

Sanders County



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Thompson Falls hydroelectric dam, by Wikimedia Commons.

MSU Extension in Sanders County provides educational programs in the areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development, and Family and Consumer Sciences. Sanders County is located in Northwestern Montana. It is bordered on the west by Idaho's Panhandle and is Montana's 18th most populous county with a population of about 11,336 (2015 estimate). There is a diverse mix of agricultural land, small acreage subdivisions, rural communities and range or forested land. The highest number of jobs are in farming, fishing, forestry, and construction. Sanders County includes the city of Thompson Falls as the county seat, Plains, and the town of Hot Springs. Sanders County is supported by Commissioners Carol Brooker, Anthony Cox, and Glen Magera.

Strong Women

One by one, women in Sanders County have been getting stronger with Strong Women. With the high population of retirees in Sanders County, The Strong Women Strength Training program has been a hit. The Strong Women Program was developed at Tufts University to increase strength, muscle mass, bone density, and balance in women. Those who attended the sessions twice a week for two to four months reported moderate to considerable improvements in general health and balance, feeling stronger physically, doing everyday activities more easily, and increasing weight they are able to lift and flexibility. Sanders County has partnered with Clark Fork Valley Hospital



Photo: Our ladies are strong, by Juli Thurston

to offer women of all ages this opportunity to improve their quality of life. Seventy-two women during 2020 have participated in classes hosted both in Thompson Falls and Plains.

Noxious Weed Seed Free Program

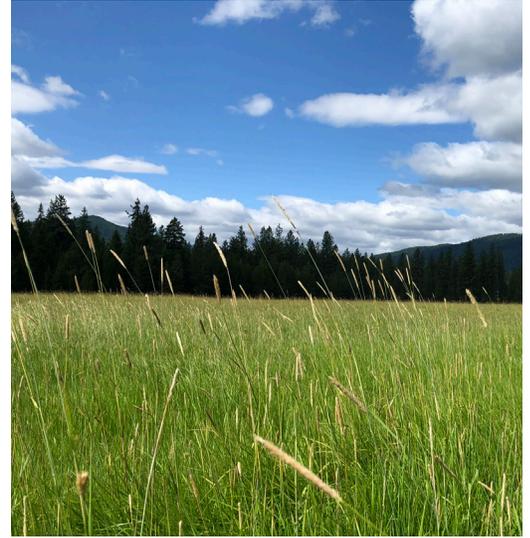
Administered by the Montana Department of Agriculture and certified inspectors from governmental organizations, the Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Program's goal is to reduce or eliminate the spread of noxious weed seeds on public lands. Only certified forages are allowed on government managed lands. At the same time, producers may market certified weed free forage above un-certified retail prices. MSU Extension Agent Juli Thurston is the inspector for Sanders County. In 2020, four local producers requested certification and both passed inspection. The poor growing condition induced by drought and the ravaging effects of a grasshopper infestation prompted several other producers to forgo the expense and effort this year. This program offers positive economic and environmental impacts. Producers receive more money for product while minimizing the risk of spreading noxious weeds to our public lands.

SNAP-Ed Supports Families with their Nutrition Goals

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) offered classes teaching the importance of good nutrition, physical activity, food resource management and food safety. Classes were free of charge and available to SNAP eligible adults as well as high school and elementary students. In addition to offering in-person classes, this year due to COVID-19 restrictions, Sanders County MSU Extension offered virtual SNAP-Ed classes. In total, 88 SNAP-Ed classes were conducted reaching 204 adults, teens and children. Classes were taught in partnership with a variety of organizations including local senior centers and the Sanders County Health Department, as well as in four school districts.

Highlights of the programming included:

- *80% of youth and 100% of teens and adults attending a class series improved their diet quality
- *67% of adults and teens attending a class series showed improvement in being physically active
- *83% of adults and teens attending a class series showed improvement in food safety practices.



Top: Field in Hot Springs, by Juli Thurston; **Bottom:** SNAP-Ed in the classroom, by <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/photo-gallery>

Sanders County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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