

# Fort Belknap Reservation



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*Little Rockies Mountains, Fort Belknap Reservation by Rod Benson.*

**A** continued focus of development and outreach efforts have centered on our role in responding to COVID-19-related needs. Fort Belknap Reservation Extension staff have operated as an integral component in developing local capacity for resource acquisition and distribution to community members.

Within the framework of Extension's directives, we are working online and in person to bring trusted resources to families, businesses, ranchers, and communities during these ever-changing days. Daily, we have seen the value and urgency of the power of education, diversity and community. Our outreach and programs have largely developed into a hybrid model of virtual and one-on-one approaches. We have been able to continue some out-of-doors activities, such as gardening, rancher/farmer consultation, and 4-H activities.

In light of this changing environment, we continue to address local community needs and interests through our work with progressive initiatives, such as Food Forests development, Master Gardener and No Kid Hungry programs, Farmer-Rancher Stress Management, SNAP-Ed, 4-H activities, and Opioid Abuse Prevention. Additionally, USDA online resources have supported the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), beef processing, small business assistance, cattle markets, and stimulus packages for individual producers.

## Food Sustainability

Extension staff, with the considerable support of community members, have continued to advance the impacts of Fort Belknap's community and home gardens, research orchard, and food preservation leaders. Approximately 200 home gardens now exist on the Fort Belknap Reservation, in addition to five productive community gardens.

We are continuing to work on building our capacity for food security at Fort Belknap through the following initiatives: The Well-Connected Communities Project supported an additional eight food preservation mentors and necessary program supplies; the Growing Together Montana grant provided financial assistance in the establishment of the Old Hays Community Garden; the new partnership with Department of Natural Resources and Conservation funded the creation of 10 food forests on the reservation; the collaboration with Nakoda Aaniiih Economic Development Corporation to create and staff a food sovereignty coordinator position; and the completion of the MSU Master Gardener series that was attended by 31 students across three counties. Additionally, we are expanding our focus to include current and future meat processing opportunities and initiatives.

The Fort Belknap Reservation, though rich in natural resources, has a distinct gap in infrastructure to support local production of beef and buffalo; meat processing resources would greatly expand our food sustainability capacity. MSU Extension is committed to leveraging partnerships, funding, and knowledge in our approach to advancing food sovereignty on the Fort Belknap Reservation.

## 4-H Resiliency

Even with the uncertainty of Covid-19 restrictions, three newly established clubs and 22 members of Fort Belknap Reservation 4-H met virtually from December through April, then in person May-August. The 4-H members learned important 4-H and life skills: 4-H book and journal training, gardening, Livestock Quality Assurance Training, club building activities, 4-H showmanship, and preparation. Five youth participated in the three-day 4-H Horse Camp focusing on horsemanship and horse health. The 4-H Fair was held in August at the Wasay Wakpa Rodeo Arena in Lodge Pole, MT, with 13 livestock projects (eight steer and five hog projects) and one horsemanship project. The hogs averaged 280 pounds and the average sale price was \$10.25/lb, while the steers averaged 1290 lbs and sold at \$7.25/lb.

The top priority of 4-H programs across the state is the health and safety of our youth, families, volunteers, faculty, staff and supporters throughout our communities. Through this year and in the future, we encourage our future leaders in learning resiliency and developing community support.

## Tribal Producer Outreach

Drought, COVID-19, fire, and livestock feed management hit Fort Belknap producers hard during 2021. Fort Belknap Extension responded to the current emergency needs with one-on-one consultations, community and tribal meetings, and local workshops. Along with attending weekly Tribal drought emergency meetings, Fort Belknap Extension collaborated with MSU Extension specialists, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Fort Belknap Tribal Land Department to present drought resources on July 27 at Fort Belknap Agency. Thirty-two producers attended the 4-hour Drought Assistance Workshop with a question-and-answer period at the end of the meeting. Producers left with the knowledge to best utilize Federal Programs during the 2021 Drought.

Local producers also participated in the week-long USDA Producer Education Conference in Billings, Montana June 1-4. CFAP (Coronavirus Food Assistance Program), beef processing, small business assistance, cattle market projections, drought assistance and preparedness, and stimulus packages for individuals were some of the topics covered. This conference





**Previous Page: (top)** Lodge Pole Home Garden, by Hillary Maxwell; **(center)** Frank Cole with his 2021 4-H Beef Project, by Jennifer Perez ; **(bottom)** 4-H Hog Weigh-In at the Hays Scale by Liz Werk; **This Page:** Old Hays Community Garden with WCC, by Hillary Maxwell

is part of a two-year USDA program grant, with a partnership with Fort Peck Community College and four Montana Indian Reservations.

One-on-one consultations and virtual workshops occurred throughout the year, consisting of drought responses and resources, and application training and assistance for agriculture loans and COVID assistance. Fort Belknap Extension assisted youth producers and new producers with the Montana Department of Agriculture Rural Assistance Loans and Junior Agricultural Loans. Four applications were completed and accepted. Online Noxious Weed Education and Training, Soil Health, Livestock Breeding Health, and Drought Resources were offered online by MSU Extension. On average, three local producers participated in each of the virtual workshops.

### Community Summer Outreach

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Education Program, or SNAP-Ed program, awarded six Growing Together Montana (GTMT) mini-grants this year to Master Gardeners. GTMT is a collaboration between the MSU Extension Nutrition Education Program and the Master Gardener program that provides grants to active Master Gardener volunteers with a focus on growing and donating produce to local food banks and supplying other emergency food resources. Each of these mini-grants, worth up to \$2,000, were used to help address food insecurity in different parts of Montana. This created an opportunity for Master Gardeners to work with SNAP-Ed instructors in their communities to deliver nutrition education to the individuals and families who utilize the food banks.

One of those recipients was Hillary Maxwell, the Family and Consumer Science Agent for Fort Belknap, also a Master Gardener, and the Old Hays Community Garden on the Fort Belknap Reservation. The garden contains several raised beds, which grew tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce, peppers, potatoes,

radishes, squash, and cilantro/herbs. An addition to the garden was a food forest which contains bee balm, rhubarb, spearmint, echinacea, and an apple tree. Others assisting with the project included; Collette Werk, who provided community leadership and volunteered time, with the help of local families in the Old Hays Community, to provide caregiving and build a fence around the grounds of the garden; Collette Hawley was the contact at the Hays Senior Center, which was the main recipient of the donated produce of the garden; also, the 2021 MSU Extension Intern Kayla Tandy provided help in maintaining the new community garden.

## Fort Belknap Reservation Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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