

Virtual and Hands-on Gardening and Youth Development

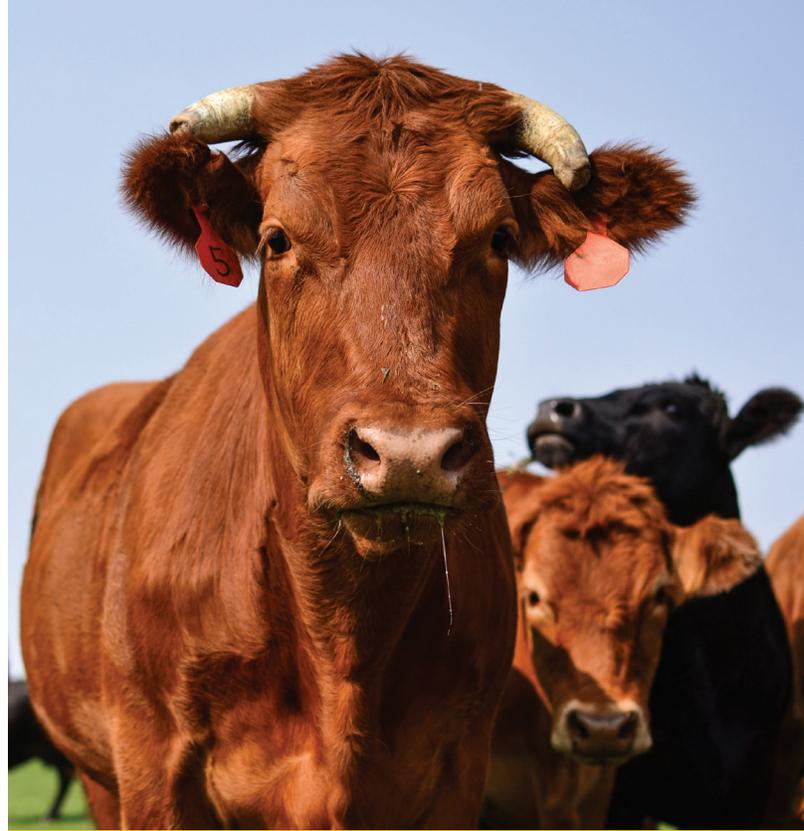
MSU Extension found ways to continue effective interactive, hands-on programs. In Big Horn County, the Gardening 100 series about basic gardening delivered a weekly short video on Facebook to more than 400 people ready to replicate the videos and try growing their own food. Carbon County offered interactive youth science classes, where at-home students built model digestive systems of ruminant animals, and built jumping machines after learning about biomechanics and mechanical engineering.

Ag Economics

MSU's Extension's Ag Economics group responded rapidly to questions about COVID-19's effect on Montana's economy by creating programs to help Montana's farming and ranching sectors. This included "The Economic Impacts of Coronavirus in Montana," a free webinar series during April and May. Together with Fort Peck Community College, they also held webinars to answer COVID-19 and other questions raised by Montana's American Indian communities. Most recently, they held a virtual, annual Ag Outlook Conference with 169 attendees, a near-record for the event.

Livestock Environment and Sustainability

COVID-19 has caused meat supply chain problems at locations across the U.S. **The MSU Extension Livestock Sustainability Specialist, with the assistance of the Montana Department of Livestock and other groups, have developed educational programs and contingency plans to address potential food chain disruptions.** This includes a plan for euthanasia, compost disposal of healthy livestock, processing needs, and supply chain bottlenecks due to potential COVID-19 caused disruptions/failures of livestock markets. To assist the public, Thomas Bass (Livestock Sustainability Specialist), with partners, is offering an online Western Meat School and certification program for small- and medium-size meat processors.



Livestock. Photo by Inga Hawbaker

Water Quality

Over 600 participants tested their water quality through the "Well-Educated Program" in 2020. Test results have identified health risks related to water quality issues and potential treatment options. In 2020 the MSU Extension Water Quality Program created a map indicating water quality health risks by county. This map will make it possible for people to know what to test for to ensure safe water. With more new wells drilled each year in Montana, the need for water testing guidance is critical to help people avoid negative health outcomes.

Modified County Fairs

Increased communication with fair boards and health officials led to creative solutions for holding county fairs, which are a positive learning experience for 4-H youth. Social distancing measures were added, schedules modified to limit daily barn attendance, and almost all livestock sales featured an online component. Despite major adjustments, parents, youth, buyers and community members shared positive feedback and success stories.