



2020 Annual Report to Clare County



A Message from the District Director Winter 2021

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 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 Michigan.

During the pandemic and subsequent stay-home orders, 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.

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.

Working from home with the tools and support needed to help them succeed in a remote environment, MSUE educators have continued to assist farmers, elected officials and decision makers, parents, families and

In 2020, we expanded our capacity to provide high-quality virtual education. In this report, you will find stories of strength and effort, stories of resilience and creativity. There is no doubt this pandemic has pushed us all to the edge from time to time, but we have worked together to get beyond it and to continue to do the good work we do and deliver the best for our residents. We are looking forward to a time when we can all meet in person safely again.

youth by meeting with them on virtual platforms through online meetings and webinars. With the work they have accomplished over the last months, staff have reported some of the benefits and disadvantages to "virtual" learning:

- Programs that are recorded allow 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.
- There are more opportunities available to everyone – once a program is made virtual anyone can sign up, regardless of where they live.
- 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 this experience in on-line program development and investment in capacity will augment our face to face work (**once that resumes**) and provide greater access to our work than ever before. Thank you for your continued support!

Shari Spoelman, District Director

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Response of MSU Extension to the impact of Novel Corona Virus

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

Adulting 101: 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. Once promoted via social media, it went “viral,” attracting more than **3,000** registered 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.

Gardening Cabin Fever Conversations – Gardening became a highly popular series of 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 topics like seed saving, houseplants, pollinator health, community gardening and container gardening. The webinar’s success of more than **500 attendees per session** prompted organizers to continue programming during winter 2021.

[Educational Resources for Parents, teachers and families](#) were compiled to assist with remote and home-based learning. 4-H Curriculum, videos, tip sheets and virtual learning tools were developed and continue to be added to and improved as we begin the Fall school year.

[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.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension

Adulting 101: Preparing for Life and College

DATE & TIME:
 April 9 2 pm
 Budget and Credit
 April 16 2 pm
 Rent Smart
 April 23 2 pm
 Cooking 101
 April 30 2 pm
 Household Tasks

LOCATION:
 Virtual through web

COST:
 Free

Prepare yourself for the future!

SPONSORS:
 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension
 MID MICHIGAN COLLEGE

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:
 Older youth (11th and 12th Graders)

DESCRIPTION:
 Learn some quick tips that will help you navigate life and college.
 Budget and Credit-Explore the basics.
 Rent Smart-Learn what to know when you rent.
 Cooking 101-Learn some tips and tricks for cooks for yourself.
 Household Task-Learn ironing, making bed, and other helpful hints.

HOW TO REGISTER
<https://msu.zoom.us/j/257448925>

CONTACT:
 Michelle Neff by hydemich@msu.edu or 989-429-2359

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Join Us Online

Food Preservation Series
 Every Thursday 1 p.m. & 6 p.m. EDT

- March 18 - Introduction to Home Canning
- March 25 - Preserving Maple Syrup
- April 1 - Selecting Plants for your Garden
- April 8 - With Spring's Arrival, Asparagus Won't Be Far Away

To Learn More Visit:
https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_preservation/events
 To join by phone, call in advance to register at 877-643-9882.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension

Canning food became more popular during the pandemic. While working from home has its challenges, food safety staff witnessed some really great results with programming online. By having online classes, instead of face:face, the reach for food preservation classes increased by over 4,000%.



MSU Extension in Clare County

2020 By the Numbers:

Jan—Dec 2020	
# of programs hosted in Clare	42
# of participants that attended programs hosted in Clare	966
# of programs offered statewide attended by Clare residents	143
# of Clare residents who attended programs	585
# of Direct Consultations Reported (Field Crops, Com Vitality, Prod Center, Soil tests, gardening, food safety, etc.)	164

General Fund Budget Expenditure	
FY 2019-2020	\$58,577
Every \$1 invested = \$4.70 in programs and services is returned	ROI

4-H 2019-2020	
4-H Adult Volunteers	50
4-H Youth Club Enrollment	272
Youth Served (duplicates removed)	680



In August 2020, the voters of Clare County approved a millage request to help fund MSU Extension and 4-H in Clare County.

We'd like to thank the residents and voters for their support of our efforts to bring the resources of the university to Clare County.



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

on the ballot
Aug. 4

in Clare County



4-H Program Highlights



ALEXANDRIA SCHUNK

*4-H Program
Coordinator*

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When Alexandria Schunk isn't outdoors gardening, camping, taking pictures, traveling and enjoying time spent at her family's cabins, she's working hard to make the 4-H program in Clare County be a rewarding experience for youth. As the 4-H program coordinator, Alex thinks it's great to see youth involved in and learning about all the different project areas 4-H has to offer. One of her passions is to see youth serve in

leadership roles, such as being on the board of the Youth Leadership Council and serving as camp counselors.

4-H Youth Leadership Council.

The 4-H Youth Leadership Council was formed just months before COVID hit. The group had big plans for their first year in existence. Due to the pandemic, the exciting plans that they had for summer of 2020 had to be canceled, and new or revised programs had to be created. As a youth led group, they wanted to learn more about how to show their animals, plus teach their peers too. The group organized a Virtual Showmanship Workshop where Clare County 4-H youth taught how to handle their animals and interact with the judge during a show.

Fun while staying home.

The 4-H Youth Leadership Council held an Animal Costume Contest for all Clare County 4-H members as a fun way to engage with one another. Youth were encouraged to not only dress up



their animals, but also themselves for the contest. Thirteen youth participated in the contest where voting took place through the county program's Facebook page. A fan of the Facebook page said "These look amazing!!! Wonderful job 4-Hers!!" The Youth Leadership Council sponsored prizes for the first through third place winners, plus prizes for all Cloverbud entries.



"Heat Lamp" the pig was a winner for Quinn and Cole Drake.

Mason is saber ready for "Yo-DAAA Farm wars!"





Healthy Living



MICHELLE NEFF

*Child and Family
Development*

Educator

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“Our work to provide resources to parents and to engage youth in a variety of activities virtually never stopped. My work and the work of MSU Extension continue to help people across our district. MSU Extension is here in our communities to help educate and share resources.”

Michelle Neff, Children and Youth Educator, enjoys providing opportunities for youth to learn new things and explore. Extension has so many programs and events that engage community members. The passion of bringing knowledge and information out into communities makes her feel like we are making an impact with communities. When not working, Michelle enjoys gardening, home food preservation, reading, and watching movies.

Adulting 101. Adulting 101 was a big impact that happened during the pandemic. Reaching over 3,000 students while planning a local event showed how important teen programming is needed. This is an example of what happens when a program goes “viral.”

This idea came from a local school counselor who shared a need to have programs for seniors while many schools were testing juniors during school in the Spring. MSU Extension and Mid Michigan College brainstormed topics that might interest youth who are getting ready to graduate and move away to college or move out. The topics that were discussed, planned, and later offered included: budgeting and understanding credit, being an informed renter, basic cooking skills, and household tasks like ironing, laundry, and cleaning. Since schools ended in-person programming on March 13th, the planning team decided to make this a virtual program in a four-week series each week with a new/different topic, with MSU Extension taking the lead. After very little promoting locally, Adulting 101 series got picked up by Mlive, many social media sites and it went viral. The first series had over 1,000 youth registered for each of the classes. A waiting list was created and was determined that we should offer another round of Adulting 101 in May with five classes instead of four. Budgeting and credit would be split into separate lessons in the May series. Additional classes were also offered in April to help fill the need around Credit vs Debit and Developing a Spending Plan. MSU Extension staff from the Financial and Home Ownership Team, the Health and Nutrition Institute, and the Children and Youth Institute all worked together to offer programming to high school aged youth across the state and country. Participants from 29 states and two countries participated in the Adulting 101 Series. Numerous teachers and individuals followed up with requests for recording and other resources. Over 124 views of the recordings have taken place. MSU Extension has since provided a College 101 series and additional Adulting 101 classes.

Evaluation. An evaluation was sent to all youth after the first series completed. Of the 94 youth that responded to the survey:

66% feel more prepared to live on their own after taking the Adulting 101 Series.

91.44% agreed and strongly agreed that the resources provided by MSU Extension were helpful.

Comments from participants about how they will apply the information:

“I will use the spending plan for the rest of my life.”

“I will definitely practice better spending habits. I now have a defined method for tracking spending & savings.”



Finance and Homeownership



TEAGEN LEFERE

Financial &
Homeownership
Program Instructor
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I enjoy hearing back from individuals who learn something new during one of our classes and the positive changes they are making in their personal finances.

Teagen Lefere is a grandma that loves to crochet. But don't let that fool you. She is also an active finance instructor for MSU Extension, helping hundreds of people every year prevent a mortgage foreclosure, improve their family budgets, prepare for homeownership, or become stable renters. Teagen loves working with individuals and families toward a positive financial outcome. "I enjoy hearing back from individuals who learn something new during one of our classes and relay back to me what they learned and the positive changes they are making in their personal finances," said Teagen.

During the pandemic and work from home orders, Teagen had to become more creative while working with people who may not have had the abilities or technology to fulfill documentation requests from Step Forward.



This is a Success Story that happened in spite of COVID. But it's also a story about why Teagen is such an amazing employee. Without her persistence, this outcome wouldn't have materialized.

Many things changed with COVID-19 and how I work with homeowners and assisting them in applying for Step Forward Hardest Hit funds. Before COVID-19 I could meet with individuals in my office to collect needed documentation and sign documents. Once I began working from home and travel restrictions were imposed, that became a challenge.

Step Forward contacted me to check on a woman I was working with in Clare County. She had been approved for Step Forward funds to bring her property taxes current from 2017 to present. They had not received her signed documents back to be able to send her funds to the county treasurer. They wanted me to contact her and see if she received the agreement as the phone number they had for her was no longer in service. These forms are time sensitive and if they are not returned by the deadline, she could lose the funding.

I went back through my phone log and tried all the numbers she had contacted me from, one of which was her neighbor's phone. Her neighbor stated she had not talked to her in some time and wasn't sure if she currently had a phone. She suggested I try her on Facebook. I found her on Facebook and sent her a private message about her Step Forward closing documents and if she was able to sign them. She replied that she was having a hard time getting the documents notarized. I told her I was a notary and was scheduled to be in my office one day the next week. We made an appointment and I was able to notarize her documents and request an extension with Step Forward. She was able to return them to Step Forward in a timely manner and avoid tax foreclosure on her home.



Nutrition



CORAL BETH ROWLEY

Community Nutrition
Instructor

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“I like it when we can see the ‘light go on’ regarding some healthy/unhealthy choices, and then thinking of ways to move in a healthier direction.”

Being able to connect with people on relevant nutrition-related & physical activity topics is a passion of Coral Beth Rowley. She especially loves to see people apply the new information they learn– taking a step in the direction of such things as food resource management, trying to reduce sugar intake, increasing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, various healthy protein sources, and exercising more regularly.

In 2020 Coral Beth was part of a team that delivered the Prescription for Health program in neighboring counties before piloting it in Clare County. Prescription for Health is a partnership with primary care health providers and public health departments. Eligible participants are referred to the program by their physician. For each class they take, they earn coupons that are used to purchase locally grown produce. Each participant earns up to \$100 in coupons to be spent for fresh produce. These classes are expected to continue in the coming year, either online or face to face. MidMichigan Health has been the partner, with Family Fare serving as the vendor where coupons are spent.

When not working, Coral Beth likes being active and enjoys walking and doing seasonal activities. Coral Beth is very involved with her church and can be found helping with Food Distribution events.

Office Management



SHERRY LANDON

Office Manager

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When Sherry Landon isn’t taking pictures, painting, or spending time with her family, she’s serving as office support at MSUE in Clare County. She is passionate about her job and it shows. She loves giving back to her community and the 4-H program. Sherry is especially proud of the work of the 4-H Ambassador program.

Whether in the office or working from home, Sherry works hard to provide support to her teammates so they can better serve their customers. “When I was in the office I was on hand to make sure faxes and information were forwarded from Step Forward clients to our specialist Teagan LeFere so that she could continue to work from home due to COVID and healing from an injury. As a team we all made little task happen.”



Agriculture

Paul Gross is an Agriculture Extension Educator specializing in Field Crops and Soil Health. When not working, he is happiest spending time with his family and friends.



PAUL GROSS

Field Crops
Educator

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"I am utilizing technology to improve efficiency in my work and to reach more people."

Paul enjoys working with farmers and agribusinesses, bringing the research and information from MSU's Extension Specialists and applying it to their farms to improve productivity, profitability and environmental practices. Paul engages in on-farm research in the county to test products, practices, and systems that address issues on their farms.

During the pandemic, Paul worked with his colleagues to develop a stronger online presence for programming. They developed online courses, podcasts, informational videos, and short how-to videos that farmers can view on demand. These have been posted on our social media sites. Covid-19 has forced all of us to be more creative in how we communicate and interact with farmers.



Impact of COVID:

According to Paul, "Like everyone else, Covid-19 changed our world and how I carried out my programming. I am fortunate that I was able to conduct all of my planned on-farm research in the summer of 2020. I was able to travel to

fields to monitor pest traps, provide soil samples and scout pests. We utilized pictures and videos for weed, insect, and disease problems when travel was not possible. I am utilizing technology to improve efficiency in my work and to reach more people."



FaceBook Live weekly Thursday "Lunch Break" is an ongoing event that brings up to date information from the MSU Extension field crops team and other members of MSU's ag educators and specialists to growers.



Farm Stress



ERIC KARBOWSKI

*Community Behavioral
Health Educator*

*“Every connection and outreach
made to someone that is
struggling can have a lifelong
impact.”*

Eric Karbowski is our Farm Stress educator who enjoys spending time with his family and friends, football, hunting, kayaking, and cutting wood. He is passionate about working with farmers, creating tools, and developing resources to support those in need. Eric joined MSU Extension to help provide behavioral health supports and services to farmers and farm families in our community. The existing farm stress programs created a nationally recognized foundation that set the stage for the advanced opportunities and supports now available to those we serve. The focus on adhering to the programming models, yet flexibility to be creative and innovative, have proven to be important in allowing resources such as the teletherapy program and “wrap around” model to be implemented. For Eric, his position with MSU Extension is helping him fulfill both personal and professional goals.

Mental Health Minute: When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Eric and his team of colleagues in agriculture were able to make an impact despite the inability to provide in person programming. One of those examples is a program called “Lunch Break.” Once a week, ag educators and Eric provide a Facebook live feed for updates and advice for growers and producers. Each week, Eric provides a Mental Health Minute, and embeds good, sound mental health education for the participants. Sometimes, you don’t know that you can use this information until you receive it.

Teletherapy: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, MSU Extension through a partnership with Pine Rest Behavioral Health, created the teletherapy program for farmers to access supports through online-counseling with master’s level clinicians that have a connection to agriculture. This was timely because the roadmap to support and recovery was already in place, making connecting farmers with the services efficient. It later received funding to help offset cost further reducing access barriers.

According to Eric, “The heralding truth behind behavioral health is that often the effectiveness of the supports we are providing will not likely be publicized. Every connection and outreach made to someone that is struggling can have a lifelong impact. Although we have a large amount of reportable farm stress impact data and outreach engagements, as friends, neighbors, and supporters of MSU Extension, you are supporting the continued development of resources and tools further reducing the impact of stress, mental illness, and the potential loss of life by suicide through our farm stress efforts.”



Responding to Farmers in Need



Beef Production



KABLE THURLOW

*Beef & Grazing
Educator*

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"I am still here to help just as I have been in the past. It might not look the same when I am not in the office, but you can still connect with me. Diagnosing problems over the phone and the computer has gotten easier. I have learned that farmers truly do not mind attending some programs virtually. "

When Kable Thurlow started with Extension in March of 1998, his goal was to get back home to family and raise his children on the same farm that he grew up on. His other goal was to bring the vast resources and expertise of MSU to the people in his community and help them be better at what they do. Working with farmers and agribusinesses across this state is very rewarding for Kable.

Grazing School. After the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited traditional face-to-face education, it was decided to move "Grazing School" to a virtual setting and offer eight topics in 1.5-hour blocks two times per week during the month of October. The intended audience of the course was beginning farmers and livestock owners who graze dairy, beef, and small ruminant animals and want the latest animal and forage research on grazing management. Kable coordinated this state-wide effort, working with MSU specialists and other educators to record educational videos, provide online teaching, and attend to all the details related to this series. A couple of successes came out of this:

1. The number of attendees actually increased.
2. All the webinars and videos were recorded and placed on MSU's website so anyone can access them at any time to refresh their skills

Participant evaluations showed that everyone's expectations were met or exceeded. Knowledge was increased for 90-100% of participants in all content areas and many indicated they were likely to implement new practices. When asked, "If given the choice on the format for the grazing school, which would you prefer?" 2 out of 3 respondents indicated they would prefer a combination of face-to-face and online instruction. About one-fourth preferred only online, whereas only one-tenth preferred face-to-face instruction. This information will be extremely valuable in preparing for future grazing schools.

Virtual Grazing Field Day. Kable Thurlow and Paul Gross were the lead Educators/Organizers at this event that attracted over 91 people. Evaluation results showed that 95% said that the event met or exceeded their expectations and 95% said they gained knowledge in six of seven content areas.



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