

Branch Agriculture Program Highlights

GROWERS LEARN NEW WAYS TO MANAGE PESTS

Managing pests is a consistent challenge for greenhouse growers due to population growth rates, insecticide resistance and life stages. Biological control can overcome these challenges but is based on a preventative -vs- reactive philosophy common to conventional techniques. In transitioning to a biological approach, it takes several seasons for growers to master the nuances of working with live organisms to control pests and requires guidance from experienced people to learn how to do it efficiently and effectively. In response, MSU Extension developed a course on greenhouse biological control featuring presentations from international biocontrol experts, MSU Extension and technical representatives from two biological control supply companies. A total of 40 participants from 10 Michigan counties, including Branch, attended a program held in August 2018. Program evaluations showed that 17 Michigan greenhouse growers representing 6.68 million square feet of protected production space were represented. Evaluation data revealed that 94% of the participants intended to implement changes to their current production practices; 94% gained knowledge from this course that will help them improve their biological control program and 59% of respondents expected to improve their pest scouting program as a result of this course.



Greenhouse growers listen to experts in biological pest control in August 2018.

EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR AFRICAN SWINE FEVER (AFS)

In early 2019, MSU Extension, Michigan Pork Producers Association and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development teamed up to address an important topic for pork producers in the Branch County Area: African Swine Fever. This meeting focused on protecting the health of Michigan's pork industry, specifically from foreign animal disease (FAD), including the very real threat of AFS. Pork producers heard from a number of experts regarding FAD and how to best be prepared for an outbreak. Information shared included the likelihood of an outbreak in the United States and what protocols would be put in place if an outbreak occurred. MSU Extension experts led an interactive session on preparing for continued production if there was an outbreak, on Secure Pork Supply Planning and on business continuity. Pork producers were able to walk away from this meeting with a better understanding of what will happen if there is a case of AFS identified in Michigan, including how farms will be quarantined, what will be required for a 'movement of animals' permit if in an infected area and the role of the biosecurity manager on the farm. Attendees indicated they had a better understanding of the importance of biosecurity and planning for an FAD outbreak.

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GROWER EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Agriculture is an important economic driver in Branch county and Branch farmers were well represented at MSU Extension educational programs offered in 2018-19. Relevant and timely information was provided through on-farm research and demonstration projects sited in adjacent counties, on-line workshops such as the beginning farmer series and interactive meetings for field crops farmers struggling with planting decisions with 2019 spring weather conditions. MSU educators reach out to growers via videos, electronic newsletters and timely articles published in print and on the internet to keep growers up to date on the latest research, as well as best practices and weather conditions that will impact their crops. On-farm consultation was also provided through programs such as employee trainings for dairies and the On-Farm Readiness Review to help vegetable growers evaluate their farm's compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Produce Safety Act.



Extension Educators present research results at on-farm demonstration sites.

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Branch County 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

BY THE NUMBERS

-  1,725 Branch County youth participated in a 4-H program
-  20 boaters and passengers practiced boat washing and identifying invasive species
-  25 attended programs to prevent or manage symptoms of chronic disease
-  107 attended 3 sessions on horse care
-  58 people attended water quality programs on healthy lake shorelines and reducing invasive species
-  200+ adult and youth volunteers dedicated their time to Branch County 4-H
-  102 youth attended the Branch County Friends Camp and learned about healthy living
-  15 riders and 33 volunteers involved in the Proud Equestrian Program for youth with special needs

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



I am delighted to share a snapshot of results from another successful year of partnership between Branch County and Michigan State University (MSU) Extension. Because of your continued support, we've been able to make a difference in the lives of youth, families, businesses and communities.

MSU Extension offers a broad range of research-based educational services to county residents. Over this past year, we've empowered families and individuals to live healthier lives, created opportunities for youth leadership development and career exploration, helped farmers with business management and mental health, and provided technical training to community leaders. Our staff live and work alongside county residents, are rooted in community relationships and are responsive to community needs.

This year, we've welcomed more Branch County residents into our online community, made new partnerships with Lions International, ProMedica, and Outlook Clubhouse and enhanced our relationships with the Branch Conservation District and the Great Start Collaborative. Through programs such as Relax: Alternatives to Anger and Dining with Diabetes we strived to improve the socio-emotional and physical health of Branch participants.

On behalf of the team serving Branch County, thank you for another great year. We look forward to your continued support and hope you'll be able to join us during one of our upcoming programs.

Julie Pioch, District Director

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities.

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Program Highlights



Coldwater 4th and 5th grade classes participated in the China Art Exchange Program



Branch youth were well represented at local, state, national and international leadership and citizenship youth development programs.



Branch County Youth have the opportunity to travel and host with other states through the Branch interstate exchange program. The exchange was with Arizona in 2018.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

MSU Extension is proud to highlight that it is reaching 20% of the youth population in Branch County through 4-H youth development programs! 1725 youth were included in programs.

Branch County participated in the FLEX international exchange by hosting 2 high school youth from Moldova and Georgia during the school year. Also, an art exchange between youth was initiated with a past exchange student from Turkmenistan and Jennings Elementary in Quincy. The idea of an art exchange or “visual letters” was created many years ago in Michigan 4-H with the China Art Exchange Program. The idea of youth exchanging artwork to share their culture was the basis of the program. Coldwater 4th and 5th grade classes participated in the China Art Program and shared artwork in an assembly with youth from China, as well as some music from China in conjunction with a ribbon dance. Forty students created art to send back to China with 2 works being selected to travel to China with art exchange. Cross-cultural programming is designed to broaden the horizons of youth around the state in bringing cultural experiences to communities.

Branch youth participated in several local, state, national and international leadership and citizenship opportunities. Locally, members learned about running a meeting with parliamentary procedure, ideal meeting structure and making group decisions. Statewide, three county youth joined 60 others from around the state for the 4-day state government experience known as 4-H Capitol Experience. The program is designed to examine Michigan’s decision-making process through state agencies, lobbyist organizations and legislative groups. Branch County’s Connie Lange was a part of the team that coordinated the program. Nationally, Branch youth were part of the 44 member Michigan delegation who attended the Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF) Program. Youth traveled to D.C. by bus via Gettysburg where they saw battlefields and museums. CWF is a week long program conducted by the National 4-H Council at their facility right outside of D.C. Participants attended committee and leadership meetings and also toured the historical sites of the area. Two Branch County 4-H Youth represented Branch County in the state delegation to Georgia for the National 4-H Congress leadership conference. And finally, for international exposure, Branch County 4-H created a program for youth to experience travel to a foreign country using foreign currency, figuring the currency exchange rate and sales tax and navigating public transportation (train, subway, bus and taxi). This year they traveled to Toronto.

Volunteers are the heart of 4-H. The 4-H Leaders’ Council is a volunteer board that provides educational program support, as well as promotional and policy support to Extension’s 4-H youth programs. In 2018, Council conducted several events including a 4-H Project Day for 107 participants with sessions ranging from woodworking to sewing. Leaders’ Council also held fundraisers to support Branch 4-H and college scholarships. 221 volunteers teach and mentor Branch 4-H youth.

TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR ASSESSORS AND ZONING ADMINISTRATORS

The Land Division Act is one of the most widely misunderstood and applied state laws in Michigan. Few organizations offer training on this topic and MSU Extension’s training has come to be seen as the best program on the topic. This program is offered in conjunction with the State Tax Commission and provides license continuing education hours. Seven programs held across the state in 2018 reached 102 participants including three from Branch county. The 4 hour training includes in-depth discussion and group work using real-world scenarios, which has been shown to be an effective teaching strategy.

Zoning administration is a key community development function. If not done properly, the position can open a community up to significant legal and financial risk. Done properly, zoning administration contributes to community prosperity. Most zoning administrators have had no formal training. They learned on the job and may not have uniform skills, but courts expect them to know the rudiments of law as it relates to zoning administration. In response, MSU Extension developed an intensive 16-hour training delivered over two days. In 2018-2019, MSUE offered the program in Grayling and Barry Counties and trained 71 zoning administrators (including two from Branch County).

SHINING A LIGHT ON AG SOLAR

State policy changes in late 2017 made utility-scale solar projects more profitable. This triggered aggressive solicitation by solar developers to lease or buy land owned by farmers for solar projects. In response, a multidisciplinary team of MSU Extension Educators provided training to 452 participants, including 19 from Branch County, during seven workshops held around the state. The program focused on policy, community planning and zoning, legal contract land leasing, tax issues, and the integration of solar with existing agricultural systems using evidenced based practices. In addition to the positive outcomes of knowledge and confidence, the program series resulted in new partnerships with agencies and associations involved in the solar industry. Overall, the program series provided Michigan residents and leaders with a unique opportunity to better understand the solar industry, its impact on local landscapes, personal finances and the economy, as well as the role of local policy development in helping shape the state’s energy future while balancing competing interests.

TRAINING ON INVASIVE SPECIES TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY LAKES

MSU Extension water quality experts were on site in Branch county in 2018-19 to share information on identifying and combatting invasive species in inland lakes reaching more than 75 residents. Water recreation and lake living is important to the tax base of Branch county. Keeping invasive species out of the lakes is important to maintaining the health and enjoyment of this precious natural resource.

Program Highlights



Branch officials participated in training programs designed to equip local assessors and zoning administrators with critical technical skills.



Utility grade solar projects are being sited throughout Michigan.



A boater inspection was held in conjunction with a boat wash demonstration with the Branch Conservation District at Messenger Lake in July 2018.