Sheridan County is located in the northeast corner of Montana, with Plentywood serving as the county seat. The MSU Extension Service is a three-way partnership between Sheridan County, Montana State University and the United States Department of Agriculture. Through the strength of this partnership, Extension Agents provide research-based education programs to county residents in the areas of Agriculture/Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development and Family and Consumer Science.

The 4-H youth development program has seven clubs, 102 members and 43 volunteer leaders, and is growing. The most popular 4-H projects are Swine, Beef, Horse and Shooting Sports.

Located in the middle of the largest pulse-producing region in the country, Sheridan County is home to Columbia Grain’s pulse processing facility, one of the most modern facilities in North America for cleaning and processing pulse crops like chickpeas, lentils and peas.

The Medicine Lake Wildlife Refuge is located on the southern border of the county and provides important breeding and stopover habitat for a diverse array of migratory birds.

**Be Flexible and Count to Ten**

Pandemic... physical distancing... face coverings. All are words we barely uttered at the start of 2020. In an instant that changed. FCS programming in Sheridan County took on a new look to continue to be relevant and far-reaching. Social media and virtual meetings and events became the new normal.

Shelter-at-Home Wellness Bursts, a Facebook event, was the first to test a new platform of program delivery. The program encouraged participants to focus on self-care during the Governor’s shelter-at-home directive. Two wellness bursts were posted daily along with a poll to self-report completion. Two hundred forty-six participants completed 688 wellness bursts. Of significance, 205 reported drinking eight, 8-ounce glasses of water a day; 134 participated in stress and mental well-being activities; 22 checked account balances to ensure they weren’t falling victim to COVID-19 scams and 267 completed physical activity challenges.

Thirty-five issues of a weekly e-newsletter, Wellness Wednesday, have been published and will continue to be sent to a list of 1218. The newsletter focuses on various aspects of wellness including, emotional, environmental, financial, physical, and social. A recent poll indicates that 83% have accessed resources and/or visited websites featured in Wellness...
Wednesday and 93% reported the content has provided information they are using in their life. The click-through report indicates that 66 individuals have downloaded MontGuides, registered for online Extension classes, and have accessed websites highlighted in the newsletter for further information.

Quarantine Kitchen, a Facebook group, is a place to share ideas and recipes, for tasty, healthy meals and snacks. Recipes are required to follow USDA guidelines for food safety and to be respectful of copyright laws. There are 778 active members who share meal ideas, support one another in their efforts to create healthy foods, and share mouth-watering photographs.

To preserve some sense of normalcy, Montana Harvest of the Month and the Arthritis Foundation Exercise programs continue as COVID-19 restrictions permit.

**Plantsing Ideas in these Challenging Times**

Sheridan County MSU Extension Agent Colleen Buck reports that programming started off with the Winter Series, with topics including: interpreting forage results, understanding bull expected progeny differences (EPDs) or genetic merit, hemp, Farm Bill, plant identification, and Palmer amaranth. Over 10,000 acres were represented by participants during the Winter Series.

Programming as we traditionally know it changed in March due to COVID-19. Utilizing social media to distribute information and programs became critical. Previously on the Sheridan County MSU Extension Facebook page, a posting would reach between 50-150 people, and since March that number has doubled and in some cases, tripled depending on the content.

A large part of early summer was spent figuring out how to navigate putting on the 4-H portion of the Sheridan County Fair so that youth could showcase their projects and many hours of hard work. Working within the COVID-19 guidelines set by the State 4-H office, the 4-H Livestock Committee and Sheridan County Public Health, 4-H members were able to show and sell their animals at the Sheridan County Fair.

This fall Buck, in collaboration with Daniels County Extension Agent Inga Hawbaker, presented a succulent workshop in both Sheridan and Daniels Counties. The workshop focused on background information, planting recommendations and care of succulents. Participants received four succulent plants, a planter, and the planting materials. The participants reported that they wanted another similar class. Some of the changes participants reported was that they would water less and use potting soil made for succulents. The combined classes reached 42 succulent enthusiasts.

*Top: Sam proudly displays beet & sweet potato chips he made for Harvest of the Month at home, by Jeannie Rude; Bottom: Succulent workshop finished product, by Colleen Buck*