



# Cass County

## 2018–2019 ANNUAL REPORT

### BY THE NUMBERS



732 youth participated in 4-H clubs assisted by 199 adult volunteers



13 youth participated in bee keeping education at Southwest Michigan College



94 youth participated in career exploration and workforce prep programs



Over 780 youth and 140 adults completed nutrition and physical activity education



6 farm operations received tax planning and management consultations



46 residents requested assistance via MSU Extension's online Ask an Expert system



21 growers attend Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo

### MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

I am delighted to share a snapshot of results from another successful year of partnership between Cass 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, 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.

We are grateful to our Cass County partners such as Midwest Energy, Cass County Fairboard, Cass County Farm Bureau, Cass County Conservation District, Cass County Parks, Southwestern Michigan College, Lewis-Cass ISD, Villages of Edwardsburg & Cassopolis and many others for helping us fulfill our mission in 2019. On behalf of the team serving Cass County, thank you for another great year. We look forward to your continued support.

*Julie Pioch, District Director*

### STAFF HOUSED IN CASS COUNTY

- Hailey Harmon—4-H Program Coordinator
- Jon Laporte—Farm Financial Management Educator
- Nora Lee—Community Nutrition Instructor
- Erin Young —Secretary

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# Program Highlights

## 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS



*Cass County youth put on their lab coats on to study the miracle of life by using the scientific method to incubate chicken eggs.*



*For the second year in a row, MSUE partnered with Southwest Michigan College's Educational Talent Search to teach leadership skills to 13 young people in Cass County*



*Thanks to Midwest Energy and Communications and Cass Farm Bureau for their financial support of the 2019 Farm Safety Camp. 25 youth and 5 adults learned about safety issues related to grain bins, pesticides, propane, lawnmowers, tractors, ATV and animals.*

Almost 15% of the youth population in Cass County are being reached through 4-H youth development programs. In total, 1410 youth participated; 732 were registered in year long community clubs, 498 in short term interest groups and 231 in school enrichment programs.

Cass 4-H club youth were well represented at local and state educational programs such as state animal shows, MSU Extension's pre-college program 4-H Exploration Days and civic engagement programs such as Capital Experience and Citizen Washington Focus, where they learned skills to enrich their project experience as well as leadership and other life-long skills.

Volunteers are the heart of 4-H. There are 199 adult volunteers who teach and mentor the 4-H youth in Cass County. The 4-H Leaders' Council is a made up of club leaders who volunteer to provide educational program, promotional and policy support to Extension's 4-H youth programs. In 2019 the Council held fundraisers to support Cass 4-H youth scholarships.

A new program called Showing Livestock...Fun, Fair and in My Future! brought 18 excited youth ages 9 to 15 together to experience working with animals for the first time. The program's goal was to introduce kids with limited knowledge of livestock to several species and allow them to experience what it takes to raise and show them. Local specialists, who were all former 4-Hers, worked with the youth on topics of swine, sheep, goats, horse, poultry and rabbits. The youth learned animal care, including a hands-on demonstration of how to administer shots. This hands-on activity included trying an intramuscular injection on an orange, and subcutaneous injections on a chicken breast. The youth learned about raising animals for profitability and had a session on swine which included a proper cooling of the pigs (and kids) with a garden hose after their short mock show. Interspersed with the educational sessions was plenty of fun (wet) activities designed to encourage teamwork and sportsmanship.

Let's Get Egg-cited About Embryology: Eleven youth put their lab coats on to study the miracle of life using the scientific method with this fun, hands-on program incubating chicken eggs! This five-week program allowed youth to create an experiment, collect data, and report their findings with their very own scientific poster. This program showed youth the embryonic development of the chicken, the hatching process, and the importance of each development phase. This unique opportunity to follow the life-cycle in such detail is one most people never experience. The youth were happy to be part of it. Two hypotheses were investigated: playing country music will increase egg hatchability and the egg will increase in weight as the chick develops. The first group found that playing country music did increase their hatchability compared to the second group. The second group had inconclusive data and decided to reject their hypothesis but had great ideas on how to improve for next time. Students took the chicks home and one of the roosters was shown at the Cass County Fair. This program will be repeated in 2020.

## TRAINING LOCAL DECISION MAKERS

MSU Extension's government and community vitality team engages participants in learning good governance and how to collaborate on solving complex issues in order to improve their communities. Participants leave their educational programs with a deeper understanding of civic roles and responsibilities, increased confidence to make decisions, skills and information to better manage community resources, knowledge of how to implement best practices, and an understanding of the importance of building quality places in Michigan. Programs attended by Cass leaders in 2018-19 included:

Citizen Planner Online is a self-paced version of the team's signature classroom program. One local official from Cass County completed the 15 hour program in 2018-19.

A bi-monthly webinar series targeting local elected officials focused on current issues affecting Michigan local government. Programs attended by Cass leaders included the opioid epidemic; Gathering input of hard-to-reach residents; Redistricting and gerrymandering; Preparing for the 2020 Census; Local government finance and autonomy; Impact of state and federal politics on local government decision-making.

New County Commissioner School trains newly elected commissioners to help them be successful leaders in county government. The program held in late 2018 was attended by 191 newly elected commissioners and county administrators (5 from Cass County).

Zoning administration (ZA) 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, ZA contributes to community prosperity. Most ZA's have had no formal training and must learn on the job. Courts expect them to know the rudiments of the law. MSU Extension offers an intensive 16-hour training delivered over two days. In 2019 it was held in Grayling and Barry Counties and trained 71 zoning administrators (including one from Cass County).

MSU Extension provided effective meetings through parliamentary procedure training to 25 Pokagon Band of Potawatomi leaders in August 2019 in Dowagiac.

## HEALTHY LAKES & ECOSYSTEMS

There are over 100 lake in Cass County, making the county a desirable place to live and recreate. Protecting this important natural resources is vital to the economy and lifestyle of Cass residents and visitors. Introduction to Lakes is an intensive six-week online course specially designed for those interested in learning about inland lakes in which participants explore topics including lake ecology, watersheds, natural shorelines, water law, aquatic plants, and citizen involvement. A total of 159 people took the course in 2019 including six from Cass county. On-line sessions are accompanied by three live-streaming Ask an Expert sessions with MSU Extension educators.

The Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program had 311 citizen scientists enrolled in 2018-19 (19 from Cass). This program is a partnership between MSU Extension, Michigan Lakes and Streams Association and MDEQ. It is designed to provide resources and assistance to riparians and volunteers to be able to scientifically monitor the health of their local lakes.

## Program Highlights



### CASS EMBRACES SBEI

MSU's Sustainable Built Environment Initiative (SBEI) offers a graphic visioning process that provides citizens with a set of images and recommendations to guide improvements in their community with a sustainability theme.

Imagine Cass brought together over 200 people to create a vision for downtown Cassopolis in 2018. Subsequently, MEC sponsored two more meetings and in early 2019 the Village Council voted to adopt a new master plan that included placemaking designs developed through the public engagement design process.

Edwardsburg was next to embrace the SBEI process and in 2019 three meetings were held to generate ideas for planning and design and to build consensus in making Uptown Edwardsburg welcoming, vibrant, attractive, and thriving.



# Cass Agriculture Program Highlights

## GROWER EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Agriculture is a key economic driver in the county. Cass farmers were well represented at MSU Extension educational programs offered in 2018-19. Relevant and timely information was provided to growers through on-farm research and demonstration projects, on-line workshops such as the beginning farmer series and interactive meetings for field crops farmers struggling with planting decisions from 2019 spring weather conditions. Cass field crop growers were the target audience for a workshop held in Cassopolis in March to help farmers plan for a challenging season. 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. With the multitude of issues faced by today's farmers, including a declining farm economy and unpredictable weather patterns, farm stress and farmer suicide are serious emerging issues being focused on in 2019 by a multi-disciplinary MSU team. Resources are continuously being updated to help support farmers and those who work with farmers.



*Research results are presented at on-farm demonstration sites.*

## 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 Cass 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.

## ON-FARM RESEARCH

In January, the 2018 SMaRT on-farm research results and recommendations for managing soybean cyst nematodes were shared at six locations around the state, including Dowagiac. Three hundred forty-two producers attended, including 19 from Cass County. Open-ended questions were asked to gather input regarding research topics for 2019 and for recruiting new trial cooperators.

## FRUIT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Fruit growing is a complex and ever-changing profession. Producers and consultants are constantly challenged to keep up with new information on pests, diseases, weeds, management strategies, and regulations. Growers need regular updates in order to use the most economical strategies and at the same time protect the environment and protect themselves, workers, and the public. Regular training is needed for growers to maintain their Michigan restricted pesticide applicators license. MSUE Fruit educators conducted an 11 meeting series of fruit management updates from April to the end of June for local fruit growers and industry consultants. Growers from Van Buren, Berrien, Allegan, Cass, Kalamazoo, and Van Buren Counties attended (with an average of 45 participants per meeting).

**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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