Sheridan County is located in the northeastern-most corner of Montana. Plentywood, the county seat, is located approximately 18 miles south of the Montana/Canada border and 24 miles west of the Montana/North Dakota border. The Montana Legislature established Sheridan County in 1913 from portions of Dawson and Valley Counties. It was named for American Civil War General Philip Sheridan. The Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge is located just south of the Town of Medicine Lake.

The Extension office in Sheridan County consists of a staff of three – two Extension Agents and an Administrative Support person. Extension Agents provide research-based programs to county residents in the areas of Agriculture/Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development and Family and Consumer Sciences. 4-H enrollment has surged over the past several years and increased numbers of volunteers are extremely instrumental in delivering the 4-H program to area youth.

Agriculture production and agribusiness are the basis of the economy here. When agriculture faces challenging times, so do all facets of the community, including businesses, schools, health care facilities and county and city governments. As many raise the question “what next,” MSU Extension must be diligent in meeting the needs of this many-faceted county by providing producers information on new management techniques and marketing options, helping families discover strategies to deal with stress and take care of their physical and emotional health, and helping youth feel empowered to see themselves in their own futures.

Montana Harvest of the Month

Montana Harvest of the Month (HOM), a program of Montana Team Nutrition and the Office of Public Instruction, showcases locally-grown produce and farm products and exposes students to new, healthy foods. Monthly lessons include education, activities and taste tests for a focus food of the month. The Plentywood School, for the second year, participated in Harvest of the Month with an increase in program participation from 74 students in four classrooms to 115 students in seven classrooms. Extension Agent Sheila Friedrich provides the activities and taste tests including lessons on leafy greens, chickpeas, beef, apples, winter squash, grains and dairy. Students continue to show great enthusiasm for the program, with nearly all at least trying a food they may have not eaten before. The staff in the school cafeteria reports an increase in the numbers of students who are selecting the
featured food for the month when offered. “Harvest at Home” is a handout sent with students to share with their families. Students and parents have reported preparing the shared recipes at home. The Plentywood School was recently notified they were the recipients of a grant from Harvest of the Month to help continue the program in the school.

**Dining with Diabetes**

Sheridan County was one of six counties across Montana to participate in Dining with Diabetes, a pilot study conducted by Montana State University Extension with funding provided by the College of Education, Health and Human Development at MSU. The purpose of the pilot study was to learn how increased knowledge about diabetes and nutrition education can improve the lives of persons with diabetes. Classes were held weekly for four weeks followed by a three-month follow-up class. Each session consisted of a lecture on healthful food choices, managing diabetes and meal planning; food preparation and tasting; and using products such as artificial sweeteners, reduced-fat foods, herbs and spices. Participants in the class either had Type 2 Diabetes or prepared food for individuals with Type 2 Diabetes. The series of classes proved to be beneficial in many ways as reported by program participants:

“I was told I have Diabetes and I knew that was bad, but didn’t know where to go for help. I have learned so much about eating to manage my diabetes in this class and my A1C is down to 6.4.”

“I have seen a Diabetes Educator in both Billings and Williston. This class provided more in-depth nutrition information. I now understand the role of vitamins, minerals, fiber, carbohydrates and how they can affect blood sugar.”

“I learned a lot about making smart food choices, food preparation, reading labels correctly, cooking diabetic-friendly foods and seasoning and spices.”

“The meal prep part of the sessions was very helpful. We developed friendships; the sharing was beneficial and I felt increased support from others with Diabetes.”

**2019 Agriculture Highlights**

2019 presented weather challenges for producers and MSU Extension Sheridan County agriculture agent Colleen Buck. Below-zero temperatures in February through March preceded calving, but thankfully, temperatures started to warm up when calves started to hit the ground. With the deep freeze, the ground froze hard, and even though it warmed, farmers had to wait until the middle of April or later for ground temperatures to warm enough to plant. May and June didn’t produce much precipitation, with temperatures cooler than normal, which caused some concern for hay production and the growing crops. Precipitation levels increased significantly in July; crops really took off and so did the grass for hay production and grazing. The precipitation didn’t stop through fall, and
Top row: (left) Flag raising at the Courthouse - a replacement for the one destroyed by a 2018 tornado; (right) Hay bales in southern Sheridan County; (right) 4-H members displaying quilts during Fashion Review at fair; Middle row: During the Dining with Diabetes classes, participants prepared healthy diabetic-friendly meals; Bottom row: (left) A young archer takes aim, with a 3-D deer target in the background; (center) Extension agent Colleen Buck talking about the information available through the local MSU Extension office; (right) Using a giant cheeseburger, students learn that all parts of a meal can come from locally-grown foods.
producers had a difficult time harvesting crops. Sprouted wheat was a major concern, along with inability to get into the fields due to excess moisture. A large majority of the Durum that is produced in Sheridan County has gone into the feed wheat category when delivering it to the elevator, which is a major decrease in expected revenue for producers. All of the unharvested wheat and sprouted wheat created an educational opportunity for Buck to talk with producers in both Daniels and Sheridan Counties about options for grazing unharvested, sprouted wheat. With all the precipitation, forage estimates for grazing are at an average of 18.43% above a normal year.

**Annie’s Project in Sheridan County**

Trained to facilitate Annie’s Project in 2016, Sheridan County MSU Extension agent Colleen Buck facilitated the program locally in 2019. Annie’s Project is geared toward empowering women in agriculture by bringing a diversity of topics together for six weeks for learning and further understanding the farm and ranch. The program started in February and participants learned about: federal credit union and bank loans specific to agriculture, markets and marketing, what Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and MSU Extension can do for them, crop insurance, and retirement planning. Finally, all the participants went through a REAL Colors personality assessment to help with communication. One participant responded to the learning experience: ‘I learned how to talk to my husband and put to use what I’ve learned. The class helped break it down and made the information approachable.’ The class included 13 participants from Montana and North Dakota, encompassing four counties and impacting 73,850 acres and 1,600 animals.

**Sheridan County 4-H Shooting Sports**

In 2019 Sheridan County 4-H Shooting Sports was awarded a grant from the NRA Foundation which provided much-needed equipment updates for the program. Included in the grant were firearm cleaning kits, two youth shotguns, three new air rifles, two 3-D animal archery targets, shotgun bags, archery gloves and more equipment and funds to purchase clay targets and paper target stands. Shooting Sports is one of the top five project areas in Sheridan County 4-H, with eight shooting sports disciplines offered for youth to participate in, and the grant helped to ensure that equipment was available for all youth to participate in a safe manner.