result in an abundance of locally-grown, fresh produce from an attractive garden system with less weeds, less water, and less work.

Mental Health in Yellowstone County

MSU Extension is working in partnership with community organizations and schools to increase mental health literacy and provide tools to respond to mental health crises in youth and adults across Yellowstone County.

Through the Mental Health First Aid certification program, similar to physical first aid training, participants learn how to offer support for someone in crisis until professionals can be reached. Through a grant with the Eastern Service Area Authority, over 75 participants have been trained in Eastern Montana by Family and Consumer Sciences agent, Jackie Rumph.



April 2003, Square Foot demonstration garden preparations began.



Summer 2018, Square Foot demonstration garden after improvements.

Youth Aware Mental Health (YAM) is a resiliency program delivered by MSU Extension in collaboration with the MSU Center for Mental Health Research and Recovery (CMHRR). It is meant to provide basic information about mental health, coping skills and emotional intelligence as well as problem-solving and positive peer-relations in youth.

YAM is taught by the 4-H and Youth Development agent, Roni Baker, in five highly-interactive sessions involving lectures on mental health, discussions of stress and crisis problem-solving, role plays of challenging life situations, and peer-to-peer feedback regarding healthy behaviors and coping strategies.

During the 2017 – 2018 school year, YAM was delivered to 72 youth in rural Yellowstone County and statewide to 641 youth. Mental health general knowledge increased. Pre- and post-surveys indicated a significant decrease in depressive and anxiety symptoms and 79% report they will now seek out school staff for mental health support.

Cooking for One

MSU Extension in Yellowstone County collaborated with the Billings Community and Senior Center to offer a Cooking for One class for county residents. Participants varied from couples with different food preferences who wanted to cook separate meals, to seniors who had lost



Preparing a Cooking for One meal.

their partners and had never cooked before in their lives. Participants gained hands-on cooking skills and experience in preparing single portion meals for themselves. An unforeseen benefit was the gathering of a group of isolated community members who were experiencing similar life circumstances. This created social support within the class and friendships that lasted beyond the three-part series.

Preparing meals at home and feeling comfortable doing so allows participants to maintain their independence. By sampling the meals in class, participants could choose which recipes they wanted to prepare at home. One participant stated this was the first time he had cooked for himself in all of his 60 years, and he now had multiple recipes he could prepare and would enjoy.

Montana State University Extension is proud to offer a class that positively impacts participants' knowledge, skills and behavior.

Connecting Dots in Agriculture

For over 20 years, MSU Extension in Yellowstone County has played a vital role in teaching fourth graders the importance of agriculture during their visit to the Northern International Livestock Expo (NILE). This year, 1,881 students from 38 schools participated in Fourth Grade Ag Education. The students learned about crops, livestock (production and by-products), range health, soil health, weeds, and honeybees.

With increasing consumer concerns about food origin and safety, and decreasing connections to agriculture, the need for education is evident. Billings, specifically, has seen steady growth in its urban population, which has allowed the program to not only reach more students, but a more diverse group of students. Those involved share a common goal – for students to learn the role that Montana's number one industry plays in their everyday lives, whether that be linking wheat to flour or pigs to bacon.

Without collaboration, program growth and impact is limited. MSU Extension in Yellowstone County partnered with the NILE, Yellowstone Conservation District, Montana CattleWomen, Sunshine Apiary, Yellowstone County Weed



Fourth graders experience hands on learning at the crop production station.



District, Extension agents and specialists, and many invaluable volunteers to give students the best possible learning experience. Ag Education's impact is verified through surveys, as well as through personal conversations. In 2018, 95% of teachers rated the program as excellent, with over 96% indicating all stations engaged the students and taught them something new. Furthermore, teachers, parents, and students continually comment on Fourth Grade Ag Education's importance, noting it as one of the most valuable school field trips.

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