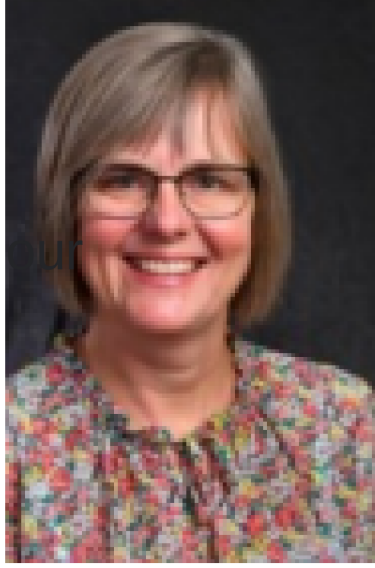


Message from the District Director



Based on MSU Extension staff annual reporting and evaluation feedback, 2022 proved to be another good year leveraging resources provided by Cass County to help us do 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 Cass 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 Cass County and strengthening the community through quality research based information and educational programs.

Julie Pioch, District Director

Cass County Staff

Jon LaPorte - Farm Financial Management Educator
Nora Lee - Community Nutrition Instructor
Lorenne Witham - 4-H Program Coordinator
Patty Dohm - Secretary

Contact

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Cass County
General Fund
Appropriations

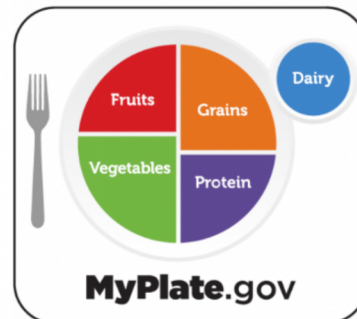
2020-21	\$104,526
2021-22	\$121,460
2022-23	\$124,700

272
EXTENSION PROGRAMS
INCLUDED CASS COUNTY
RESIDENTS

2182
CASS COUNTY
RESIDENTS ATTENDED
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

156
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS
REPORTED*

75
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY



623 4-H Youth Enrolled
142 Adult Volunteers
25 Community Clubs
1624 Total Youth Reached

18 USC 707

KUDOS FOR NUTRITION PROGRAM

I am a substitute teacher and recently I had the awesome pleasure of being in a 2nd/3rd grade classroom when Ms. Lee appeared at our door. She was there to do a scheduled "Nutrition Program." As a former teacher and school administrator, I can't tell you how impressed I was with the entire lesson. Every student was fully engaged as she asked recall information from the previous lesson (and they did indeed have the answers), presented new information about healthy eating and food groups, discussed the importance of staying hydrated with water, and had the children move around the classroom. I was extremely impressed with her teaching style. Her enthusiasm and energy were contagious! What a wonderful way to get young children involved with their individual 'health journey' with information and facts that can last them a lifetime. The nutrition program that I observed appears extremely proactive and, in my humble opinion, is just what children need. Keep up the GREAT work, Ms. Lee!

Written by substitute teacher at Dowagiac School

WEBSITE STATISTICS

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

On-farm Training Important for Dairy farms

Agriculture, like other industry sectors, faces issues with hiring and retaining employees. Employee training is an employee retention strategy. The MSU Extension Dairy team provides employee training tailored for a farm's specific needs in several management areas of the dairy farm. A 2022 training at the Sparks Cedarlee Organic Dairy Farm in Cass County is a successful example of Extension's work in providing training for employees.

The Sparks Cedarlee dairy requested an employee training on milking procedures and animal handling. The training was delivered in Spanish, with a section conducted in the farm's meeting room, followed by a hands-on demonstration. There was great engagement and interest by employees. They provided examples of situations in which they could implement what they were learning and what needed improvement in their current management practices. Based on employee feedback and interest, the farmer requested two additional hands-on trainings covering other important topics. Because the trainings were

conducted at the farm all the employees could attend all three sessions. All participants received a certificate after each training. After six months, feedback from the farmer included:

- Improvement in protocol compliance.
- Increased engagement on the job.
- Improved communication with the management team.

Additionally, the producer reported:

- A bulk tank somatic cell count reduction of 30.000. Such reduction is a result of improved udder health and lower mastitis infections for the whole herd.
- A decrease in clinical mastitis cases. Clinical mastitis is the most expensive disease that affects dairy cattle.
- Improved animal handling.

He also highlighted the importance of accommodating the needs of employees by delivering the training in Spanish, which he considers essential for the learning process.

Planning for Renewable Energy

A 2021 Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy study found Michigan communities unprepared for larger scale solar deployment. In response, MSU Extension collaborated with the University of Michigan to create a comprehensive resource, *Planning and Zoning for Solar Energy Systems: A Guidebook for Michigan Communities*. The Solar Guidebook was created to educate and enable thoughtful advancement of the deployment of solar energy in Michigan. A state-wide educational program followed to introduce the Solar Guidebook to planners, appointed and elected government officials. Six in-person programs and 2 webinars were held in 2022 with 373 participants (including leaders from Cass County) attending. Evaluations revealed that 93% of respondents increased their knowledge in the topic. In addition, participants said that they would:

"Update the zoning ordinance"

"Discuss importance of including alternative energy into the Master Plan with my board."

"Definitely will address renewable energy in our Master Plan and follow up with zoning ordinance changes. Also, since our master plan addresses Agricultural preservation I think we need to define what we mean by preservation."

I will help review Master Plan updates to incorporate defined sustainability goals so that future ordinance updates address solar."

Demand for Virtual Programs Continues

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.

"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!"

"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."

First Impressions Tourism Assessment in Cassopolis Provides Evidence to Build On

MSU Extension's First Impressions: Tourism Assessment (FIT) is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors that leads to new development based on program results. FIT involves developing community leadership, assessing the host community, sharing the results in a community forum and providing suggestions to drive community action. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors. Since inception in 2016, MSU Extension has continued to provide Michigan communities with a plethora of data and suggestions based off first-time visitor perspectives and experiences.

In early 2021, MSU Extension began a two-year partnership with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to offer the award-winning FIT assessment program to select Redevelopment Ready Certified (RRC) communities. The partnership selected four communities: Grayling (2021), Cassopolis (2021), Allegan (2022), and Hart (2022).

Communities were required to develop Community Leadership Teams made up of public, private, and non-profit leaders to manage the project and sponsor a public forum after the assessment report was completed. MSU Extension organized the assessment team, provided a written report of results and recommendations and facilitated the community forums.

The final report for Cassopolis included a general summary of raw data generated from visitor assessment surveys, photos, and discussions. The information provided in the report reflects the exclusive perspectives of five visitors to the Village of Cassopolis and surrounding region. The result of the Cassopolis FIT assessment and key findings were presented to the Village of Cassopolis in February 2022 and is available on the MSU Extension website.

The Cassopolis forum attracted nearly 100 participants. Evaluations revealed 88% thought the information shared will help strengthen collaboration within the community and 84% strongly agreed that the information from the assessment will be used to advance tourism in the community. Participants were also asked a series of qualitative questions after participating in their community forum. Qualitative responses garnered from participants at Cassopolis forum demonstrated the significance FIT carries after a pause in community activity due to covid-19 in 2020.

Long Term Work with Cassopolis Brings Results and Awards

The Village of Cassopolis partnered with MSU Extension, and several other organizations, over the past several years to engage in a robust community visioning and planning process to revitalize their downtown area as part of the *Imagine Cass - Embrace the Vision, Cassopolis Transformation Project*. Participation in MSU Extension's Sustainable Built Environment Initiative and the First Impressions for Tourism assessment over the last few years have been key parts of the Village's strategy to improve the quality of life for residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

In 2022, this work was recognized by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SMPC) via the Graham Woodhouse Award. This honor is given to community projects that exemplify intergovernmental cooperation. MSU Extension was one of 21 identified partners and 25 separate funders who contributed to the efforts in the Village.

Members of the SMPC highlighted the important role that MSU Extension's visioning process through SBEI played in helping launch future efforts and engaging the community through very well attended meetings. Leaders in the Village of Cassopolis continue to engage with MSU Extension to not only build their capacity but to also share lessons learned with other communities. For example, Village staff created and delivered a presentation at the 2022 Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference in Alma Michigan.

Other partners recognized included Cassopolis Main Street, Midwest Energy & Communications, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan, Cass County and Cass Economic Development Corporation.

“The Imagine Cass Project sought to transform our entire community, stop the perpetual decline and unite, for the first time in decades, under the core principles of community vision, collaboration, citizen-led change and the premise that if you invest in yourself, others will invest in you. It has been our goal of the project to create a community that our residents can be proud of.”

Emily LaGrow, Village of Cassopolis

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 Cass 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*.

In addition, the team has partnered with the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI), whose goal is to ensure that young people in foster care have successful outcomes in housing, education, employment, community engagement,

and specifically targeted to young people who are aging out of the foster care system with the hopes that the information learned in the program will help the young people be successful. Some of the session titles include *Goal Setting*, *Informed Renter*, *Household tasks*, *Art of Time Management*, *Rockin' Resumes*, *Career Connections Through Volunteerism*, and *Changing the World with a Single Vote*. In 2022, 61 sessions were provided to youth involved in MYOI, with 1545 participants with some from Cass County.

There are approximately 11,000 children in foster care in Michigan. Youth living in foster care are often subject to adverse childhood experiences (ACE's). Providing programs where youth feel welcome, have a sense of belonging, their voices are heard and their contributions matter is particularly important for youth in the foster care system. MSU Extension staff serve as positive and supportive adult role models in for youth.

Clean Boats, Clean Water Supports Locals

The Michigan Clean Boats, Clean Waters (MCBCW) program funded 11 aquatic invasive species education projects across the state in 2022. Each organization received between \$1,000 - \$3,000. Over 2,500 boaters were contacted at 80 events and an estimated 2,900 educational materials were distributed by grantees.

Awardees included the Donnell Lake Conservation Club in Cass County who hosted three educational booths at popular community events and tournaments throughout the summer. They also installed a Clean Boats, Clean Waters Boat Decontamination Station sign at their local boat launch.

Since 2006 MCBCW has educated recreational water users in behaviors that limit or prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species often spread unintentionally on boats and trailers, and once introduced, are extremely difficult and expensive to manage. Boater education is one tool of many used to address invasive species issues. This is the second year funds have been available through the program to support local organizations. MCBCW is a joint effort between MSU Extension and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.