



# Oceana County 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

## BY THE NUMBERS



Almost 2,000 Oceana County adults and youth participated in MSU Extension programs



356 youth participated in 4-H and school enrichment programs



Over 100 youth and adults participated in health and nutrition programs



29 MSU Extension staff delivered programs to Oceana County residents.



1,943 people participated in programming by Oceana County vegetable educator Ben Werling.



395 Oceana County residents participated in 147 unique virtual programs.



2483 users visited the Oceana County website, viewing 6127 web-pages.



1,897 Oceana County residents stopped in to the office or called in for direct assistance.

## MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Once again I am delighted to share the results of another successful year of partnership between Oceana 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, supported new and local businesses, created opportunities for youth leadership development and career exploration, helped farmers with business management and mental health, and much more. Our staff live and work alongside county residents, are rooted in community relationships and are responsive to community needs.

Of course this year was a year like no other, and the following pages allow me to share my pride in how well MSU Extension has responded to the challenges both broadly as an organization, and of course locally through our continued delivery of programs and services made available to our local communities.

Our partnership with you makes this all possible. On behalf of the MSU Extension team serving Oceana County, thank you for another great year. We look forward to your continued support and hope you'll be able to join us during one of our upcoming programs.

James Kelly, District Director

# Unprecedented Times - Director's note

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](http://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. The creativeness, dedication, teamwork, and resilience that our MSUE professionals exhibited during this global pandemic has been outstanding. 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 Michigan.

Forced to focus on 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 everyone or every program, but to expand our reach and to help more people incorporate the evidence-based learning from a major university into their homes, families, businesses and communities, it 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.

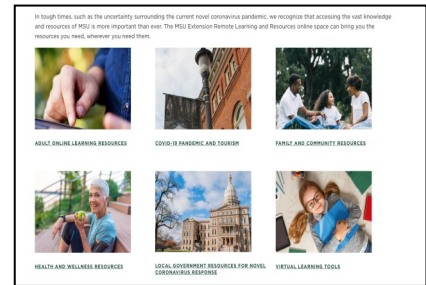
In the end, I believe the experience in on-line program development and investment in capacity will not only augment but strengthen our face to face work (once that resumes). Our programs will have greater reach than ever before and MSUE will be a leader in virtual education.

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

# Broad Response to Novel Corona Virus

In late March, MSU Extension pivoted all of our programming to online formats to comply with the original Stay Safe, Stay Home order (EO2020-42). Within six days of that order, we launched the Remote Learning and Resources website and our teams immediately began modifying programming to a digital format that would provide equal educational value right in people's homes. This online space provided a platform to launch this effort and since then has become a robust virtual one-stop-shop for everything MSU Extension has to offer online. This site has evolved over the past year and houses educational resources:

- to help parents keep their children on track with learning at home;
- an extensive list of online programs for adults;
- a calendar of virtual events;
- educational videos;
- relevant, responsive and evidence-based articles authored by MSU Extension's experts;
- resources for local governments and communities navigating the effects of the pandemic and more.



Within a few days into the quarantine, staff had new programming spooled up and ready to present digitally. A few noteworthy examples include:

- Staff members quickly pivoted from a face-to-face program offered in a few locations to a series of one-hour presentations called **Adulting 101**. Topics include things such as what to look for when renting, tips and tricks for easy cooking, how to keep your finances in order and the right way to do household tasks such as ironing and setting a table. The series attracted more than **3,000** participants statewide and was recommended by school districts. This program has now become a regular recurring series and engaged a team of program staff to share in its delivery.
- **Cabin Fever Conversations** became a highly popular series of 11 webinars via Zoom and Facebook Live designed to get people's minds off of being cooped up inside and get them thinking about their garden spaces. Sessions focused on lighthearted but educational conversations about gardening featuring guests who discuss topics like seed saving, houseplants, pollinator health, community gardening and container gardening. The webinar's success of more than **500 attendees per session** has prompted organizers to continue programming during winter 2021. This program also provided a great learning opportunity for staff who had never presented live webinars and created comical do's and don'ts to live programs for staff to learn from to improve their work.
- **Rapid Response For Agriculture** was a site developed in 2019 to provide a single point for farmers to access resources developed in response to several weather related emergencies. In 2020, our agriculture team immediately rose to the challenge to assist the industry with resources and management tools to aid them through the pandemic emergency. One first response was a series of articles and best practice options for the floriculture industry who were limited in the ability to sell to their wholesale markets. Other resources were aimed at keeping farm employees safe and how to best manage operations while still meeting consumer demands for a fresh, safe food supply during emergency conditions created by Covid-19.

# Broad Response to Novel Corona Virus (cont.)

- **MSU Extension CHAMP:** COVID-19 Hazard Assessment and Mitigation Program is one tool found on the rapid response site. This tool was designed to help ag operations reduce the risk of worker exposure to COVID-19 and mitigate disease spread. It assists farms and ag related businesses with designing a pandemic preparedness plan, conducting a hazard assessment to identify risks for exposure, and developing mitigation practices supporting worker safety and health. These agriculture-centric, pandemic preparedness education and support materials were designed to align with federal, state and local guidance.

## Going Virtual with Traditional Face to Face Programs

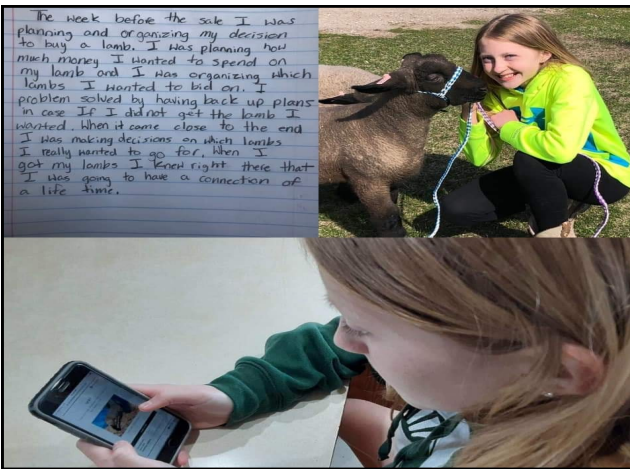
- **Annual Research Project and Demonstration Field Days** highlight on-farm research collaborations between MSU Extension, MSU AgBioResearch and local growers. These in-person daylong experiences have always been held in-person, on farms. In 2020, these events were moved to a digital format. The program and attendance of these events so far has been impressive. Moreover, the production of these events will allow the visual results to be shared at other meetings.
- **Fruit Crop Research and Scouting** carried out by the **MSUE Fruit team** is especially important to the economy of District 5. The Integrated Pest Management meetings that occur every Monday during the growing season have been held face to face for decades reaching a handful of Michigan famers each week with the remainder waiting for the written report to be broadcast. Taking this program virtual has brought in growers from all the fruit growing regions in the state as well as several people from other parts of the and the world. Also, the sessions were recorded, allowing growers to hear the latest on pest and disease conditions at their own convenience. Information shared during these meetings is critical to the sustainability of agriculture in west Michigan. Fruit Field Days were also successful for this team and included the Viticulture Field Day in July and Peach Field Day held in August.



Chase Township farmer Jack Thornton was featured in statewide education during a virtual field day event.

- **Food Safety Education** teaching capacity was increased by MSUE in early 2020 with the ServSafe Certification program for food managers and workers scheduled to be offered throughout the district. However, without national approval to provide the course on-line our programming efforts were put on hold in April. The Food Safety Team worked quickly to modify other face to face curricula into web-based offerings and expanded their educational reach to engage food service workers, homemakers, and families in weekly educational sessions. The sessions were designed to answer questions about food preservation, cottage food law, and food pantry safety. With an emphasis on engaging young people during the quarantine, the team focused on youth focused topics and seasonally themed cooking workshops. They have maintained a weekly programming schedule since May 2020 which has significantly increased their reach across the state.

# Program Highlights



4-H members submitted their fair entries for the virtual auction and showcase.



## 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

4-H is the largest youth development organization in Michigan. Connected at the national level, MSU's program promotes traditional 4-H clubs as well as many other leadership and life-skills development opportunities for youth. 4-H provides experiential learning opportunities that allow youth to explore new interests and discover their passion. In Oceana County, we had 95 registered adult volunteers and 356 youth participating in 33 established 4-H clubs.

In Oceana County 4-H worked tirelessly to provide a virtual fair experience for Oceana county youth. Oceana County MSU Extension office coordinated the youth events: a still exhibit show, horse show, livestock shows & 3 animal auctions (small market, large market and junior market).

There were 460 entries for our youth virtual showcase events with 20 judges participating. These entries were in still exhibit classes, horses and livestock classes. Ninety animals were auctioned off, with 191 buyers registered for the auction,. Over 100 of those buyers actively bidding during the three auction events.

## MONEY MANAGEMENT

MSU Extension helps youth learn the important skill of money management, MSU Extension is making financial education fun through hands-on workshops on topics such as goal setting, decision making, budgeting, saving, investing and borrowing as well as financial services, earning potential and risk management. In 2020, our Career Exploration and Workforce Development Educator delivered financial literacy training to youth in Oceana County

# Program Highlights

## SHORELINE PROTECTION

MSU Extension provides education that assists in protecting the natural resources we all enjoy. In 2020 high water levels caused significant erosion along the bank erosion, slope stability, nature based solutions, ice issues and the benefits of collaborating with neighbors. Local educators gave multiple presentations on best practices and worked with statewide partnerships to help mitigate the issues.



Local residents participant in shoreline erosion discussions.

## WATER RESOURCE EDUCATION

MSU Extension's focus on lakes, streams, and watersheds brings together educators and researchers with local, state, regional, and federal agencies and stakeholder organizations to protect and promote the sustainable use of the state's distinctive aquatic resources. In 2020, Pentwater Lake in Oceana County project became the focus of an intense campaign to stop the spread of an invasive species called European Frog-bit.



Research on inland lakes in Oceana County provides data for statewide reports.

## HEALTHY LIVING

MSU Extension helps people apply research to make positive changes in their lives. We empower individuals with the knowledge they need to make healthy choices. Chronic Pain Management and Chronic Pain PATH (Personal Action Towards Health), held at the Oceana County Services building, introduced participants to various self-management tools which empower them to take an active role in managing their pain. Diabetes Prevention, taught at the Oceana Council on Aging in Hart.



Chronic Pain PATH participants learn pain management techniques in Oceana County.

# Program Highlights

## GARDENING & CONSUMER HORTICULTURE

Homeowners often have insect infestations or plant diseases that they are unfamiliar with and need help addressing. MSU Extension provides soil testing, plant and insect identification, disease identification and treatment, Smart Gardening resources, and a toll-free Lawn and Garden hotline. The Oceana County MSU Extension office provides assistance to many customers with basic home gardening concerns. Additionally, 18 soil tests were completed for Oceana County residents in 2020.



Gypsy moth caterpillars were back in 2020.

## FARM BUSINESS

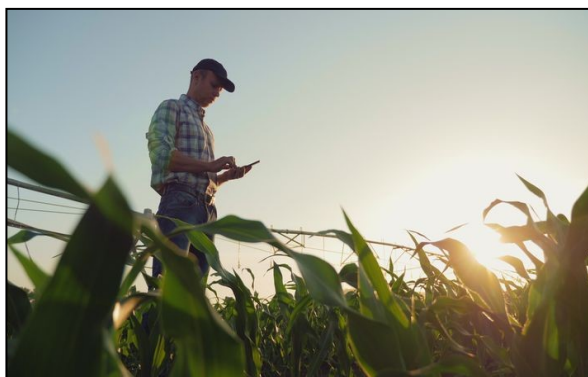
Providing business support to farmers in Oceana County resulted in improved financial operations for many farms. Our Farm business educator provided business support to farmers in Oceana County that resulted in improved financial operations for many farms.

Our Farm business educator had direct contacts with 110 farmers between email, Zoom and phone calls in the last quarter of 2020. In addition she reached at least 3235 customers via digital content: 104 with printed materials, 580 with accounting spreadsheets, 4 with podcasts, 13 with videos, 30 with paper letters, and 2495 with newsletters, plus more via social media.

Other farm visits in Oceana County focused on succession planning with farm financial analysis, Farm Bill education sessions, and Farm Stress consultations. Virtual sessions on tax preparations, lending tips, and future farm financial trends were also well attended.



An Introduction to Cost Production webinar.



The Farm Records Book for Management is a free

# Program Highlights

## PRODUCT CENTER COUNSELLING

Strong counties provide resources to assist entrepreneurial activity within the region. MSU's Product Center helps Michigan entrepreneurs and businesses to develop and launch new product and service ideas into the food, agriculture, and bioenergy markets. One of the businesses the MSU Product Center supported in 2020 from Oceana County is GingeRx, which produces their products at the Starting Block in Hart.

GingeRx was founded in 2018 to provide an alternative to refrigerated ginger beverages. The company added additional flavors in 2019 and in 2020. Currently, GingeRx three flavors of their ginger beverage; all of which are shelf-stable 100% organic juice. Their products can be found in stores like Better Health, D&W and select Meijer stores.

In 2020, GingeRx was able to hire a full-time consultant dedicated to acquiring new retail accounts. Additionally, the company entered a new market where restaurants purchase and utilize their beverage in specialty cocktails.



Stacy Orosz, co-owner of GingeRx, says, "The Michigan State University Product Center has been an integral part of our success thus far. They have assisted with processing policies, vendor relations, and marketing strategies. Without the Product Center, we would not even have the proper bottle necessary for our production requirements."

## NUTRITION EDUCATION

MSU Extension's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-ED) provides basic nutrition education and hands-on activities for all ages. Core curricula are designed to help low-income families stretch their food dollars while maintaining good nutrition. Some instruction includes physical activity and cooking techniques that help instill life-long skills. It is estimated that every \$1 spent on nutrition education saves as much as \$10 in long-term health costs. In Oceana County, participants enrolled in virtual programs on various topics in 2020.



In-person and virtual programming continued to teach youth about healthy nutrition.



# Agriculture



**MSU Extension supports Oceana County agriculture by helping local farmers learn research based business and production practices, along with sharing how to optimize and reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers.**

**This education leads to better use of time, money, and human capital, and helps retain and create agricultural jobs.**

MSU Extension works to increase farmers' success while protecting the environment, ensuring food safety, reaching new markets, and advancing agriculture through applied research. That work is evident on many levels in Oceana County through the efforts of in-County educators as well as through the support of other MSU Educators in surrounding counties that provide extensive support to the farming community.

In 2020, Oceana county residents participated in programming such as Hemp 101, a workshop designed to help local farms determine if hemp is a good fit for their farms. Asparagus Day 2020 attracted 140+ attendees from across Michigan and included a full day of education, as well as a trade show. A post-event survey suggested the education was valuable: 100% of survey respondents felt the day would help them better manage pests, reduce input costs, or improve crop yield or quality.

Support for our fruit farmers was continued by our educators in Kent county, as well as locally through our office support staff through routine communication to our farming community. From researching Fruit Tree disease resistance

to managing disease and insect issues, the fruit and vegetable growers recognize the importance of a strong Extension presence in the area. In 2021 that support will be further enhanced with the opening of the West Michigan Research Center, a facility that will be used by MSU staff from the Ag-Bio Research Center as well as by our local fruit and vegetable educators.

All of the programming combined resulted in over 1,000 contacts with local farmers with significant impacts on farming practices and commodity gains.



MSU technician Chris Robbins inspects industrial hemp research plots.

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities, and businesses. For more than 100 years, MSU Extension has 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. For more information about the programs we offer please refer to the contact information below.

**OCEANA COUNTY MSU EXTENSION STAFF**

Sarah Schaner, 4-H Program Coordinator	<a href="mailto:schaner4@msu.edu">schaner4@msu.edu</a>
Toni Van Bergen, 4-H/Support Staff	<a href="mailto:vanberg2@msu.edu">vanberg2@msu.edu</a>
Kathy Walicki, Office Manager/District Support	<a href="mailto:walicki@msu.edu">walicki@msu.edu</a>
Dr. Ben Werling, Vegetable Production Educator	<a href="mailto:werlingb@msu.edu">werlingb@msu.edu</a>

**CONTACT**



Oceana County  
MSU Extension

844 S. Griswold St., Suite 400  
Hart, MI 49420



231-873-2129



[Msue.msu.edu](http://Msue.msu.edu)

[Oceana@msu.edu](mailto:Oceana@msu.edu)



MSU Extension Oceana



[@MSUEExtension](https://twitter.com/MSUEExtension)

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. The 4-H Name and Emblem have special protections from Congress, protected by code 18 USC 707.