



# CASS COUNTY 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

## MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



Despite the ongoing pandemic of 2021, Michigan State University Extension continued to work for Cass County youth, adults, businesses and communities providing outstanding research-based education and community development programs.

With the learning curve of on-line programming behind us, we continued to expand and perfect our digital educational offerings.

Considering the health and safety of participants, many of our face-to-face programs provided both an in-person and remote option to participate.

Our educators found creative ways to offer outdoor programs and engage with schools and community groups while maintaining social distancing.

This report provides a snapshot of our accomplishments from 2021. Please reach out to me or anyone from MSU Extension with ideas for programs, contacts for new partners or feedback on our work. It takes all of us to bring the best programming to the district.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support of Michigan State University Extension in Cass County.

*Julie Pioch, District Director*

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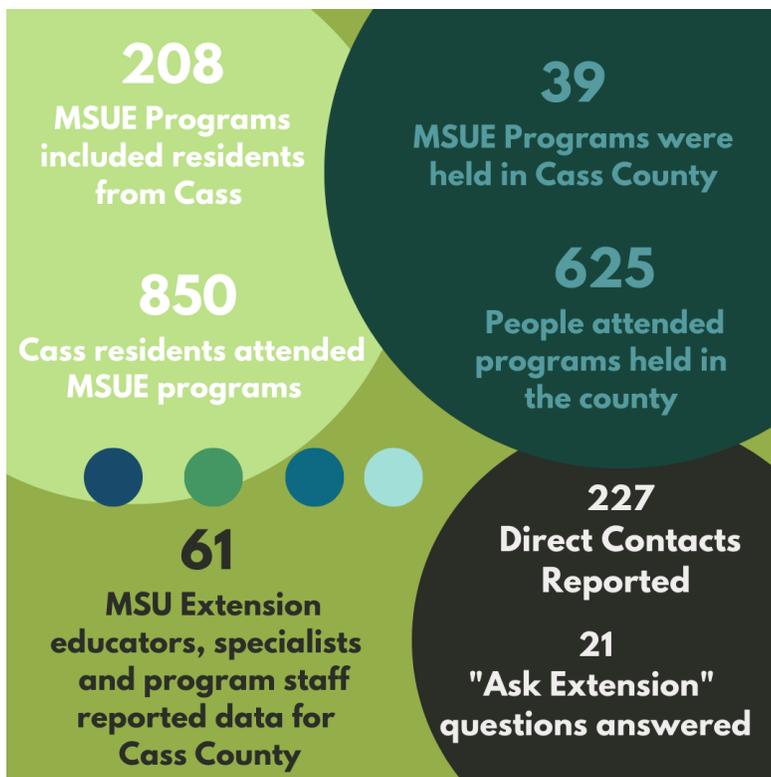
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## CASS COUNTY GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATION

2019-2020 \$101,504  
2020-2021 \$115,089  
2021-2022 \$121,460



## 4-H AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

A total of 637 youth were enrolled in Cass County 4-H Clubs in 2021. In addition, 135 adult volunteers dedicated their time to mentoring, teaching, and providing leadership to the program. In order to maintain a high-quality program that is safe and welcoming to all youth, 4-H staff time was invested in training and coaching volunteers. Working one on one with leaders to manage safety protocols imposed during the pandemic was essential in helping them convene club meetings remotely and in organizing activities that would keep young people engaged. To equip our volunteers with skills to manage conflict, each leader was required to participate in a short online training in order to stay in good standing in 2021. 4-H Leaders involved in the Leaders Association assisted with fundraising activities, countywide community service projects and program promotion in 2021. The Cass County 4-H Horse Leaders' Association sponsored a six-week virtual program which featured topics to keep the attending youth engaged.



CASS COUNTY 4-H HORSE LEADERS' PRESENT  
**EQUINE EDUCATION THURSDAYS!**  
MARCH 4 - APRIL 8  
6:30 PM



- SPORTSMANSHIP
- VETERINARY CARE
- NUTRITION
- AND MORE!

REGISTER THROUGH 4-H ONLINE  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

## PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR SUCCESS

Michigan 4-H provides youth with hands-on opportunities to explore future jobs and careers, including entrepreneurship, while enhancing their financial literacy and important life skills for the workforce. In 2021, 38 Cassopolis Middle School youth participated in Mock Interviews as part of a long-term partnership with MSU Extension and Southwestern Michigan College's Educational Talent Search (ETS). ETS is a federally funded TRiO Program committed to enhancing and ensuring the academic and personal success of local eligible middle and high school students in the Dowagiac, Marcellus, Cassopolis, and Edwardsburg school districts in Cass County. MSU Extension Educators also facilitated a summer entrepreneurship day camp for ETS participants. Fourteen budding entrepreneurs ages 13 to 16 attended. The teens learned about business plans, marketing, networking and setting goals. When asked how they might use this information in the future, their responses included: "I might start a business!" - "I will use it to start the café and bakery I want in the future." - "I learned about teamwork and time management."

As a result of participating in the entrepreneurship camp, survey responses revealed that:

- 64% indicated that they planned to start their own business in the future.
- 73% planned to pursue further education about entrepreneurship and business.
- 91% agreed that they were aware of how they could use their skills to become an entrepreneur.

The week ended with a pop-up market outside the David C. Briegel Building of SMC's Dowagiac campus. Students voted to donate \$867 of their sales made that day to Cass County Animal Control.

To introduce new audiences to 4-H and inspire youth to explore pathways to STEM careers in fisheries and wildlife, the 4-H Wild Spartans program was held monthly from October 2020 to May 2021. The synchronous series had 143 families enrolled including families from Cass County. The program reached 51 families that were new to 4-H.

Each virtual session introduced youth to a scientist, their research and field work, and the education and career path they followed. The series included a live session with each scientist where youth were encouraged to ask questions. Youth asked over 300 unique questions, positive responses, and comments that allowed the team to evaluate learning and engagement with the subject matter. All sessions were recorded, closed captioned and saved on a website as a readily searchable resource for educators and home school audiences. Each recording includes links for continued STEM learning & 4-H Career Preparation resources.

*Leaders are critical to the success of 4-H and assisted with educational programs in 2021*



*Pictures of some of the booths set up at the end of camp pop-up market at SMC*



## AGRICULTURE

### MI AG IDEAS TO GROW WITH VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

MSU Extension Agriculture Educators rose to the challenge in 2021 in being able to continue to pivot their traditional educational efforts to methods that would provide clientele with access to programs and information from their homes or office. One significant effort developed to meet this need was the MI Ag Ideas to Grow With virtual conference.

This unique event combined the annual events of Ag Action Day, Branch County Farmers Day, and Southwest Michigan Horticulture Days into a week-long virtual program. It featured subject matter tracks from livestock production, fruit and vegetable production, sustainability, soil health and irrigation to horticulture and home gardening. A track was also offered for youth participants. All in all, 55 different education sessions were offered.

Each day focused on specific topics with sessions occurring at the top of every hour. The horticulture, home gardening and animal agriculture sessions were featured daily throughout the week. Educators worked with state officials to make it possible for attendees to receive RUP and CCA credits for eligible sessions.

While this program was developed to provide access to education typically delivered at MSU Extension's in-person programming the success of the virtual platform exceeded the expectations of the planning team. During the weeklong event participants from 47 counties in Michigan (including Cass) attended sessions and over 980 sessions were accessed by clientele. Attendees included some who not participated in the traditional in-person programs in the past.

*"Thank you so much for putting on this conference. I've attended the past few years and I always learn a lot. You guys do a really good job of providing various quality materials and knowledgeable speakers."*

### FIELD CROPS WEBINAR SERIES

With 754 registrants, it was a record year for the 2021 Field Crops Webinar series. Sixty-two percent of attendees were full time farmers and 25% were part time farmers. A whopping 880 completed surveys were submitted. Eighty-seven percent of attendees reported they learned something and 372 (42%) said they would make a change on their farm to manage risk and improve production efficiency on 295,366 acres. This totaled a financial impact of \$3,223,318 or an average of \$11/acre towards the change on their farm. What an amazing impact MSU Extensions 5-part webinar series had on Michigan's Field crop industry!

### LOAN PREPARATION SERIES FOR NEW & BEGINNING FARMERS

Loans are an important tool for growing a successful farm business and are a beneficial part of business development. MSU Extension partnered with Greenstone Farm Services, Northern Initiatives and United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency to host an education series to prepare new and beginning farmers with the tools needed to approach a lender.

Representatives from each lending organization discussed the financial and business documents needed to begin the loan process and financial tips for successful repayments. The sessions included one-on-one "office hours" with the lenders. Seven Cass residents were among 202 participants who joined this on-line series in Winter 2021.

### MICHIANA IRRIGATED CORN AND SOYBEAN CONFERENCE

Producing corn and soybeans under irrigation provides both opportunities and challenges for producers and a high concentration of the irrigated production occurs in Southwest Michigan and Northeast Indiana. Therefore, MSU and Purdue Extension have collaborated with their state corn and soybean checkoff organizations to conduct a high-profile, multi-state educational program in Shipshewana, IN since 2014.

In 2021, 153 producers and agronomists participated in the conference (including many from Cass County). A post season follow-up evaluation revealed that:

- 96% of the respondents gained new knowledge by participating in the program.
- 88% said that they used information they learned on their farms during the 2021 growing season.
- 20 producers said they earned more money by implementing the information they learned at the program. The average additional income was \$18.60 per acre which applied to 8,786 acres, producing a financial impact of \$163,375.

Producers raising corn and soybeans under irrigation in Southwest Michigan and Northwest Indiana have come to rely on this annual event as an important source of information for helping them mitigate the challenges and maximizing the opportunities associated with irrigated crop production. This is demonstrated by the consistently strong attendance the willingness of participants to provide meaningful input regarding topics for future meetings.



## CASS ANIMAL CONTROL PARTNERS FOR EMERGENCY TRAINING

When working with animals, you have to expect the unexpected and be prepared for chaotic situations. The welfare of the animal is always a concern for the Cass County Animal Control department, second only to the health and safety of the staff who are responsible for handling situations with animals - including livestock. Emergency responders have to be ready to respond to accidents involving both single animals and truckloads of animals.

In summer 2021 Berrien and Cass County Animal Control Directors worked with MSU Extension to make sure their teams had training and proper equipment that may be needed in certain situations.

“Unfortunately, there are times that we have to make decisions based on what is in the best interest of an animal’s welfare, those are not fun or easy decisions,” said Beth Ferry MSU Extension Educator. “But having the right equipment and properly trained people make all the difference.”

The Directors and Ferry worked together to source a properly sized captive bolt device that would be used if an animal needed to be euthanized out in the field. A captive bolt device is recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) as a humane piece of euthanasia equipment and one of the safest methods for those that are responsible for completing this process. MSU Experts, along with Ferry, provided training on the proper use, cleaning and handling of this piece of equipment.



*Staff from Cass and Berrien County Animal Control repeatedly used the captive bolt device to ensure that staff had an acceptable level of comfort with this new tool.*

## WHAT IS “ASK EXTENSION”?

MSU Extension’s [“Ask Extension”](#) is an online tool that can be used by community members to get answers from MSU Extension experts. Questions received have ranged from food safety, agriculture and gardening, to natural resources questions relating to frogs and snakes to land use and home ownership questions. As seen on the infographic on the cover page of this report MSU Extension answered 21 inquiries from Cass County residents.

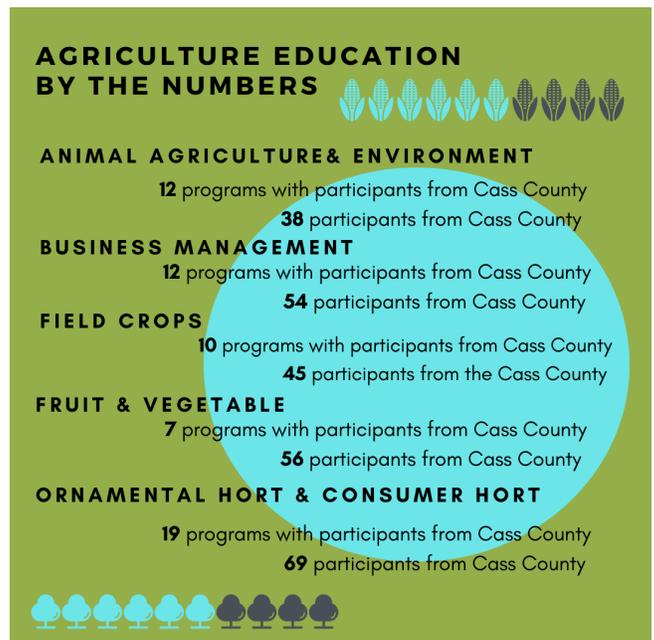
Once questions are submitted, they are “wrangled” by a team at MSU Extension and forwarded to the MSU expert who can answer the question. Questions come in from all around Michigan as well as from all over the county. With our national extension service network, some questions are even answered by colleagues from other universities when needed.

Seeing what questions are submitted can also help MSU Extension educators see trends and identify needs for other educational products like articles or even research projects.

The trend for use of the site is going up as we look over the last few years. Since 2017, there has been a significant increase in the number of questions each year. MSU Extension staff promote this online tool at events such as Home and Garden Shows, articles, email signatures, presentations, program related websites, and more.

Some highlights for 2021 include:

- 7,470 questions answered.
- 21 questions came from Cass County residents.
- 163 MSU Extension staff and 26 MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers answered questions.
- 10 of the top 20 responders were MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers.





## GOVERNMENT, COMMUNITY VITALITY & NATURAL RESOURCES

### ARPA FUNDS TRAINING

MSU Extension partnered with the Michigan Association of Regions to host 14 workshops around the state for local and tribal government officials to discuss American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund spending opportunities. Participants were able to attend the sessions in person or join remotely. The sessions covered ARPA fund basic rules, best practices and early examples of ARPA spending; practical considerations for contracts, accounting, and project management. Group discussion centered on regional collaboration, leveraging funding sources and setting priorities. This workshop series had over 750 participants from Michigan's units of government including 10 from Cass County. When asked about the workshop one participant said:

*"Great job! I am thinking more broadly about ways to use our ARPA funds. I was very pleased with the attendance, facilitation, the information shared and received as well as the flow of the workshop."*

### FISCALLY READY COMMUNITY SERIES

Several Cass County community leaders joined 390 others in attending a four-part series, created to assist communities establish, measure, and maintain policies to increase operational and financial effectiveness and safeguards. The Fiscally Ready Communities series was a program designed by MSU Extension in partnership with the Michigan Department of Treasury to help local governments work toward fiscal health by sharing best practices in fiscal sustainability.

### ZONING ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING

*"Take It, Take It, Take It! The information you get will help not only you, but your community as well. You will be glad you did"* was the response from one participant who attended MSU Extension's Zoning Administrator Certificate (ZAC) program – now in its 13th year. The program provides training to those who administer and enforce local zoning ordinances and continues to be a trusted source of training for local government officials with 100% of respondents recommending that *"all zoning administrators attend this program."*

In 2021, 48 participants from 29 Michigan counties (including two from Cass) graduated from the course. The 2021 ZAC program was held virtually over 10 weeks in February, March, and April. Zoning administrators completed 8 modules, each focused on a different aspect the zoning administrator's job such as reviewing plot and site plans, inspections and violations, and customer service and delivered through a blend of live Zoom meetings and self-

paced online sessions. Participants finished by testing their planning and zoning knowledge through a rigorous 195 question exam. Those who completed all the course modules and received a passing exam grade were recognized with a Zoning Administrator Certificate to acknowledge their professional development.

### INTRO TO LAKES LEADERSHIP COURSE

Two Cass County residents joined 286 attendees in the six-week Introduction to Lakes course in 2021. The program is now in its 4<sup>th</sup> year. The series focuses on developing local leaders through education in lake ecology and management. The series combines self directed educational sessions with online communication between participants and instructors through topical discussion forums. Participants also attend three webinar sessions with instructors and outside experts.

### MICORPS COOPERATIVE LAKES MONITORING PROGRAM

The Michigan Clean Water Corps (MiCorps) is a network of volunteer water quality monitoring programs in Michigan. It was created to assist the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) in collecting and sharing water quality data for use in water resources management and protection programs. The MiCorps Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP) is Michigan's long term volunteer lake monitoring program MSU Extension plays a leading role in management of this citizen science program and received funds in 2021 to continue to coordinate the program for the next 5 years. The primary purpose of the CLMP is to help citizen volunteers monitor water quality and habitat in their lake and document changes in lake quality over time.

IN 2021, Seven lakes from Cass County were enrolled in the CLMP. Cass County volunteers have been monitoring their lakes through this program for many years. For example, Eagle Lake has been collecting data off and on since 1974. Volunteers from 10 lakes from Cass County have signed up for 2022.

Part of a successful citizen science program is educational programs that train volunteers on proper data collection and provide a sense of community between the volunteers. Cass County volunteers attended MSU Extension's annual training at the Michigan Lakes and Streams Associations conference in 2021. The day long program provided training for volunteers on water quality and habitat parameter protocols. Several volunteers also attended a Spring kick off in May and follow up Summer meeting. The impact of this program not only improves the knowledge and skills of the volunteers who work within it but also the health and protection of Michigan's inland lakes and streams.



## NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

With a focus on reaching those in the community who are eligible to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits (SNAP), MSU Extension works with community partners to present one-time lessons and 6 to 8 session series on nutrition and physical activity education to students, adults and seniors. The SNAP education curriculum is an evidence-based program that helps people lead healthier lives, teaches people about good nutrition and how to make their food dollars stretch further. In 2021, Nora Lee, Community Nutrition Instructor completed series with 106 youth and 22 adults and reached 167 youth and 22 adults through one-time presentations for a total reach in Cass County of 317 participants. Classes were held in person and online in partnership with Patrick Hamilton Schools, Sam Adams Middle School, Sister Lakes Schools, Northpointe Learning Center, Great Start Readiness Program, and Brookside Learning Center. According to Nora Lee:

*I was teaching a lesson on protein to a group of young students. They thought protein was only meat. I told them about other foods in the group such as eggs, nuts, peanut butter and beans. One student said, "I don't like beans!" I told the student that was fine as long as he was still eating other foods from the protein group. As the lesson went on, I asked the students to give me a thumbs up or a thumbs down if they liked a certain food. When I mentioned bean burrito over half the class gave a thumbs up, even the student that said he didn't like beans. I explained to the class that the refried beans in a bean burrito are pinto beans that have been cooked and mashed. I said, "So, if you eat a bean burrito you are eating a type of bean." The students looked at me in surprise and the one that said he didn't like beans said, "Man, I didn't know that." When I teach, it is very important to break down the information to students, so they can relate the lesson to foods they eat and then use the information to make healthier food choices.*

## HEALTH

The MSU Extension health team offers a variety of programs to help people learn to improve their lives through educational programs in social emotional issues, chronic disease, addiction and pain management. The team held 35 programs that included 47 residents from Cass County. Program highlights for 2021 included:

Mindful Mondays Lunch & Learn teaches and encourages the use of mindfulness self-care skills to help participants feel better and enjoy life more. Research has shown that practicing mindfulness is effective in reducing stress-related symptoms such as worry, depression and physical tension, and may be helpful in managing chronic conditions such as cardiac disease and diabetes. Topics covered in these Monday sessions included breathing techniques, mindful eating, changing negative self-talk, and mindfulness for parents and caregivers. This online series reached more than 2000 participants including residents from Cass County.

RELAX is a four-part educational series designed to help adults, parents and caregivers increase their knowledge about anger issues and put anger management and healthy relationship skills into practice. Through presentations, group discussion and skill-building activities, participants learn what anger is, what triggers anger, calming down and de-stressing methods, the principles of problem solving, effective communication skills and forgiving and letting go of the past. In 2021, programs reached nearly 600 participants including residents of Cass County.

## FOOD SAFETY

As the coronavirus pandemic progressed forcing people to stay home, interest in gardening and preserving food at home skyrocketed. This was seen by the enormous interest in our online Food Preservation classes. After moving quickly to pivot MSU Extension Food Preservation classes to an online format there was an explosion of interest as evidenced by more than 10,000 people registering for online classes from June-December 2020. Continuing into 2021, we recognize that online learning offers opportunities to reach more people with education on safe home food preservation practices. Distance learning can address the discrepancies caused by socioeconomic and geographic differences, schedules, and ease of accessibility. The team reached 7,189 people in nearly 400 programs including 26 programs that included 28 residents from Cass County. Food Preservation classes were offered from mid-January through early December 2021. Each program included a lesson, and a panel to answer consumer questions. In 2021, a variety of food preservation topics were covered in order to provide research-based education and resources to consumers on safely preserving food at home.