



MSU TOLLGATE FARM AND EDUCATION CENTER

2020–2025 STRATEGIC PLAN



INTRODUCTION

Michigan State University (MSU) Tollgate Farm and Education Center has a long history of providing unique extension programming for local audiences. As a part of MSU Extension, we are proud of this legacy, but we also simultaneously look to the future. The MSU Tollgate Farm team has been challenged by the leadership of MSU Extension to transform MSU Tollgate Farm into a national leader for place-based education. A first step in this process was engaging in strategic planning. In 2019, an extensive planning process took place led by Mike Mathis, director of MSU Tollgate Farm; Holly Madill, director of the National Charette Institute; and Marie A. Ruemenapp, MSU Extension specialist and co-director of the Urban Collaborators.

Feedback was gathered from various stakeholder groups to assess current audiences, needs, challenges, desires, and

context. Research about MSU Tollgate Farm's local, regional, and national context was also completed. Based on this information, to achieve Tollgate a reputation for national leadership, we will need to address several pressing challenges including improvement of facilities, staffing systems, and financial systems. The resulting vision statement, goals, and objectives were crafted with these long-term challenges in mind. The combined efforts of MSU Extension, MSU Tollgate Farm, and dedicated community partners such as the Americana Foundation, among others, will be needed to meet our stated vision and goals. Together, we can lay the foundation for achieving greater impact on a national scale.

CASE: WHY MSU TOLLGATE FARM AND EDUCATION CENTER?

Although Michigan has approximately 10 million acres of farmland across the state, four out of five Michigan residents live in urban or suburban communities and 23% of those residents are under the age of 18. This means that most youth in Michigan have limited awareness of agriculture and its importance in their daily lives. They most likely don't know where their food comes from, have never had an experience with farm animals, and most likely know little about growing their own food.

Our state, country, and world also face unprecedented environmental challenges. Human activities are causing major changes to Earth's biosphere and the environmental systems that we depend on to survive. Climate change, topsoil loss, habitat destruction, decreasing availability of fresh water, and biodiversity loss pose major threats to the quality of life for everyone on the planet. These issues also disproportionately affect people of color and those who have contributed the least to their root cause.

Without education, another generation will move forward in life with no understanding of the importance of the natural environment, of ways to live and protect the Great Lakes, or of the agriculture and food systems that keep our food safe and our state's agricultural industry thriving. Educational programming related to agriculture, water quality, environmental science, ecology, and sustainability will arm residents with the best evidence-based information possible so they can make better decisions, both individually and within their community.

The MSU Tollgate Farm team crafts experiential learning opportunities with a basis of sound research and proven best practices. Outdoor experiential learning has been shown to increase student test scores across content areas including reading, math, science, and social studies (Glenn, 2000). Time spent playing and learning outdoors has also been shown to have a positive effect on the social and emotional





health of children, including reducing the symptoms of attention deficit disorder and other cognitive issues (Louv, 2008). Young people who learn about agriculture, the growing and harvesting of food, the care and keeping of animals, natural resources, and the importance of conservation and stewardship of the environment are better prepared to make healthy decisions for themselves and their communities.

MSU has operated Tollgate Farm since 1987 as a working agricultural operation in Novi, Michigan, providing pre-school through adult learning opportunities related to agriculture and farm production in the middle of one of the most populous areas in southeastern Michigan. With a deep connection to Michigan 4-H, 160 acres of uniquely preserved open space in Metro Detroit, and a dedicated team of staff and volunteers, MSU Tollgate Farm is well positioned to meet the mission of MSU Extension through four program areas. These program areas include environmental and agricultural sustainability, horticulture, youth development, and

community education. The yearly programs reach over 21,000 participants through events and workshops. As a result of experiential learning offered at MSU Tollgate Farm, thousands of Michigan adults and youth are better equipped to make important decisions about their futures. Few places can provide such a diverse offering of programs covering agriculture, natural resources, youth development, horticulture, and community education to such a large population.

In addition, MSU Extension has operated in Michigan for over 100 years and has been organizing life-changing programs for youth through 4-H since 1912. We know that youth who participate in these types of programs are more likely to go to college, more likely to complete college and more likely to give back and participate in the communities in which they live. They are also less likely to participate in risk-taking behavior. Providing youth with these experiential learning programs changes their lives and improves their communities.



COMMON STAKEHOLDER THEMES FOR AN MSU TOLLGATE FARM VISION

EDUCATION	INNOVATION	DIVERSITY	SUSTAINABILITY	COMMUNICATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop industry-leading place-based education. - Increase the diversity of content topics covered in programs. - Increase the variety of both targeted and general education experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop industry-leading programs. - Address emerging issues in our programs. - Develop new methods for reaching high-needs audiences. - Create industry-leading facilities with new technology, and multi-use purpose powered by alternative energy. - Spur innovation with improved and new staff skills. - Develop new means for generating financial support. - Take inspiration from our heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the diversity of our audience based on age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors. - Improve the diversity of our staff based on age, race, and ethnicity. - Improve the diversity of skills present within our staff. - Diversify the funding sources available to the farm. - Diversify the content, delivery method, and intensity of programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create financial sustainability through diverse funding sources and parentships. - Create sustainable facilities and operations with a long-term maintenance plan, multi-purpose facilities, and alternative energy. - Create sustainable programming with relevant topics, work-life balance, and additional administrative and operations support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve our ability to tell our story through digital media, in-person communication, and site signage. - Aspire to be recognized for the exceptional impacts that we make in our community. - Increase the MSU Tollgate Farm brand recognition. - Be recognized as a respected partner and program provider. - Deliver education content with a variety of delivery methods. - Place an emphasis on heritage and history.



VISION: WHERE WILL THIS 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN TAKE US?

During the various strategic planning sessions, the MSU Tollgate Farm team, along with many stakeholders, shared their vision of what the farm will look like in five years. Five common themes emerged during these discussions including education, innovation, diversity, sustainability, and communication. The feedback within the table was used to craft a vision statement and goals.

MSU Tollgate Farm and Education Center Vision Statement – In 2025, MSU Tollgate Farm and Education Center is no longer considered a local “hidden gem” and is recognized as a leader in Michigan for its

ability to blend heritage and innovation into experiences for all ages. To accomplish this, MSU Tollgate Farm has increased access to agriculture and natural resources education by placing a priority on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, MSU Tollgate Farm will have the operational systems in place to achieve the long-term goal of being a national leader beyond 2025. The farm continues to be a trusted provider of evidence-based agriculture, natural resources, and youth development content for the public, practitioners, and academics to make informed decisions.



GOALS: HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

1. **Goal: Make a positive impact on our community through high-quality place-based education and as a leader in Michigan 4-H.**

1.1. **Outcome: Increase the number of people we serve.**

1.1.1 Objective: Develop programs and events that take advantage of new timeframes.

1.1.2 Objective: Train part-time staff to manage programs independently.

1.1.3 Objective: Train volunteers to lead and support public programs.

1.1.4 Objective: Diversify program topics based on strategic plan feedback.

1.1.5 Objective: Expand traveling program offerings.

1.1.6 Objective: Increase programming executed by off-site MSU Extension staff.

1.2. **Outcome: Increase the diversity of our program audience (socioeconomic, race, ethnicity, physical abilities, and other factors).**

1.2.1. Objective: Use curriculum that respects diversity and a wide range of physical abilities.

1.2.2. Objective: Develop off-site programs for audiences with limited transportation.

1.2.3. Objective: Devise methods for delivering more low-cost programming.

1.2.4. Objective: Improve site accessibility for people with limited mobility.

1.3. **Outcome: Increase volunteer impact.**

1.3.1. Objective: Implement opportunities for volunteer appreciation and recognition.

1.3.2. Objective: Effectively communicate the impact volunteers have on the farm.

1.3.3. Objective: Employ job descriptions for new and existing volunteer roles.

1.3.4. Objective: Employ standard volunteer training and onboarding.

1.3.5. Objective: Adopt the University Volunteer Selection Process.

1.3.6. Objective: Increase opportunities for volunteers to donate their time.

1.4. **Outcome: Increase place-based education occurring in our community.**

1.4.1. Objective: Increase community capacity through professional development, scholarship, and partnerships.

1.4.2. Objective: Increase the capacity of staff to deliver place-based experiences in collaboration with each other and community members.

1.4.3. Objective: Increase sustainability focus.

1.4.4. Objective: Deliver place-based experiences appropriate for all ages.

2. Goal: Prepare to participate in the next university capital campaign.

2.1. Outcome: Increase pool of individual, corporate, and nonprofit prospects.

2.1.1. Objective: Increase the number of volunteers and community leaders in positions of leadership.

2.1.2. Objective: Increase the number of people and organizations interacting with programs and communications.

2.1.3. Objective: Write yearly communications plan.

2.2. Outcome: Establish a database of prospects, program participants, and volunteers.

2.2.1. Objective: Share data with University Advancement and Alumni Association.

2.2.2. Objective: Employ a standard data profile to be captured for all programs and volunteer opportunities.

2.3. Outcome: Increase giving from new and existing prospects.

2.3.1. Objective: Increase opportunities to donate at current events and programs.

2.3.2. Objective: Develop a strategy for sharing “Case” and “Needs” statements.

2.4. Outcome: Develop written fundraising plan.

2.4.1. Objective: Develop “Case” statement and “Needs” statement.

2.4.2. Objective: Identify systems and deadlines established by University Advancement for capital campaign and match with Tollgate timeline.

2.4.3. Objective: Prioritize renovation and construction projects based on a needs survey.

2.4.4. Objective: Secure bids and plans to use when fundraising for construction projects.

2.4.5. Objective: Analyze market capacity and giving requirements of prospects.

3. Goal: Improve long-term sustainability of site finances, operations, and staffing.

3.1. Outcome: Increase the amount of funding and the diversity of funding streams.

3.1.1. Objective: Employ a process to access grant monies to supplement site funding.

3.1.2. Objective: Re-invest event revenue into staffing to pursue sponsorships.

3.1.3. Objective: Increase revenue with new times and seasons for programs.

3.1.4. Objective: Increase rental income with improved marketing and business plan.

3.1.5. Objective: Increase giving by communicating “Needs” and “Case” through volunteers.

3.2. Outcome: Improve ability to make strategic decisions based on financial data.

3.2.1. Objective: Develop and employ a business planning process.

3.2.2. Objective: Increase site support for accounting and business planning.

3.3. Outcome: Increase staff capacity to fulfill strategic goals.

3.3.1. Objective: Increase percentage of gifts and endowments supporting positions.

3.3.2. Objective: Coordinate full-time position development with strategic goals of MSU Extension institutes and outside partners.

3.3.3. Objective: Develop human resources policies, business policies, and organizational structure to best utilize full-time and part-time staff.

3.3.4. Objective: Enlist more volunteers to support site activities.

4. Goal: Implement capital improvement projects that support education and safety.**4.1. Outcome: Improve overall site accessibility, safety, and ease of access.**

4.1.1. Objective: Update site promotional and directional signage.

4.1.2. Objective: Reconfigure driveway entrances for improved safety.

4.1.3. Objective: Limit vehicle access to the back of the farm.

4.1.4. Objective: Improve pathway access from the parking lot to the back of the farm.

4.1.5. Objective: Install wheelchair accessible pathways to instructional areas.

4.1.6. Objective: Acquire method for transporting people with limited mobility into fields and areas of the farm without pathways.

4.2. Outcome: Increase the capacity of facilities to execute programs and farm operations.

4.2.1. Objective: Increase the amount of well water available.

4.2.2. Objective: Upgrade electrical capacity to the “back” of the farm.

4.2.3. Objective: Install internet access to animal barn.

4.2.4. Objective: Relocate farm workshop to new building.

4.2.5. Objective: Update Activity Center program space, restrooms, and kitchen.

4.2.6. Objective: Install 4-H Discovery Garden fencing, pathways, and activity areas.

4.2.7. Objective: Expand heated greenhouse capacity.

5. Goal: Contribute to relevant academic, practitioner, and public knowledge resources.

5.1. Outcome: Increase the amount of publications, presentations, and online content related to Tollgate.

5.1.1. Objective: Increase full-time staff contribution to communications.

5.1.2. Objective: Increase support from MSU Extension educators and assessment staff.

5.1.3. Objective: Improve access to program assessment data.

5.1.4. Objective: Increase capacity for social media and website communication.

REFERENCES

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