Welcome to Big Horn County

Big Horn county is a land of diversity. Rural and urban, rangeland and industry, past and present, creates a rich tapestry that makes Big Horn County unique. Encompassing approximately three million acres, Big Horn County includes the city of Hardin as the county seat, Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, Pryor, Wyola, and the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservations. The Little Big Horn Battlefield and Big Horn Canyon National Recreation Area are two major tourism destinations. Agriculture and coal mining are the primary industries of the county, practicing sustainable production of food and fuel.

The city of Hardin is the headquarters of Montana State University Extension in Big Horn County. The two resident Extension agents cover the county providing research-based, unbiased information to the residents of Big Horn County. With the collaboration of the Agriculture Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent, SNAP educator, and support staff, we offer over 50 years experience in food production, sustainable agriculture, horticulture, nutrition, food preparation and preservation, and home skills.

HARDIN GARDEN

The first year of growing was a great success for the Hardin Garden! With Big Horn County MSU Extension playing a lead role, it wouldn’t have been made possible without the Hardin Garden Board, local support, and contributions totaling over $5600 dollars and six grants, including Montana SARE Professional Development Program, Town Pump Foundation, Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger, First Interstate Bank Foundation, Red Ants Pants Foundation, and Human Resources Development Council, totaling $8500.

After many hours planning and building, 16 raised garden beds served over 38 people, including 18 low-income families, in growing produce for themselves and family. Two separate families mentioned they wanted to be involved so their kids would learn how to grow produce off the land to be able to provide for themselves when they get older.

Big Horn County MSU Extension used one of the garden plots for educational purposes, including how to plant seeds, weed identification, pest management, and when to harvest the produce. The vegetables produced in Extension’s plot were used for SNAP-Ed Education adult classes.

Moving into 2017, the Hardin Garden Board is looking into potential expansion due to the demand of returning gardeners from 2016 and interest from others in the community. The Board is also looking into adding fruit trees in the back for plot renters to harvest from and using it for more educational classes.
Earth Day in the Schools

To help celebrate Earth Day, the National Park Service, Americorps, Department of Natural Resource Conservation, Cloud Peak Energy, Little Big Horn College, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Fire Management of the Crow Tribe, and MSU Extension were able to visit schools throughout Big Horn County, reaching over 400 students. Each entity taught about various aspects of the environment and how students can help keep the environment healthy. MSU Extension taught the youth what plants need to grow and photosynthesize. Each student then planted a marigold seed of their own to take home.

Grasshopper Suppression

Fall 2015 adult grasshopper counts from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) gave Big Horn County MSU Extension a heads up that 2016 may be a great year for grasshoppers’ destruction to range land. Over a period of 30 days, each grasshopper can create about 14 pounds of lost grass per acre. Multiple this by 20 grasshoppers per square yard, that is a loss of 276 pounds of forage for each acre over 30 days. For a period of 60 days, it equates to 552 pounds of lost forage.

Early planning for suppression activities was key for program success. With cooperation between Big Horn County MSU Extension and APHIS, over 290,000 acres were treated for grasshoppers. This equates to over 80 million pounds of forage saved from grasshopper deprivation which can greatly impact a ranches operation from having to buy replacement forage for the fall and winter and/or culling excess cattle to make up for the lost forage.

Initial Pesticide Training

An Initial Pesticide Training was held in Hardin by Big Horn County MSU Extension. Topics covered included private applicator license information, pesticide safety, reading the pesticide label, sprayer calibration, pesticides in the environment, integrated pesticide management, and pesticide laws. Covering all of this information made for a full day of learning about safe pesticide use. A total of 17 new licenses were acquired, and 28 more people filled their recertification credit requirement for keeping their private pesticide applicator license.

Forage Nitrate Testing

Over 20 forage samples were brought to Big Horn County MSU Extension in 2016 to test for nitrates. Out of the these samples, two recommended to only feed non-pregnant livestock or no more than half the ration to pregnant animals, five of the results said to not feed any pregnant animal and limit the forage to half the ration for non-pregnant animals and two forage results had such high nitrated it was recommended to not be fed at all to livestock.

These tests saved producers from killing livestock from nitrate poisoning and potential aborting of calves in pregnant animals.

SNAP-Ed

The Big Horn County Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-Ed) reached over 630 youth in the schools and 29 adults. In the six week youth classes, SNAP-Ed educator Shirley Redding teaches the kids about food groups, food safety, and healthy eating. During her adult classes, Redding teaches the participants about healthy eating and the food groups, how to plan out meals on a budget, and food safety. When adults complete the eight week program, they are eligible for an additional food box from Helping Hands Food Bank in Hardin.

SNAP-Ed Educator, Shirley Redding, promoting her Adult education classes at the local Farmer’s Market.
Thirty-Seven Years of Service

Well, it seems like all good things must come to an end. After over 36 years spent working for Montana State University Extension Service, I can honestly say that Extension has been my second family. When I came to Montana 44 years ago, I never envisioned a career that would last this long, nor one that would be so fulfilling. I have come to the end of the line and will be jumping off the MSU Extension train at the end of December 2016.

I am proud of my accomplishments over the years. In 4-H, I have seen hundreds of 4-H members and leaders pass through our program. My pay back has been to see former 4-H members come back to the program as leaders and 4-H parents… makes me a little teary eyed.

Community Development was a part of my early and mid-career, and being involved in securing the Railroad Depot as our local Chamber of Commerce was an important event. Another important accomplishment was working with Jean Kukes and Don Gilbertson to create the local Helping Hands in Hardin Food Bank. It has come a long way since its beginning operating out of the basement of the County Health Department and the American Lutheran Church.

Over the years I have traveled throughout the county to provide programming on many topics including family financial information, food safety, food preservation, sewing, upholstery, nutrition, diabetes, cardiac fitness, balancing work and family, grandparenting, parenting, after school programming, in-school programming for teachers, enrichment classes in schools about water quality, financial management, food safety, hand washing, simple science experiments to encourage an interest in science, first time home buyers, healthy homes, various programming including fraud protection, exercise, and health related topics for senior citizens.

In addition to teaching and facilitating classes, I have answered thousands of questions. One of the latest calls involved “How long do I have to cook a 42 pound turkey, and can I cook it partially at home and then drive for three hours and finish cooking it at our destination?”

DEEP (Diabetes Empowerment Education Program) is a “new kid” on the block for MSU Extension. Big Horn County was an early adopter for the program and as a result has paved the way for many other counties to become trained in the program and delivery thanks to Lisa Terry, Stillwater County MSU Extension Agent.

Food Safety and food preservation are my passions! In my final year, I have presented nine basic employee ServSafe classes to 154 students. Many of the participants use the certificate to gain employment, continue employment or to run food stands at various events in the county.

It has been my pleasure to teach people to preserve food. Over the years I have taught many classes and answered thousands of questions, including questions from other Extension Agents. It has been my favorite topic for many years.

Supervising Shirley Redding, our SNAP Nutrition Assistant, has been a rewarding experience. She has served in a number of programs through the years, including IRNE (Indian Reservation Nutrition Education), EFNEP (Expanded Food Nutrition Education Program), FSNEP (Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program) and now SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). SNAP-Ed continues to evolve and finding ways to incorporate the information for schools, and adult learners is a challenge that Redding meets daily.

I am proud of being a small part of the MSU Extension Team that hosted more than 700 participants at the National Association of Family and Consumer Science Agents at Big Sky in September 2016. It was a big accomplishment for a small Montana branch.

And finally, I am extremely proud, honored, flattered and excited to receive in 2016 the highest award that MSU Extension gives, The Silver Buffalo Award from the Joint Council of Extension Professionals. What a way to go out! None of the work I have done over the years would have been possible without the support of the Big Horn County Commissioners, the people of Big Horn County and Montana State University Extension. So, THANK YOU to all who have supported me and my endeavors!
4-H Program Updates

Big Horn County Youth and Open Fair
The Big Horn County 4-H program had a great year once again! MSU Extension appreciates all of the hard working volunteers and leaders who make this program a success. We had a total of 115 youth members and 46 adult leaders enrolled in 4-H this last year. For fair, there were over 700 project entries, including cooking, leathercraft, scrapbooking, welding, and livestock projects. A total of $174,068, a 12% increase from last year, was generated at the market animal sale. Youth learn very valuable life lessons through their projects, and many use the money raised from the sale for their college funds.

Reach for the Stars
The 2016 Montana 4-H Rec Lab was hosted by District 8 counties, which includes Big Horn, Carbon, Musselshell-Golden Valley, Stillwater, and Yellowstone. With a lot of planning by county agents and district 4-H ambassadors, District 8 held a very successful Rec Lab in Joliet, Montana. Over 160 youth and 30 adults attended the event learning many leadership skills, recreational activities, and networking with one another. Participants take what they have learned from the event back to their home counties to share and hopefully aid their program in “Making the Best, Better.”

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