MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY | EXTENSION

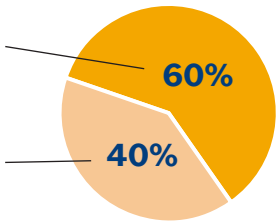
Improving Lives and Communities

Montana State University Extension's network of faculty and staff on the MSU-Bozeman campus and in county and reservation offices serve Montanans to fulfill the land-grant mission and in response to our assessment of local needs. MSU Extension partners with others to serve locally identified needs, improving lives with trusted education and information to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of individuals, families and communities. MSU Extension offers education in leadership, agriculture, horticulture, healthy living, estate planning, youth development, and more.

IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING PESTS FOR SAFETY AND SAVINGS

The Schutter Diagnostic Lab (SDL) is a nexus for statewide integrated pest management (IPM) efforts. Diagnosticians help safeguard agriculture, landscapes, and public spaces from pests by **providing identification services, advice, and education.** In 2023, SDL diagnoses and identifications impacted up to 250,461 acres. **SDL clients saved on average $34,518.**

In 2023 the SDL conducted 2,767 plant, plant disease, insect, mushroom, and abiotic diagnoses in all 56 Montana counties and four additional states



PARTICIPATION IN 4-H BUILDS LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR WORK AND LIFE

According to the US Department of Labor, employers report gaps in soft skills among job candidates and new hires, including communication, teamwork, problem solving and emotional intelligence. These are the skills that Montana teens gain because of participation in 4-H events.

Leadership Preparedness
84% reported feeling more prepared to take on leadership roles

Networking
83% expanded social networks and formed new connections with peers they wish to stay in touch with

Knowledge Sharing
83% learned new ideas they intend to share within their communities

Problem-Solving
81% indicated an increased readiness to tackle problems because of learning experiences

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NUTRITION PROGRAMS IMPROVE DIETARY PRACTICES

Adult obesity has been rising, with families facing barriers to nutrition education and access to healthy food. As part of the Nutrition Education Program, MSU Extension offers courses for adults with limited resources on nutrition, physical activity, food safety, budgeting, and provides coupons for access to fresh produce. As a result, **98 percent of participants improved diet quality,** with one participant noting how learning to meal plan and make healthy snacks for her daughter helped her make healthier choices and save money.

Nutrition Education programs provided **1,715 nutrition and physical activity classes, reaching 3,966 Montanans**

90% of adult participants improved food management practices

89% of youth participants made healthier food choices

60% increased or improved physical activity

IMPROVING WATER QUALITY THROUGH WELL EDUCATION AND TESTING

The Well Educated program distributes test kits with more than 40 partners to help private well owners test water and understand results. **One-third of Montanans rely on private household wells,** and over 20 percent contain health risk contaminants, yet many well owners are unaware of risks.

The program's data helps well owners understand local contamination risks like arsenic. By providing accessible, localized guidance on testing and treatment, **the program supports rural and underserved communities in mitigating health risks of contaminated well water.**

Since 2023 more than 565 participants received personalized water quality reports (for drinking, livestock and irrigation), with **44% of participants with health-related issues making changes to address water quality**

BOLSTERING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE AND RESPONSE SKILLS

Mental illness and substance use disorders are prevalent among Montanans, with rates higher than the national average. Early intervention is critical, but barriers such as stigma, limited awareness of resources, and cultural emphasis on self-reliance often prevent a person from seeking help.

Since 2017, MSU Extension has offered Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and Youth MHFA training to reduce stigma and equip adults and youth with skills to support those experiencing mental health challenges. MSU Extension has trained 791 adults and 235 youth in MHFA, with training efforts reaching school nurses, national park staff, and early childhood services staff, thereby enhancing community-wide mental health literacy and support.

MSU Extension has trained **791 adults** and **235 youth** in **Mental Health First Aid**

BUILDING LOCAL LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES

Montana faces the second-highest demand for leaders per capita in the US. In response, the Big Sky Big Leadership (BSBL) and Reimagining Rural programs develop leaders through local facilitation and volunteer engagement. **BSBL has served 400 participants with more than 13,000 hours of leadership training** positively impacting communities. Since inception, **Reimagining Rural has enriched 53 communities** across Montana.

The Resource Education and Agricultural Leadership (REAL) Montana program **has trained more than 100 leaders from 33 counties** to impact agriculture and natural resource industries.

"REAL Montana provides the opportunity to build leadership skills that I can use to serve my local community and Montana agriculture through my work."

– Riley Slivka, Class VI, Lewistown
Digital Media Producer at AgriStudios

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