



Berrien County 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) brings the science, programs and resources of Michigan's land grant university to organizations, communities and individuals throughout the state. Our outreach and engagement is built on a local basis, thanks to our county partnerships and more than 600 faculty and staff in offices across all 83 counties.

Historically, most of our relationships have been maintained through in-person meetings and programs. Over the last few years we have built up the breadth and quality of our website at extension.msu.edu, which now averages 1.25 million visitors per month. In 2020, we expanded our capacity to provide high-quality virtual education.

2020 will be a year to remember for many reasons (several of which we will want to forget). The creativity, dedication, teamwork, and resilience that our MSUE professionals exhibited during this global pandemic will be something I will always remember. This has been a difficult time for communities, families and staff, and I am proud of the work we have done to continue to provide high-quality educational programs throughout my district.

Forced to pivot to on-line programming, MSUE staff were given an opportunity to do something they have wanted to do for a long time - convert their in-person programming to a digital format. Digital formats don't work for everybody or every program, but to expand our reach and help more people incorporate the evidence-based learning from a major university into their homes, families, businesses and communities has always been a goal worth pursuing. Many were moving in that direction already; the

pandemic required others to move there faster.

Working from home with the tools and support needed to help them succeed in a remote environment, MSUE educators have continued to assist farmers through the growing season, elected officials and decision makers, parents, families and youth by meeting with them on virtual platforms through on-line meetings and webinars. With the work they have accomplished over the last months, staff reported to me that they have learned that:

- Programs that are produced for a live audience and recorded allow more people to view the meetings in a time convenient for them;
- We are reaching audiences that would not be able to attend our programs in the past because of time, travel and disability;
- We are reaching local, regional, state, national and global audiences;
- We are able to share our expertise, ideas and best practices more efficiently across the state;
- A digital divide still exists, not all programs work in an on-line format, and nothing will replace our local, face to face, relationship-based work.

In the end, I believe the experience in on-line program development and investment in capacity will not only augment but strengthen our face to face work (once that resumes). Our programs will have greater reach than ever before and MSUE will be a leader in virtual education.

Please contact me for more information and thank you for your continued support!

Julie Pioch, District Director

LOCAL STAFF

- Kelly Stelter—4-H PC
- Yolanda Thrash—CNI
- Renee' Harris—CNI
- Mike Reinke—AABI Educator
- Zelda Felix-Mottley—HNI Educator
- Debra Barrett—CYI Senior Educator
- Beth Ferry—AABI Educator
- Jamie Styburski—Secretary

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Youth experience the Tractor Operator Certificate Program held in February 2020

4-H & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

In 2020, MSU Extension's youth development program reached 18% of the county youth population. A total of 1440 young people participated, 399 enrolled in community clubs, 247 in short-term interest groups and 794 in school enrichment programs. 143 adult volunteers participated in programs teaching and mentoring our youth. The Berrien County 4-H Leaders Council provided leadership and program advice to Berrien 4-H Program Coordinator Kelly Stelter to engage and expand the local 4-H program.

For those who live and work in agriculture, it is well understood that there are inherent dangers involved with day-to-day farm operations. Every three days, a child dies in an agriculture-related accident, and an additional 33 children are injured each day in on-farm accidents. The most common fatal events involved tractors and ATVs. A healthy respect for the dangers of farm equipment is critical, and education and training are vital in ensuring the safety of youth working in agriculture. Berrien County 4-H held the 4-H Tractor Operator Program January and February 2020 in partnership with Countryside Academy. Nine young people from Berrien County participated. Upon completion of the program, the youth received a certificate that satisfies the U.S. Department of Labor's 1973 Child Labor Law, allowing them to operate a 20 PTO horsepower or greater, garden, or agricultural tractor in local contests, parades, and festival activities.

With no face-to-face 4-H interactions since March, Kelly was active in keeping 4-H volunteers and youth connected during this difficult year. She held regular "fireside chats" with volunteers to keep them informed of programming opportunities and to help them with technology to engage clubs in virtual activities. She worked with volunteers to market the many virtual special interest programs and workshops made available by colleagues around the state.

Berrien 4-H'ers joined with other youth around the state to participate in programs such as the "Adulthood 101" series where youth received training in budgeting, cooking and household tasks; A National Park Tour Series that engaged youth in virtually exploring our national parks; American Sign Language; Public Speaking; Baby Sitting; Junk Drawer Robotics and Ocean Explorers, both emphasizing important STEM skills in a fun and interactive way.

For the third year in a row and with social distancing protocols in place, Berrien County 4-H Clubs partnered with Berrien Farm Bureau, Farm Bureau Insurance of Michigan Agent Charitable Fund, Southwest Michigan College, and Niles FFA to assemble 110 food baskets for the "Thanks 4 Giving" community service project. Since 2018, 480 baskets have been delivered to families in need. Our Clubs collected food donations and assisted in assembling baskets. Each bushel basket was overflowing with enough food for a family to enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving feast, including a turkey, locally grown lettuce, apples, potatoes, sweet potatoes, stuffing mix, canned vegetables, cranberry sauce, fresh dinner rolls, a pumpkin pie and vouchers for milk and butter from local grocery stores. Each basket contained at least 35 pounds of food for a total 3,850 pounds of food distributed! Berrien County Farm Bureau gave three door prizes away in the amount of \$100.00 each to participating clubs.

Berrien County 4-H Youth Program
November 16, 2020



Berrien County 4-H Youth Program
November 22, 2020



Berrien County 4-H Youth Program
November 9, 2020



Berrien County 4-H Youth Program
November 24, 2020



Social media was used to share information about 4-H members and programs in 2020

NUTRITION & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) is an evidence-based program that helps people eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to lead healthier lives by learning about good nutrition, making their food dollars stretch further and being physically active. Most classes are held as a series, which gives participants the opportunity to practice these healthy lifestyle habits.



2020 programs in Berrien reached 660 youth and 69 adults in partnership with Discovery Enrichment Center, Emergency Shelter Services, Hope Resources, Lybrook Elementary School, Steam At MLK, International Academy at Hull, Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen, Lybrook Elementary School, Mildred C. Wells Academy, Riverside School, Fair Plain East Elementary, Berrien County Health Department, Area Agency on Aging, and Riverwood Center.

In order to accommodate the educational requirement for Senior Project Fresh coupon distribution, 100 seniors received small group Zoom and telephone sessions on healthy eating and physical activity. This education, typically held face-to-face, was key to connecting with seniors so they could take advantage of this fresh food benefit and was also a way to check in with seniors during the pandemic. The redemption rate of SPF coupons was 78%.



Boys at Riverside School show off their freshly made smoothies after a SNAP-Ed lesson on healthy eating.

STRESS LESS WITH MINDFULNESS

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. Mindfulness was a skill much needed in 2020. MSUE Community Behavioral Health Educators adapted the Stress Less with Mindfulness series to a web-based program to introduce the experience and practice of mindfulness. Over 7000 people in Michigan have participated in this program to date. More than 30 Berrien residents participated in mindfulness programs offered by the team in 2020.

FOOD SAFETY & PRESERVATION

During the pandemic there has been an increase in the number of consumers preserving food at home, along with an increased focus on food safety.



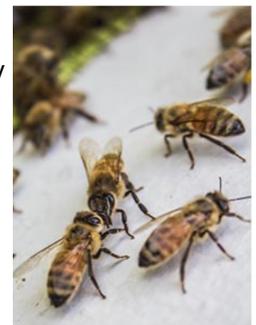
MSUE'S Food Safety Team worked quickly in March to modify their face-to-face curricula into web-based offerings and expanded their programs to offer weekly on-line interactive education.

The goal for the team was to reach as many people as possible—answering consumers' questions, providing evidence-based resources, and clarifying misinformation and unsafe food preservation techniques found on the Internet and on social media.

Programs engaged food service workers, homemakers, families and youth on topics such as food preservation, the cottage food law, food pantry safety, emergency preparedness and seasonally-themed cooking workshops. From March 2020 through December 2020, over 11,000 viewers have logged into these programs—many from Berrien County. The expansion of this team's efforts, and the capacity they have built around food safety education, is a shining example of success for MSUE's response to education during the pandemic.

SERIES PROVIDES SUPPORT TO BEEKEEPERS

MSU Educators specializing in pollinators and beekeeping held 10 webinars from March to October 2020. With almost 1700 viewers, the workshops provided expert training for new and experienced beekeepers. Sessions in March and April focused on first year and established colonies. Webinars that followed were in an open question and answer format. Thirty-one viewers were from Berrien County. The apiculture team's efforts support MSU's Pollinator Initiative's mission, which is to develop a coordinated research, education, extension, and policy-driven effort to address priority issues related to pollinators and pollination in Michigan. Michigan State University works with partners around the state in pursuit of research-based solutions for beekeepers, growers, land managers, and policy makers to promote economic vitality and ecological stability.



AGRICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS



Prior to the 2020 health crisis, MSU Extension agriculture and agribusiness educators were already providing “non-traditional” options for growers to meet their educational needs through webinars, blogs, podcasts, email newsletters, and texting. Therefore, when the pandemic stopped face-to-face programs in March, our Southwest Michigan Ag team was prepared for the challenge.

MSUE’s Rapid Response For Agriculture Website

was a resource developed in 2019 in response to several weather-related emergencies (freeze, flood then drought!) The site provided a single point of entry for farmers to access resources to help them navigate those disasters. In March 2020, the site was quickly populated with resources and management tools to aid producers through the pandemic emergency. As needs emerged across the various commodities, webinars, articles and on-line tools were developed to help farms keep employees safe, while still meeting consumer demands for a fresh, safe food supply during the emergency conditions created by COVID-19.

Market disruptions caused by the pandemic had great potential to devastate the farm economy and the food supply. MSUE provided leadership in convening partners and information to assist during those first critical weeks and months of the pandemic. For example:

- In partnership with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Michigan Pork Producers Association, MSUE hosted informational webinars for pork producers. The sessions enabled industry experts to update producers on markets, options for animal overcrowding, euthanasia recommendations, disposal options and capacity, financial assistance and mental health resources.
- The greenhouse industry was hit hard when the first Stay at Home order forced large retail outlets to close garden centers. MSUE educators quickly stepped in to provide a series of workshops on alternative marketing strategies to help garden centers quickly shift to sell their plants through curbside pick-up, delivery, and on-line orders. Over 300 people participated.

After intensive work with campus specialists and state partners, the [COVID-19 Hazard Assessment and Mitigation Program tool](#) was launched in July, to help ag operations reduce the risk of worker exposure to COVID-19 and mitigate disease spread. The tool is available to all ag related businesses to aid them in designing a pandemic preparedness plan, identifying risks for exposure, and developing mitigation practices supporting worker safety and health. The tool and supporting education ma-

terials align with federal, state and local guidance and thus has required several updates to reflect changes in rules and the science related to the virus.

Despite the pivot to COVID-19 related demands, MSUE continued to work on educational and research initiatives critical to producers in Berrien County:

- Research projects and demonstration field days highlight on-farm research collaborations between MSU Extension, local growers and grantors. In 2020, research continued as usual but with field day events moved to a digital format. Ag Educators working in and around Berrien County, managed local research plots and used their expertise to highlight results at Virtual Field Days focused on peaches, vegetables and root crops, wheat, cover crops, corn, precision livestock farming, manure management and irrigation. Highlights focused on critical issues being faced by producers in the county. Unlike other years, the archived programs continue to be available on the MSU Extension website at www.canr.msu.edu/virtualfielddays.
- Annual ag educational events such as Ag Action Day in Kalamazoo, Southwest Michigan Hort Days, Field Crops and Pest Update, Pesticide Core Manual training and Farm Bill Update in Benton Harbor took place in person and on schedule in early 2020.
- MSUE specialists and educators teamed up for a third year to bring agribusiness professionals and farmers a series of “Virtual Breakfast” meetings. These hour-long, on-line meetings started at 7 AM with a discussion of current field and weather conditions, timely crop production tips and the latest information on emerging issues affecting growers across the state. The latter half was an open Q&A session where participants could ask specific questions. An important change in 2020 was that RUP credit was available to each participant each week.
- Berrien produce growers took advantage of MSUE’s Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower Training Courses offered face-to-face and on-line in 2020. The training is offered at no cost to growers through a grant from the FDA. Individuals who attend are eligible to receive certification from the Association of Food and Drug Officials. In addition, the training team held a Farm Crew Leaders and Managers program in Berrien and offered programs to assist growers, u-pick operators and farm markets with handling and marketing fresh produce during Covid-19.



FRUIT TEAM CONTINUES SUPPORT TO GROWERS ON-LINE

Berrien County is known for its crop diversity and the economic value of its fruit production. The MSU Extension Fruit Team has a reputation of providing high quality on-demand assistance to fruit growers in Berrien County, and 2020 was no exception.

The Annual Blueberry Kickoff Twilight meeting was one of the season's first meetings to be shifted on-line. With information for growers being too important to cancel, the team worked within two short weeks to re-design the program to a virtual platform. The format enabled MSUE educators and specialists to deliver their subject matter through short, 15- to 20-minute presentations with a period for questions and answers after each talk. This program received high praise from growers with attendance much larger and broader than what had occurred at face-to-face meetings in the past. The successful outcome inspired the team to move ahead with more webinar-based programs. Some highlights include:

- The Southwest Michigan Monday Fruit IPM meetings, which were held every week from April through June, reaching 52 to 90 participants at each meeting.
- Spring 2020 MSU Tree Fruit Webinar Series—Tree Fruit educators and specialists teamed up to design a

10-day webinar series to replace face-to-face programs that were canceled. The series took place over the lunch hour to accommodate growers' busy schedules during a critical production time. This was a true team effort with an overwhelmingly positive response from fruit growers and stakeholders. The program reported 478 participants, with 16 from Berrien County.

- Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) continues to plague fruit growers. Therefore, the MSU Fruit Team hosted SWD Fridays! - a series of webinars geared specifically toward providing fruit growers with spotted wing drosophila information. This series was held every Friday from June 19 through August 14, 2020. Each webinar featured a 10-minute statewide update on the status of spotted wing drosophila activity in susceptible fruit crops, followed by a special topic and time for questions. Special topics presented by the team and invited speakers included 2020 management considerations in cherry and berry crops, sampling fruit for SWD, biological control, and the role of drosophila flies in grape sour rot. The program had 20 to 41 participants per session, with 232 total viewers, many from Berrien County.

2020 BY THE NUMBERS:

# of programs hosted in Berrien	69
# of participants who attended programs hosted in Berrien	1273
# of programs offered statewide attended by Berrien residents	266
# of Berrien residents who attended statewide programs	940
# of MSUE staff reporting Berrien participants	65
# Direct consultations reported	75
# Soil Samples processed	191
# of youth participating in programming	1140
2020 Website Stats	Users 14214
# of Sessions 21497	Pages/session 2.35
Average time on page 2:05	Page views 50,496

MSU PRODUCT CENTER DATA

In 2020, the MSU Product Center provided business counseling and specialized services to 18 businesses in Berrien County, totaling 68 hours of MSU staff time. These 18 businesses have a combined total of 45 full-time employees and 89 part-time employees. Three of these businesses were launched in 2020. The demographic breakdown of business owners includes: one Black/African American, one Native American, one Hispanic/Latino, and 15 White. Twelve businesses are female-owned and six are male-owned.

Berrien General Fund Budget

2019	\$298,614
2020	\$307,609
2021	\$309,045

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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