

## Montcalm County MSU Extension Report, March, 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 Montcalm county alone, over 9,400 users made over 16,800 visits and viewed over 43,000 pages!** Not everyone in Montcalm county limited themselves to finding information on our website. **We still had 659 residents take advantage of 195 different MSU Extension educational programs through remote and in-person classes and meetings. The staff working out of Montcalm County hosted 30 programs through Montcalm 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.

### **Supporting our local community**

[Victoria Newcomb](#) has been in our office when able and when working remote has coordinated pickup and delivery of soil sample kits, 4-H kits, farm record books and other items. In addition, Victoria has made sure that Montcalm 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.
- 148 soil tests were conducted by the MSU Soil & Plant Nutrient Lab (116 were for Commercial and Farm samples).

- Victoria continued to take calls from farmers with various crop issues and referred them to the appropriate educator – Christina Curell, Monica Jean or Paul Gross.
- In addition, Victoria regularly connected the public to educators for many issues and supported the educators who were working in remote settings. One of the most crucial areas was support given to residents facing foreclosure.
- Victoria also helped connect small businesses in mid-Michigan connect to PPE sources.

**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
  - Healthy Montcalm
  - Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative
  - Montcalm Human Services Coalition
- Create meaningful partnerships in Montcalm with promises of programming
  - EightCAP Inc. Head Starts
  - Montcalm Care Network – 2 series scheduled, but cancelled
  - Central Montcalm Upper Elementary
  - Central Montcalm Middle School – 2 series scheduled for Jan.
  - White Pine Library
  - Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI) – 1 series scheduled for Jan.
  - Relief Against Violent Encounters (RAVE) – 2 presentations scheduled for Jan.
- Helped convert two curricula to an online format

**Tarin Minkel** 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. Tarin 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 34 active 4-H clubs and over 140 4-H adult volunteers working with 526 youth over that past programming year.
- Over 250 youth participated in youth programming outside the typical 4-H model where Tarin was the lead or collaborator.
- Montcalm County youth participated in 38 different types of programs.

- Screened current volunteers through interviews and references collected to ensure the highest level of safety in Montcalm 4-H programs.
- Tarin facilitated or assisted in:
  - Ractopamine Meeting
  - Reduce, reuse and recycle for seed germination
  - Mask making workshops
  - Embryology training
  - Marketing your livestock project
  - Livestock Showmanship workshop
  - Small Animal Showmanship workshop
  - Montcalm County 4-H Virtual Showcase
  - OTP Youth – “Go, Slow, Whoa” Aging out of Foster Care Young Adults
  - Montcalm County Let’s Chat for Volunteers 1 & 2
  - Michigan 4-H State Awards Program
  - Fall and Holiday Kits

**Katie Ockert**, chronic wasting disease educator, worked hard to build networks to share vital information to those who hunt, consume venison, and care about our natural resources. Katie also serves as the statewide lead in outreach and education around zoonotic disease. She reached 4,242 residents statewide, many from Montcalm County.

- Chronic Wasting Disease Charrette Planning meetings where residents in Montcalm and Ionia counties were engaged in designing an event to gather input from the community about what CWD education and outreach efforts should include.
- Presented at the annual Legislative Staff Training in February 2020 to educate legislators and their staff about how CWD impacts their community.
- Received a \$50,000 grant in 2020 and a \$75,000 grant for 2021 from the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists to conduct Zoonotic Disease Education for Youth in Agriculture programming which includes teaching principles in biosecurity, multi-sectoral animal health planning and outbreak response at fairs and exhibitions. Katie also connected with local businesses where people and animals interact.
- Katie planned and facilitated a webinar series called Hunter to Hunter: Connective Conversations webinars which included 6 webinars that connected hunters to regulatory officials, Chronic Wasting Disease researchers, food safety educators, tribal leaders and those involved in disease testing and surveillance.
- Collaborated with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to produce an online tutorial to teach hunters how to properly collect lymph nodes for CWD testing from their harvested deer. This video tutorial has had over 7 million views.
- Collaborated with AABI and MSU Product Center staff to edit and digitize a series of at home venison processing videos.
- Held 5 CWD test collection sites in Montcalm and Ionia counties to assist hunters in collecting tissue samples from their deer for CWD testing. These sites accounted for 14% of CWD testing submissions in the state.

**Brenda Long** continued to offer financial and homeownership education to Montcalm 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.

**Kevin Gould**, serves Montcalm County within his large coverage area. Keven had over 1,100 direct and programming contacts in the large region that he covers. He also continued many face-to-face activities by seeking travel waivers to make the necessary visits and conduct essential agricultural services.

- Kevin answers grazing questions and helps develop grazing plans on a regular basis.
- Kevin helps facilitate Breeding Soundness Exam Clinics and tested 43 bulls in our area. Kevin also serves on the Bull Evaluation Program committee to help evaluate beef breeding bulls for the annual program supplying bulls to cow-calf producers throughout the state.
- Kevin performed ultrasounds on 350 head of cattle in 2020 (all breeding cattle; no youth animals were scanned due to Covid-19 restrictions). This is a service to the beef industry that adds educational value and marketing opportunities for scanned cattle.
- Kevin has also participated in the local response to agricultural accident planning and training, as well as, helped teach The Beginning Grazing School and other animal science subjects at the community college and university level.
- Kevin has also lent his expertise to local farm succession issues and the emergency response to the delayed planting crisis.



Due to the cancellation of the fair, youth exhibitors had animals that still needed to be sold. Tarin Minkel created a Facebook Group titled "Montcalm County 4-H Meats" where youth could post their 4-H projects for sale and the community could join to support them in purchasing their projects.

**This has been unprecedented year for all of us thus far. We are here to serve all the residents of Montcalm 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 Ionia County, MSU Extension is able to continue its local presence and to provide vital educational resources and programming in such areas as community and economic development, agriculture, land use, health and nutrition, and youth development.**

**MISSION:**

**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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