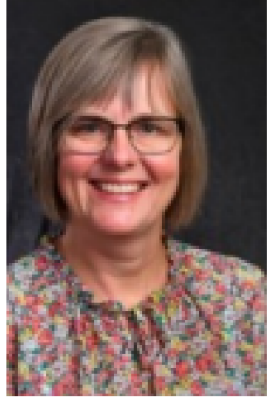


Message from the District Director



Based on MSU Extension annual reporting and evaluation feedback, 2022 proved to be another good year leveraging resources provided by Branch County to help us do our work in the community. Staff reports revealed working with schools, service organizations, local government, residents and youth to provide educational programs, and one-on-one consultation in Branch County. Indirect work was also strong in

the county with outreach through newsletters, social and print media, educational articles for farmers and businesses and fact sheets on nutrition, immunizations, early childhood education, youth development and other important topics to help people make decisions and improve quality of life. In 2022, District 13 educators worked together with MSU researchers, federal and state agencies and non-profits to bring in nearly \$1 million in grant funding to expand their research and outreach efforts. This report provides a few statistics and sample stories as evidence of our work. We look forward to continuing our partnerships in Branch County and strengthening the community through quality research based information and educational programs.

Julie Pioch, District Director

Branch County Based Staff

Dave Thompson - Pork AABI Educator
Victor Malacco - Dairy AABI Educator
Megan Wilczynski - 4-H Program Coordinator
Tamra Bildner - Secretary

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**Branch County
General Fund
Appropriations**

2020	\$127,417
2021	\$115,172
2022	\$134,568

606 4-H Youth Enrolled
182 Adult Volunteers
32 Community Clubs

159
EXTENSION PROGRAMS
INCLUDED BRANCH COUNTY
RESIDENTS

453
BRANCH COUNTY
RESIDENTS ATTENDED
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

89
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS
REPORTED*

5
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY

WEBSITE STATISTICS

3473
COUNTY VISITORS
13,002
PAGE VIEWS
17%
REGULAR CONSUMERS

Branch 4-H Story of Success

My first year on the State 4-H Youth Leaders Council (SYLC) started in December, 2019. There was a lot of optimism and excitement for the following year to come because of how active SYLC is around the state. My first event was the SYLC Meet and Greet at the Kettunen Center where I was able to meet fellow members. We went through training courses on things like equality, diversity and inclusion and how to do an elevator speech. We had a zoom call with the Michigan 4-H Foundation President and the Director of MSU Extension and asked them questions about their vision of 4-H. At the end of the day, we were able to sit and talk around the fireplace about what we do in 4-H at home and what we can bring back to our counties.

My time on SYLC was different than youth before me because I joined four months before Covid 19 so most experiences happened over zoom, but they were still very impactful. I was able to help with Teen Tuesdays, Capital Experience Online, 4-H Exploration Days, and was a keynote speaker for an online 4-H Recognition Night. I was able to do many new and exciting things that I would have never had been able to do.

After my SYLC term ended my term as youth advisor began. As a youth advisor I help manage SYLC meetings, work with networking groups, and am a peer advisor to SYLC members. I helped lead the last two SYLC trainings. This year's group are very ambitious and that means I am a very busy youth advisor but I absolutely love it!

This last year has been one of my most exciting years as a part of SYLC. I've gotten to see new members grow in their leadership skills and help advise them in the programs and ideas that they want to do. I'm excited for the summer where we get to meet up and start actually putting their ideas and programs and workshops into action.

Abigail Lehman, 4-H Branch County

Community Leaders Praise Lakes Program

"I really loved the whole experience; I was looking to better educate myself to speak knowingly about watershed conservation at township meetings and thanks to this class I will be able to do just that. I now know how to be a better steward of the lakes and feel the support of so many organizations that you have made me aware of, thanks! "

"All of the information was clear, actionable and came with useful resource links."

I feel like I learned a lot and have the tools to apply this knowledge when working with others in my area. "

Introduction to Lakes is a six-week online course designed for lake users, lakefront property owners, and lake managers. In 2022, there was a cohort of 524 participants from 19 states and four countries, the largest in MSU Extension's experience to date since the program began. Participants were spread out over 69 counties. There were 49 local government officials in the course and 289 owned riparian property. Of the 524 participants, 86% of them completed all six units and received a Certificate of Completion. The high completion rate is attributed to the level of interaction with participants. Unlike many online courses, Introduction to Lakes is cohort based and taught on a week-by-week basis, allowing for online communication between classmates and instructors through topical discussion forums. There were 2,255 discussion forum posts and replies on the course website.

Reducing Stress to Improve Mental Health

According to 2019 research by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, over 1.3 million adult Michiganders have a mental health condition. About 38% of these individuals are not receiving care. Social and emotional health encompasses forming and maintaining satisfying and healthy relationships, taking another's perspective, resolving interpersonal conflict, feeling capable and whole, expressing emotions, navigating stress, and having supportive relationships. Stress reduction and anger management programs help individuals learn how to improve their mental health and well-being.

One of the programs offered by MSU Extension Health Educators is *RELAX: Alternatives to Anger for Parents and Caregivers*. This workshop for adults provides information to help support positive youth development, self-control and dealing with strong emotions. Participants learn about anger triggers for adults and children and practice ways to calm down.

The workshop was offered several times throughout 2022 as a stand along program and as part of a weekly on-line series of other health team offerings. Several Branch County residents attended. Participants shared some of their thoughts, suggestions and insight during the on-line sessions:

Demand for Virtual Programs Continue

Every Thursday during the growing season, farmers and agribusiness professionals can access the most current information available for timely, relevant, in-season crop and weather information by tuning into the MSU Extension field crops team's Virtual Breakfast Series. Following topical presentations, participants interact with MSU specialists and educators in a question-and-answer period. This innovative program provides growers the opportunity to participate in a live webinar via their computer, laptop, cell phone or Facebook. Sessions are closed-captioned and recorded for later viewing on the MSUE website or as a podcast in Spotify, Apple, Audible, and Podvine.

"This series provides much information about current issues and is a great tool for farmers to gain knowledge. It generates discussions between us farmers as well outside of the series airtime. You guys do a GREAT job with this and I thank you for providing this information and discussions."

"Overall, I really enjoyed attending when I was able to! The RUP credits obtained were also an awesome bonus to attending! Thank you for providing this online format for discussion & knowledge! It's super convenient to listen to in the cab of a tractor during the busy seasons, and even at home on the couch during the less hectic times! Being a young farmer, a ton of this information is valuable and especially interesting to share with my parents as we continue to grow throughout the years! I look forward to tuning in for years to come! Thanks again!"

"It's important because I don't always want to always yell at someone that I'm angry with."

"Something I know but this put it in perspective...how much stress plays a part in your well being."

You can't get out of a troublesome situation by doing the same thing that got you there. You'll just go in a vicious circle."

"Last week I had a victory and was able to listen to my wife at the height of the conflict. Afterward she thanked me for how I listened and didn't try to solve it. She was super appreciative."

"Taking the time to listen rather than jump in was my focus this week, it is difficult but has been effective."

"If you are headed in reverse in life you are just replaying the same thing over and over you have no opportunity for any change."

"More awareness of what triggers my reaction."

Meat Cutter Training Course Provides Job Training Skills

The MSU Extension Meat Cutter Training Course is a hands-on introduction to beef and pork fabrication. The primary goal is for participants to learn where beef and pork cuts originate from on carcasses and use their newly gained knife skills to break down pork and beef carcasses into various cuts. Additionally, participants learn about the proper personal protective equipment to wear during meat processing and gain experience in grinding meat, cleaning and sanitation of equipment and the facility. Two 4-day sessions of the course were held in 2022. Enrollment was capped at 8 participants per session to allow maximum hands-on experience and interaction with staff and faculty in the MSU Meat Laboratory. In total, 16 participants received their Certificate of Completion in 2022 with one from Branch County.



When asked to give feedback on the effectiveness of the course, the following trends for improvement were observed from participants:

- Meat cutting skills: 100%
- Sanitation: 93.3%
- Packaging types and methods: 80%
- Knife handling: 93.3%
- Confidence in meat cutting: 100%

Participant comments included:

"I would recommend the course to anyone looking to gain knowledge in carcass fabrication. The information was easy to digest for me as a total beginner and the instructors were able to help those with more background to fine tune their trade."

"Thank you so much! Instructors' love of the subject was very infectious!"

"I very much enjoyed the course and thought it was a good intro to meat cutting. Definitely feel more prepared to go into the meat industry."

Teaching Life Skills for a Lifetime

MSU Extension educators have developed a series of workshops designed to provide life skills education to assist young people in transitioning to adulthood. Under the title of Adulthood 101, the series includes lessons in workforce preparation, financial literacy, communication, civics, and healthy living. Sixteen Adulthood 101 sessions were offered for free virtually in 2022, reaching a total of 830 participants across the state, including many young people from Branch County. Comments from young people following workshops on workplace professionalism included:

"I learned that if you have the right attitude you can be more successful and to say no when you need to."

"I learned that having good manners and being well dressed may help your employer to know that you are serious about your job."

"Do research before you believe everything coworkers say."

"I learned how time management is important and that dressing is big too."

To meet financial literacy goals, a program titled "Avoiding Money Mishaps" was offered to increase awareness and provide practical tips for youth to prevent identity theft, predatory lending, scams and fraud. After the class, 95% felt more confident in protecting their identity and in their ability to avoid scams and fraud. Comments from youth included:

"This class will help me avoid suspicious and unsafe scammers and people who steal identities."

"I will start shredding my mail and expired forms of identification before throwing them away."

"Thank you, this helps me very much. I can't wait for the next classes."

Based on feedback from participants, Adulthood 101 sessions will continue monthly throughout 2023 and several new topics have been added such as Medical Insurance 101, Cracking the Code to College, How to Buy a Car, Eating Healthy on a Budget, and Sew What! Clothing Care saves Cash.