Montana: Living Life Well is a research-based chronic disease self-management program offered to Toole County residents. The program was co-sponsored through Toole County Extension and Toole County Health Department. Montana: Living Life Well workshops empowered participants to take an active role in managing their health. Participants meet once a week for six weeks.

Seven local residents participated in the program this past June. Participants learned techniques to deal with problems associated with chronic disease, appropriate exercise, appropriate use of medications, communicating effectively with family, friends, and health professionals, nutrition, and how to evaluate new treatments. Each week, participants created an action plan to accomplish a realistic, attainable goal in their self-management plan. Participants who completed a workshop demonstrated significant improvements in exercise, ability to do social and household activities, less depression, fear and frustration or worry about their health, reduction in symptoms like pain, and increased confidence in their ability to manage their condition.

Diabetes Empowerment Program (DEEP) is a program accredited by the national American Association of Diabetes Educators. The evidence-based diabetes self-management education program is for people with pre-diabetes or diabetes. The goal of the DEEP program is to empower people to take charge of their diabetes, avoid complications from the disease, and improve self-management skills.

In November eight local residents participated in the four week DEEP program. Participants of the program gathered a greater understanding about how the disease process affects their body and learned how to manage diet, exercise, medication and stress to reduce their blood glucose level and manage their overall health long-term.

Strong Hearts for Montana is an exciting collaborative research study developed by Cornell University that is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Cornell has partnered with Montana State University and county Extension educators to deliver the Strong Hearts, Healthy Women study. Montana and your community are helping lead the way in what could prove to be a very exciting breakthrough in cardiovascular disease prevention in rural areas throughout the country.

Toole County was selected as one of twelve rural locations in Montana to participate in Strong Hearts for Montana. In this study, we examined the effects the program in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. The leading cause of death among adults in Montana, including women, is heart disease.

Eleven participants volunteered to be part of the Strong Hearts Study. The women participated in a baseline data collection of blood pressure, cholesterol, bone density, weight and body composition. After the women participated in the six month Strong Hearts, Healthy Women program, there was a follow up collection event to see if the program made improvements in the women’s overall health.
Youth Development

Toole County 4-H Program

The Toole County 4-H program offers a wide range of education and leadership opportunities for area youth. The top three projects in the program currently are shooting sports, market animals, and foods. Currently, Toole County has four clubs: Blazing Saddles, Steppin’ Up, Kountry Kids, and West Butte. There are around 80 kids and 30 volunteers in the program. Many dedicated volunteer hours go into making the program a success.

Carcass Quest!

This year, Extension Agriculture agents from Glacier, Toole, Liberty, and Pondera Counties teamed up to create a board game for the Carcass Contest. The game was titled “Carcass Quest” and was a hybrid mix of “Monopoly” and “The Farming Game”. The 4-Hers chose cards from Steer, Swine, or Lamb depending on which animal they took to the fair, and the card choices were Selection, Nutrition, Management and Circumstances. Each card had a situation based on real life with a real life circumstance.

This game got the 4-H members more interested in Carcass Information than a PowerPoint presentation. We have never had so many compliments on how fun the game was and how much the 4-Hers learned.

Family & Consumer Science

Food Preservation Workshops

MSU Extension offered two opportunities for Golden Triangle residents to learn how to can fruits, vegetables and meats.

The first workshop was offered in the fall in Cut Bank, Shelby, Chester, and Fort Benton. Participants gained hands-on experience using both pressure and hot water bath canning methods. The class covered the equipment needed for canning, recommended research-based recipes and resources, safe food handling practices, and proper protocol for canning fruits and vegetables. At the request of the workshop participants a second workshop was offered on preserving meat, poultry and fish.

Almost all participants gained understanding of safe food preservation practices and the participants indicated that they would feel comfortable canning at home. There was a total of 76 participants in the canning workshops, which were hosted by agents in Choteau, Glacier, Liberty and Toole County.

Food Safety Training

During 2016, 41 people participated in the ServSafe Food Safety Managers training course to meet the 2015 Montana legislative requirement. MSU Extension provided the training in conjunction with the Toole County Sanitarian. This certification helps local restaurants meet the food code requirements of the state as well as assure the public that the establishment is following best practices in providing the community with safe food to eat.
**Agriculture**

**Orange Wheat Blossom Midge**

This summer, Agriculture Agent Kim Suta was involved with studying the Orange Wheat Blossom Midge around Toole County. Five traps were placed around county and checked weekly. The traps have a sticky paper bottom and a pheromone in them to attract the midges. If found, midges can be very disastrous to farmer’s yields. The midges lay their eggs on the awns of wheat and when the midges hatch, they eat the kernel in the head of the wheat, and the damage is not easily seen.

Two of five traps had an abundance of midges after monitoring for two months. The midge seem to like humid, non-windy areas, so we tested in different locations. The trap that had more than 1,000 midges was very concerning, so we scouted the field at sunset. None could be found on the wheat or in the heads. The farmer confirmed the midges didn’t seem to affect yields and he got around 55-60 bushels to the acre. While this farmer was very lucky to have such good yields despite a high volume of midges, the midges may still become a problem for Toole County in the future and will need to continue to be monitored.

**Fruit Tree Cultivar Research**

Brent Sarchet, MSU Extension Agriculture Agent in Lewis & County Extension Agent, is conducting a research project to find and develop recommendations on fruit tree cultivars in the state. He hopes to determine which cultivars are most successful given a certain geographic region to encourage more producers to local grow fruit, which will be successful and profitable for the landowners, thus increasing the accessibility of local fruit across the state. Fruit tree production can be an economical enterprise for farms to diversify their operations. Local producer Brad Munson has volunteered an area on his farm for a research orchard plot in Toole County. Over 20 varieties of apples have been planted at the research site to determine what will grow best in Toole County.

**Interested in Helping to Determine Future Programming for MSU Extension in Toole County?**

MSU Extension in Toole County is planning on implementing a needs assessment for the upcoming year. We are asking for volunteers to serve as members of focus groups and advisory committees to develop a strategic plan for the next five years in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer science, and youth development. If you are interested in volunteering to help with the needs assessment, please contact the MSU Extension office at 424-8350.
Hello, I’m Kim Suta -- your new Agriculture Extension Agent in Toole County. I am originally from a wheat farm south of Cut Bank. I just graduated from Montana State University in May of 2016 where I studied Agriculture Education—Relations and I received a Minor Degree in Natural Resources and Range Sciences. At MSU I was involved with the Collegiate Young Farmers and Ranchers and the Range Club. Previously, I have had great agriculture experience with summer internships with MSU Extension in Glasgow and Dow AgroSciences. I was involved with 4-H in Glacier County for 10 years and my favorite project was Market Hog. I am very excited to get to know my new community and get involved with agriculture and 4-H!

Website and Facebook Updates

With Kim Suta as a very tech savvy agent, our website has gotten a full overhaul. The website features an “Upcoming Events” section that is updated bi-monthly and it includes the latest 4-H newsletter in PDF form for anyone to view or download. Kim Suta will also be working on a website for the Marias Fair for all the counties to add content in one simple site!