

Gratiot County MSU Extension Report, June, 2021

During the Covid-19 crisis, Michigan State University Extension has continued to help people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, families and communities. Though it looked different in 2020, MSU Extension has still helped grow Michigan's economy by equipping Michigan residents with the information they need to do their jobs better, raise healthy and safe families, build their communities and empower their children to dream of successful futures.

In 2020, Michiganders heeded the calls to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. People across the state stocked up and stayed home and entered a period of uncertainty. New questions were on everyone's minds: Would the pandemic last long? Would the supply chains hold up? Was it safe to grocery shop? How would we continue to educate our children? MSU Extension already had a vast amount of information on its website and programming experts who have a vast amount of knowledge and experience. Early on, some of the most viewed articles from one of our District 8 food safety educators, [Joyce McGarry](#), were [Safe food handling when shopping in stores or using grocery delivery](#) (March 30, 2020); [How to handle takeout and drive-thru foods safely](#) (April 2, 2020) and [Does washing foods make them safer?](#) (April 20, 2020). As more and more information and education opportunities were developed, MSU Extension created a web page just for [Remote Learning & Resources for Those at Home During COVID-19 Pandemic](#). **The number of MSU Extension website users soared to over 1.7 million, who made over 3 million visits to the website and viewed over 7 million web pages. From Gratiot county alone, over 3,700 users made over 6,200 visits and viewed over 24,000 pages!** Not everyone in Gratiot county limited themselves to finding information on our website. **We still had 257 residents take advantage of 165 different MSU Extension educational programs through remote and in-person classes and meetings. The staff working out of Gratiot County hosted 15 programs through Gratiot County and participated in many statewide opportunities as well.** As farmers, business owners, families and communities adapted to restrictions and a different way of life, so did our educators and instructors. Working remote, using travel waivers, or in the office we continued to serve the public.

So far in 2021

Over 150 Gratiot County residents have participated in more than 40 different MSU Extension programs.

- From the Community, Food and Environment institute a sample of what residents in included:
 - Can You Explain Your Tax Bill.
 - The Invasive Species Summit.
 - Cabin Fever Conversations.
 - Fiscally Ready Communities: Financial Best Practices.
 - Current Issues Affecting Michigan Local Government.

- From the Agricultural and Agri-Business institute a sample of what residents participated in included:
 - Field Crops Webinar Series.
 - The Michigan Manure Management Summit.
 - MI Ag Ideas to Grow With.
 - Michigan Soybean On-farm Research.
 - Master Gardener Training.
 - Milker Training.
 - Great Lakes Regional Dairy Conference.
- From the Health and Nutrition institute a sample of what residents participated in included:
 - Changing Negative Self Talk.
 - Begin With a Breath.
 - RELAX Weekly.
 - Spring Food Preservation.
 - Stress Less Coffee Hour.
 - Safe Food = Healthy Kids.
 - Asparagus – Spring’s First Vegetable.
 - Michigan Cottage Food Law.
- From the Children and Youth institute a sample of what residents participated in included:
 - Volunteer Brainstorming Session.
 - How Children Develop, Extension Extras.
 - Laughing, Loving, and Leading Your Kids.
 - 4-H SPIN clubs.

Supporting our local community

Joan Taylor & Kami Paksi have been in our office when able and otherwise continuing to work remote. They have kept our office open to the public, coordinated pickup and delivery of soil sample kits, 4-H kits, farm record books and other items. In addition, they have made sure that Gratiot County residents have been connected to the proper resources and experts within MSU Extension.

- Farmers were notified of current requirements for Pesticide Certification. Our MSU Extension field crops team developed online review modules.
- 31 soil tests were conducted by the MSU Soil & Plant Nutrient Lab (28 were for Commercial and Farm samples).
- Over 30 residents connected with ask the expert and a few reached out to the garden hotline.
- Joan and Kami continued to take calls from farmers with various crop issues and referred them to the appropriate educator –Monica Jean or Paul Gross.
- In addition, Joan and Kami regularly connected the public to educators for many issues and supported the educators who were working in remote settings.
- Worked with 4-H families to make sure their animal projects were tagged for fair.

- Joan also helped connect small businesses in mid-Michigan connect to PPE sources.

Diane Longanbach, MSU Extension Educator and MSU Product Center Innovation Counselor, worked business concepts with many new clients in 2020. The businesses associated with Diane created over 50 new Michigan jobs and experienced more than \$180,000 in sales growth. Some of the highlights in 2020 include:

- 129 clients (including 32 minority entrepreneurs).
- Counseling entrepreneurs that employed 195 Michiganders.
- Counseling entrepreneurs who had a total of \$6,758,085 in annual sales.
- Chaired the Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) Multi-State Virtual Conference and continued planning for the Alma, Michigan debut of the program.
- Worked on multiple videos and webinars to assist small business with labeling, food establishment licensing, sales and pricing, lot coding, Cottage Food businesses and more.
- Facilitated or assisted in programming that reached more than 600 Michiganders.

David Rowley, Government and Community Vitality Educator, developed online versions of “Can you explain your tax bill” and “Do you think your property valuation is too high.” David also developed an online class for local governments entitled, “Michigan’s Property Taxes and the Annual Assessment Process: It’s not just a Revenue Enhancement.” In addition, David co-authored “Ethics: It is More than a Conflict of Interest.” David’s experience with local government helped him grow and maintain a network of local government partners including the City of Alma. Some of his 2020 highlights include:

- Facilitating or assisting in programming that reached over 1,100 Michiganders.
- Providing content and education resources to the Alma CEC Conference, the Michigan State Tax Commission, Mid-Michigan College, and other local entities.
- Developing multiple curriculums and adapting several programs for online presentation.

Erica Rogers, Environmental Management Educator, worked with a statewide team on Agriculture and Agri-Business’ Rapid Response for Agriculture task force and other supply chain disruption brought on by the global pandemic. Several articles, fact sheets and presentations were developed to keep growers, producers and the general public informed on crucial issues caused by Covid-19. In addition, Erica’s 2020 highlights included:

- Work on the Michigan Manure Hauler Certification Program.
- Developing and delivering presentations on conservation, manure management, nutrient management.
- Work on various statewide taskforces including the Manure Generally Acceptable Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs) and Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) systems.

- Contributions to Livestock, animal agriculture and field crops work teams.
- Facilitating or assisting in programming that reached over 2000 Michiganders.

Casey Zangaro, Swine Extension Educator, completed a detailed biosecurity mapping project through Google Earth. This program can create an up-to-date biosecurity map for livestock producers. Casey has created informational guides and presented on this project to producers. In addition, Casey's 2020 highlights included:

- Taking a leading role in restructuring the website to provide up-to-date, easy-to-find information for farmers and the public.
- Managing and assisting on several grant opportunities to help leverage the funds MSU Extension receives from partners to further serve Michiganders.
- Collaborating on a number of agricultural/animal science projects to help educate 4-H youth and adults.
- Facilitating or assisting in programming that reached over 1,300 Michiganders.

Monica Jean, Field Crops educator, serves Gratiot County within her large coverage area. Monica had over 13,842 direct and indirect programming contacts combined in the large region that she covers. Monica also continued many face-to-face activities by seeking travel waivers to make the necessary visits and conduct essential agricultural services, including 87 individual Stakeholder Consultations. In addition, Monica's 2020 highlights included:

- Helped develop online pesticide review modules when it became apparent that online options were desperately needed.
- Helped develop and present a Cover Crop Virtual Field Day.
- Continued to improve and expand her team's popular agricultural podcast "In the weeds."
- Collaborate with other AABI work teams to make sure that Michigan's farmers had access to vital information during the pandemic.
- Every Wednesday throughout the pandemic Monica hosted an interactive Facebook live discussion broaching such topics as Farm Stress, Field Crops and Farm Financial analysis.

Natasha DePue delivered programming to 172 participants around the state in the critical areas of health and nutrition. Natasha began her position as a Community Nutrition Instructor after the stay-at-home orders, which greatly impacted her ability to connect with community partners and schools. However, she immediately began helping a team of co-workers to adapt programs to an online format, to teach several programs to a variety of partners in surrounding communities as well as statewide, and she also persevered in creating meaningful community partnerships. Although scheduling programming was difficult in 2020, Natasha was able to still do the following:

- Join community coalitions to connect with partners and advertise programming.
- Begin and continue a thriving partnership with Live Well Gratiot.
- Create meaningful partnerships in Gratiot County with promises of programming.

- Helped convert two curricula to an online format.
- Programming for over 50 adults with Prescription for Health.

Chris Thompson is our 4-H Program Coordinator. With the pivot to online programming, our youth have not been able to meet for in-person programming. This has been a challenging year for all Michigan 4-H youth. MSU Extension waived all participation fees in 2020 to reduce the barriers to participation and worked hard to develop an online option to fair participation both at the state and local levels. Chris also facilitated online programming and worked with colleagues to find online solutions to serve youth affected by the pandemic in addition to maintaining the 4-H clubs and committees.

- There are 39 active 4-H clubs and a 100 4-H adult volunteers working with 541 youth over that past programming year.
- Over 150 youth participated in youth programming outside the typical 4-H model where Chris was the lead or collaborator.
- Screened current volunteers through interviews and references collected to ensure the highest level of safety in Montcalm 4-H programs.
- Some of the programs Chris facilitated or assisted in:
 - SPIN Club: Surviving a Zombie Apocalypse.
 - Cake Decorating with Cindy Lou.
 - 4-H State Awards.
 - Various Outdoor and survival films in the works.

Brenda Long, Finance and Homeownership educator continued to offer financial and homeownership education to Gratiot County residents and beyond. Brenda was able to maintain the critical presence for foreclosure intake and assistance and pivot to remote programming for the many subject areas that she oversees.

- Brenda reached 974 program participants in 2020.
- Brenda provided foreclosure prevention education, and STEP Forward assistance to local and neighboring county residents.
- Brenda offered online education in:
 - Homeownership
 - Household budgeting
 - Credit
 - Financial goal setting and crises management
 - Retirement
 - Overall money decisions
- Offered classes or instruction in 16 different money topics.



[In times of supply chain disruption, how do I appropriately dispose of my livestock mortalities?](#)

[Erica Rogers, Dale Rozeboom, and Casey Zangaro, Michigan State University Extension - May 3, 2020](#)

Composting animal mortalities can be timely, effective, and environmentally beneficial. | Photo by MSU Extension

This has been unprecedented year for all of us thus far. We are here to serve all the residents of Gratiot County by meeting their needs as we have done for more than 100 years. Thank you for your support!

Through successful partnership and collaboration with Gratiot County, MSU Extension continues its local presence and provides vital educational resources and programming in such areas as community and economic development, agriculture, land use, health and nutrition, and youth development.

MISSION:

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