



St Joseph 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 online 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 online 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

ST JOSEPH COUNTY MSU EXTENSION

- Eva Beeker—4-H Program Coordinator
- Linda Kline—Community Nutrition Instructor
- Eric Anderson—Field Crops Educator
- Tonya Barrington—Administrative Aide
- Lyndon Kelly—Irrigation Educator
- Dean Baas—Cover crops Educator

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4-H & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

In 2019, MSU Extension's youth development program reached 18% of the county youth population in St. Joseph County. A total of 2286 young people participated, 907 enrolled in community clubs, 935 in short-term interest groups and 910 in school enrichment programs. 259 adult volunteers participated in programs teaching and mentoring our youth. The St. Joseph County 4-H Leaders Council provides leadership and advice to St. Joseph 4-H Program Coordinator Eva Beeker.

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. Cass and St. Joseph County 4-H programs worked together to offering the 4-H Tractor Operator Program in February 2020. Upon completion of the program, the 14 to 19 year olds received a certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, allowing them to operate a 20 PTO horsepower or greater, garden or agricultural tractor. Certification is also used by youth who exhibit and participate in local contests, parades and festival activities. The three-Saturday course was taught at the First Baptist Church-Newberg in Jones. The training included educational sessions, some driving practice, written and driving tests and graduation.

With no face-to-face 4-H interactions since March, Eva was active in keeping 4-H volunteers and youth connected and engaged during this difficult year. She helped leaders with technology to engage clubs in virtual activities, and worked with volunteers to market the many virtual special interest programs and workshops made available by colleagues around the state.

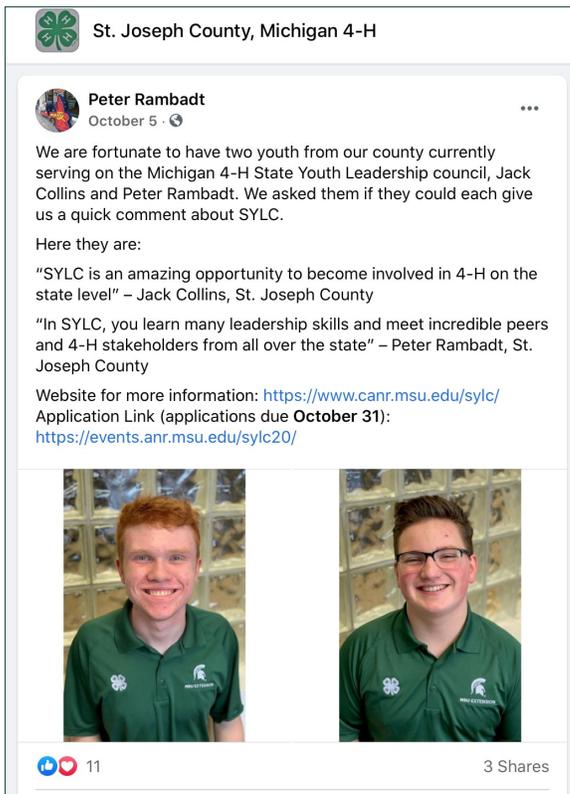
St Joseph 4-Hers joined with other youth around the state to participate in programs such as the "Adulting 101" series where youth received training in budgeting, cooking and household tasks; A National Park Tour Series that engaged youth in virtually exploring our national parks; American Sign Language;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

Eva worked with volunteers to provide lessons and hands-on educational kits to St Joseph 4-H Cloverbuds. Kits were sent to homes and worked on together via four online zoom meetings.

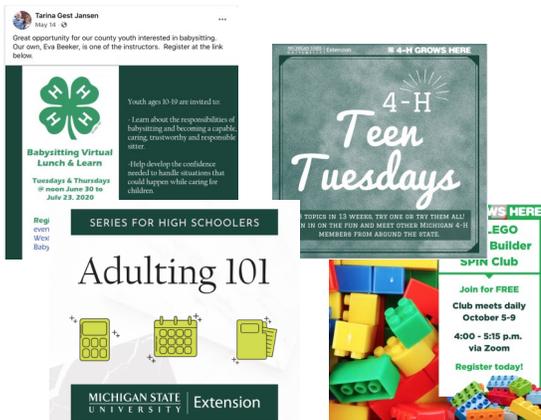
In lieu of a face to face fair experience, A Virtual Showcase titled "4-H Fall Event" was organized to give youth an option to show their projects and receive feedback from judges. There were 191 youth who participated in the local event. The 4-H Youth Council, the 4-H Livestock Association and local donors all provided financial awards to the youth. Nineteen (19) of our local youth also displayed their projects in the 2020 Michigan State Fair 4-H & Youth Virtual Showcase that was held in August.



Youth experience the Tractor Operator Certificate Program held in February 2020



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



NUTRITION EDUCATION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) is an evidence-based program that helps people lead healthier lives, teaches people eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits about good nutrition, how to make their food dollars stretch further and learn to be physically active. Most classes are held in a series so participants can work towards practicing healthy lifestyle habits.

Highlights from 2020 SNAP-ED programming:

During a six week series with the Three Rivers Young Adult program a participant commented on a change made since a grocery shopping field trip. The young adult was part of a cognitively impaired classroom aged 19-26. The first session was a trip to a local grocery store to see what the students knew about a store layout, where weekly sale ads were located, how shelves are stocked and how to get the most food for the money they had. Two teams, consisting of 7 students each, shopped for their morning meal. They had combined their money for a total of \$10.00 to choose their items. After the field trip they went back to the classroom where the items were placed on the counter for each of the two teams. A sale ad was brought back to the school and receipts were compared. Sale items were discussed along with serving sizes to see if there was going to be enough food for their team. Some meals were more nutritious than others. Details about using the 5 food groups were discussed while they revealed what food groups were missing from what was purchased. The following week the young woman said she had learned a lot while visiting the store and now feels more comfortable shopping for her meals. The biggest change for her was picking up the sale ad before making the trip to the store. Now she could stretch her food dollars and get more nutritious food for her money!

A group of 25-1st grade students from Wall Elementary School in Sturgis have been very engaged with several of the Show Me Nutrition lessons. Increasing vegetable and fruit servings can be difficult for that age group. Viewing a poster that shows all different vegetables and fruits in the shape of a rainbow was exciting to them! Many of the students were not familiar with recognizing the different varieties of produce. More than half the group couldn't decipher what was actually a vegetable or what was a fruit. We discussed having them ask their parents to take them to the produce section in a store so they could see ones they weren't familiar with. Some of the students reported later that they did just that. After attending classes, several are now sampling new ones during the week and on weekends and are now able to distinguish the difference between the two food groups. One proud

student couldn't wait to share with her peers, "Now I'm eating the rainbow and it tastes good!"

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a teacher from the Great Start Readiness Program reached out to MSUE to review a Show Me Nutrition lesson with her Pre-K students. Two Zoom sessions were conducted with the students and their parents on proper hand washing techniques to combat germs. The lessons took place both during the day and evening to make sure all students were able to participate. They were excited to do the activity online with their parents, telling them how they learned how to fight Germs, Germs in their classroom and now on the computer!



FOOD SAFETY & PRESERVATION

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. 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.

The goal for the team was to reach as many people as possible—answering consumer questions, providing evidence based resources, and clarifying misinformation and unsafe food preservation techniques found on the internet and 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 November 2020, over 11,000 people have logged into these programs—many from St. Joseph 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.

ANNUAL AG-CITING GOES VIRTUAL

In 2020, the St. Joseph County Grange Fair, along with so many other fairs in Michigan, had to close its gates for the year due to COVID-19 pandemic concerns. In order to give third graders the opportunity to experience a taste of what they would have seen and heard, MSU Extension staff and a host of generous volunteers produced a virtual version of the Ag-Citing tour available at <https://tinyurl.com/2020Ag-Citing>

The Ag-Citing Experience has been a fair week tradition since 1990 designed to educate third graders in the county on where their food comes from along with promoting good nutrition and physical activity. Not only did students learn about farm animals, they also learned about crops grown in the area. Over the past 30 years, thousands of students and hundreds of teachers, tour guides, presenters and tractor drivers have participated and assisted MSU Extension in making memories that people still share today.

The videos are available free of charge in a YouTube playlist where closed captioning is also available. The main video, just under an hour long, introduces all the major livestock species and types of crops grown for food and feed. Along with the main video, there are several short “bonus features” on topics including turning wool into clothing, taking a tour of a dairy farm, horses and horse care, and antique tractors. There is a virtual 4-H showcase where several young people show their animals like they would have at the fair. There are also two versions of a video describing how different animals are born or hatched—a shorter version and a longer one showing actual scenes of live births.

Though references are made to a few crops grown primarily in southwest Michigan, the majority of the content is widely applicable to youth and adults throughout Michigan and the Midwest who want to learn more about how farmers raise animals and crops and where their food comes from.

PRODUCE SAFETY TRAINING

Produce growers from the county took advantage of MSUE’s Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower Training Course face to face in Vicksburg in February. The PSA Grower Training Course covers information on produce safety, including a foundation of Good Agricultural Practices and Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule requirements. It is recognized by the FDA as one way to satisfy the training requirement of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, written in provision 112.22(c). 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. The team supplemented the regular course with online trainings in April and May to assist growers with handling and marketing their fresh produce during Covid-19.



Going virtual in 2020, this fun and ag-citing experience has evolved through the years but remains true to its purpose.



Comic relief from Nurse Betty, otherwise known as Betty the Cow, during the 2020 Virtual Ag-Citing Experience video.

Photo courtesy of Betty Meyer.

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 (SLWM) 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 St. Joseph residents participated in mindfulness programs offered by the team in 2020.

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 online 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 materials 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 St Joseph 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 St Joseph County, managed local research plots and used their expertise to highlight results at Virtual Field Days focused on 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 Farmers Day in Coldwater, Ag Action Day in Kalamazoo, a Farm Bill Program in Three Rivers, Pesticide Core Manual trainings in Centreville and Coldwater and Soybean Management and Research Technology meeting in Three Rivers took place in person and on schedule in early 2020.
- Other programs attended by county residents that provided support to the agricultural community in St. Joseph County included Wildlife Management For Field Crops; Irrigated Corn and Soybean Production Program; Ultra-early Soybean Planting Producer Panel; Sheep and Goats for Small Farms; Intro to Backyard Poultry, Prepare your farm for tax season, and Michigan Farm to Institution Network Meeting..
- MSUE’s pork team presented to 4-H youth and parents at Glen Oaks College on new restrictions in the use of ractopamine.

Field Crops Virtual Breakfast

MSUE specialists and educators teamed up for a third year to bring agribusiness professionals and farmers a series of “Virtual Breakfast” meetings. These 1 hour long online 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 1 RUP credit was available to each participant each week.



MSU PRODUCT CENTER HIGHLIGHT

Stutzman Brothers Meats based in Sturgis worked with Tina Conklin, MSU Product Center Specialist, in 2020 to earn their USDA grant of inspection for meat processing. The business currently employs three full time positions and up to four part time positions throughout the year. They are at the beginning stages of an expansion project that will add more processing space and a beef slaughter facility. This expansion is expected to create 5-10 full time jobs when it is completed in 2021 or 2022.

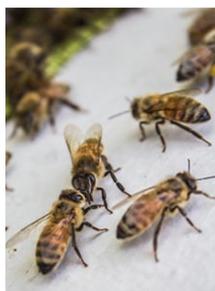
"I can't say enough about the positive experience we had working with the MSU Product Center and Tina Conklin on our USDA grant of inspection. She made the process easy to understand. Her work is thorough. She put in extra hours to support our business. Tina and the MSU Product Center are a huge asset to our business. We plan to work with her on our expansion project as well," said Matt Stutzman, Stutzman Brothers Meats Owner.



Stutzman and his brother purchased the business in the Fall of 2019. They raise Wagyu beef in partnership with Fairgrove Dairy Farm at a farm in Howe, IN. Stutzman's grandfather purchased a farm in St. Joseph County in 1961 and the family has been farming this land ever since. Stutzman Brothers offers a variety of meat products and partners with schools and youth sports teams to sell meat products for fundraisers. They have a large customer base in northern Indiana and are working to grow their customer base in Michigan.

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 an open question and answer format. Twenty-one viewers were from St Joseph County. The efforts of the apiculture team 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.



2020 BY THE NUMBERS:

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| # of programs hosted in St. Joseph | 20 |
| # of participants who attended programs hosted in St. Joseph | 525 |
| # of programs offered statewide attended by St. Joseph residents | 155 |
| # of St. Joseph residents who attended statewide programs | 553 |
| # of MSUE staff reporting St. Joseph participants | 51 |
| # Direct consultations reported | 68 |
| # Soil Samples processed in 2019 | 59 |
| Website Stats: Users Jan—Dec 2020 | 8244 |
| Sessions | 13,464 |
| Page views Jan— Dec 2020 | 32032 |
| Pages per session | 2.38 |

2020 St Joseph General Fund Budget Expenditure \$223,396

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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