

**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 Kalamazoo 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 Kalamazoo 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 Kalamazoo County and strengthening the community through quality research based information and educational programs.

**Julie Pioch, District Director**

**Kalamazoo County Based Staff**

- Veronica Bolhuis - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Mariel Borgman - CFS Educator
- Beth Clawson - Natural Resources Educator
- Writton Graham - EMG Program Coordinator
- Amanda Hulet - Community Nutrition Instructor
- Jeremy Jubenville - Floriculture Educator
- Samual Lawrence - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Corrine Lopez - MVP Program Instructor
- Jane Toll - Community Nutrition Instructor
- Nancy Hostetler - Secretary
- Julie Ford - Secretary

**Contact Information**

201 W. Kalamazoo St  
Suite 306  
Kalamazoo MI 49007  
269-383-8830  
www.msue.msu.edu  
msue.kalamazoo@county.msu.edu

**Kalamazoo County  
General Fund  
Appropriations**

2020	\$252,788
2021	\$266,648
2022	\$278,108

**656**  
EXTENSION PROGRAMS  
INCLUDED KALAMAZOO  
COUNTY RESIDENTS

**3524**  
KALAMAZOO COUNTY  
RESIDENTS ATTENDED  
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

**312**  
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS  
REPORTED

**97**  
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY

SOIL TESTS STATS  
**115 RESIDENTIAL**  
**15 COMMERCIAL**

**175 "ASK AN EXPERT"**  
QUESTIONS ANSWERED

**NUTRITION PROGRAM  
SUCCESS STORY**  
BY JANE TOLL, CNI

**280** 4-H Youth Enrolled

**145** Adult Volunteers

**22** Community Clubs

**1415** Total Youth Reached

Few things feel as refreshing as a cold drink on a hot summer day. However, lessons we learn can be just as sweet!

At the Back 2 School Jam hosted by Young Kings and Queens at Farrel Park in Kalamazoo, community members were invited to visit the MSU Extension table and see the "Rethink Your Drink" display. The display included various canned and bottled drinks, as well as sandwich bags which held the amount of added sugar in the drinks measured out in teaspoons.

Families were encouraged to try matching the drinks with the bags of sugar without looking at the Nutritional Facts labels. Children and adults embraced the challenge, sharing their thoughts with one another and examining the different bags of sugar. Eyes widened and jaws dropped after picking up the heaviest bags. One father and his son were particularly surprised by the sugar content in the drinks. The father snapped a picture with his phone of the boy holding up a bottle of soda in one hand and the corresponding bag of sugar in the other. Then, he took a second picture of his son holding up a different bottle of soda with its bag of sugar. The man said, "these are our family's two favorite drinks. Since my wife isn't here, I want to show her what we looked at."

When parents and children learn together, it can be easier for the whole family to make a change and support each other. As SNAP educators, it is important for us to be present in our community and share our knowledge. Our work helps families start the conversation around the importance of health- whether it be rethinking what we drink, or any other aspect of nutrition.

**WEBSITE STATISTICS**

**26,109**  
COUNTY VISITORS

**102,066**  
PAGE VIEWS

**11%**  
REGULAR CONSUMERS



Cabin Fever Conversations is a free virtual program that provides a space to replicate the lighthearted and educational conversations that happen naturally in the garden, even when we are not physically present with others. After two successful seasons in 2020 and 2021, Cabin Fever Conversations returned in 2022. Three episodes held in late winter focused on houseplants, plant names (binomial nomenclature) and highlighted the work of Edible Flint. Each episode included ASL interpretation and recordings were posted on the Cabin Fever Conversations website. Participants were asked how many episodes they watched (57% watched all three, 29% watched two and 14% watched one) and if they watched live or the recording, or some of both (69% watched live, 6% watched the recordings, and 25% watched some of both). All participants enjoyed the speakers for each episode they watched. Based on the evaluation, 94% of participants would recommend this program to others. Several Kalamazoo County residents participated in the program over the three years. Comments from participants included:

***"Too bad it was only once a month. The sessions are always so enjoyable. Please consider holding these sessions again next year!"***

***"I loved the series. I feel it was well thought out and delivered with so much heart. They helped me expand my knowledge of horticulture. I learned a lot about better care of my houseplants and what plant names mean and how to decipher them. I would recommend Cabin Fever very highly."***

### **ServSafe Training in Kalamazoo County**

ServSafe is a national certification program for those working in food service, specifically managers and other leaders. ServSafe teaches about foodborne illness, how to prevent it and how to train employees about the latest food safety issues. The ServSafe Manager course uses proven techniques, provides new FDA food code rules and content related to the food industry. Topics include: providing safe food, forms of contamination, the safe food handler, food safety management systems, safe facilities & pest management, cleaning & sanitizing. In 2022, 25 participants in Kalamazoo successfully passed the ServSafe Food Protection Manager Certification exam.

### **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 course designed for lake users, lakefront property owners, and lake managers. In 2022, there was a cohort of 524 participants, the largest since the program began. Participants were spread out over 69 counties with 12 from Kalamazoo. 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 a 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.

### **Let's Talk: Parent-Provider Communication**

Parents, child care providers, and teachers all play crucial roles in the development of children. Parents and care providers want the best for young children, but sometimes their perspectives are different and they may have trouble communicating effectively. Learning how to communicate effectively can help children thrive by providing consistency as well as supportive relationships. As part of their statewide parenting education series in 2022 called "Extension Extras Parenting Hour" the MSU Extension Children and Family Development team offered Let's Talk: Parent-Provider Communication in 2022. The workshop's goals included teaching participants strategies to effectively communicate and explore ways to problem solve communication challenges. Extension Extras Parenting Hour is a free online series of parenting workshops that provides guidance for parents of young children as they navigate the challenges, joys, and concerns of parenting. Certificates for participation are provided upon completion of the class. In 2022, 52 Kalamazoo County residents took part in the webinar.

## **Kalamazoo is Wild About Conservation**

Human activities in yards and neighborhoods affect local wildlife and the quality of water in our soil, land, lakes, and rivers. No matter the size, our yards can serve as a refuge for unique plants and animals. From landscaping with native trees and shrubs to adding water features, even the smallest of things that we do can help. The Wild About Conservation webinar series features experts from MSU Extension discussing conservation practices anyone can implement on their property. Participants registered in either one or all eight of the Wild About Conservation webinars for free from the comfort of their homes and more than 20 Kalamazoo residents enjoyed the webinars in 2022. Webinars took place on Tuesdays twice a month and addressed unique topics related to conservation including bumble bee conservation, landscaping over septic fields, bird conservation and research, planning and planting a native plant pollinator garden, and much more. The popular series will continue in 2023.

## **Assisting County Leadership Set Goals**

In September 2022, MSU Extension educators facilitated a consensus workshop for the Kalamazoo County Road Commission to assist with long-term planning goals. The visioning session involved staff and road commissioners, focused on answering the question “What do we want to see in place in 3-5 years as a result of our actions.” Participants were asked to brainstorm a wide variety of responses, and the dialogue that followed helped to focus these ideas on key themes:

- Fully Engaged Road Commission Team
- Building Trust Through Community Engagement
- Innovation and Technology Drive Our Future
- Safe Quality Road Infrastructure For All
- Show Me the Money

One theme that came up throughout the session and had a strong consensus from the entire group was that the other 4 themes really work together to support the goal of “Safe Quality Road Infrastructure For All.” It was stated by the group with broad agreement that the goal of “Safe Quality Road Infrastructure For All” really succinctly defines “what we do” as the Road Commission.



*MVP program instructors record an episode of "An Ounce of Prevention"*

## **Retaining and Attracting Ag Workers**

The 2022 labor market is a challenging environment and businesses are struggling to find and keep high-quality employees. The food and agriculture industry is no stranger to this problem, but the highly competitive market has made it much more difficult for our industry to find the help it desperately needs. In recognition of this critical issue, MSU Extension held a half-day attraction and retention workshop for food and agricultural employers in February 2022. The workshop was designed for ag businesses interested in improving their Employer Value Proposition (EVP) by making their operation a more enticing place to work. The program featured a combination of university and industry specialists, and agricultural producers, covering the fundamental concepts of attracting and retaining employees, including: employer value proposition, company culture and branding, wages and benefits, and the valuation of current employees. Greenhouse, vegetable and animal producers and 4 representatives from private industry from 7 Michigan counties (including Kalamazoo) were in attendance. Participants represented 2.1 million square feet of greenhouse production space and 1,100 acres of field production. A post-seminar survey assessed learning impacts and discerned readiness of attendees to implement changes based on the information presented during the program. Evaluations revealed:

- 100% of respondents felt that the information presented will help them improve employee recruitment and retention at their company.
- As a result of the attending this workshop, 100% of the respondents intend to implement a change to improve their company's ability to attract and retain employees.

## **Michigan Vaccination Project**

To help Michiganders make informed vaccine decisions for themselves and their families, MSU Extension’s Michigan Vaccine Project (MVP) is providing vaccine education to adults and youth across the state. To leverage the power of storytelling as a public health communications tool, MVP launched a monthly podcast in 2022 titled “An Ounce of Prevention.” The podcast featured stories that communicate experiential knowledge to connect with audiences on a personal and emotional level. The podcast is available on Spotify, Anchor, and Apple Music. The second episode featured an interview with pharmacist Arun Tandon of Kalamazoo County. More than 715 participants with several from Kalamazoo County, took part in the 2022 Michigan Vaccine project.

## 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 *Adulting 101*, the series includes lessons in workforce preparation, financial literacy, communication, civics, and healthy living. Sixteen *Adulting 101* sessions were offered for free virtually in 2022, reaching a total of 830 participants across the state, including many young people from Van Buren 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, *Adulting 101* 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 and community engagement. 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 these youth. MSU Extension instructors serve as positive and supportive adult role models for youth. The team has specifically targeted their programs to young people who are aging out of the foster care system with the hopes that the information will help them 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 with MYOI, with a total of 1545 participants with several from Kalamazoo County.

## Partnership with Treasury Continues

Over 1,000 local government elected officials and staff participated in the 2022 Fiscally Ready Communities program, a partnership between MSU Extension and the Michigan Department of Treasury. The series included seven webinars on important financial management and sustainability topics for local government. Program participants included elected officials (40%), administrators and appointed officials. Over half had been in their role for less than 2 years, meaning this program provided valuable learning for new leaders in Michigan communities. Thirteen participants were from Kalamazoo County. Evaluations demonstrated clear gains in learning for all but the real story came through participant comments about value and behavior change:

***“The importance of team work and communication to provide transparency within the process. Also to use everyone's input to gain the trust of the staff and public so that everyone feels valued and has a vested interest in the process.”***

***“It was a very good review of requirements and implementation of financial controls. I wish I had had this training when I first became a Treasurer.”***

***“I get caught up in the day-to-day issues and duties but don't take the time to review and update policies.***

***This was a good reminder of the importance of performing this task.”***

***“I plan to type out exactly what our little office does to ensure internal controls are utilized and deliver the final product to the council members in this month's council meeting packet.”***