



2020 Annual Report to Isabella County



A Message from the District Director Spring 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:

- 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 – Gardening!** 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.
- [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. 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.

The flyer is titled "Adulting 101: Preparing for Life and College" and lists four sessions: Budget and Credit (April 9, 2 pm), Rent Smart (April 16, 2 pm), Cooking 101 (April 23, 2 pm), and Household Tasks (April 30, 2 pm). It specifies the location is virtual through the web and the cost is free. Sponsors include Michigan State University and Mid Michigan College. The flyer also includes a "WHO SHOULD ATTEND:" section for older youth (11th and 12th graders), a "DESCRIPTION:" section for each session, and a "HOW TO REGISTER:" section with a Zoom link. A contact person, Michelle Neff, is listed with her email and phone number. A small disclaimer at the bottom states that MSU is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer and that the flyer does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, age, gender identity, national origin, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic.



MSU Extension in Isabella County

2020 By the numbers:

Jan—Dec 2020	
# of programs hosted in Isabella	56
# of participants that attended programs hosted in Isabella	1,447
# of programs offered statewide attended by Isabella residents	307
# of Isabella residents who attended programs	1,173
# of MSUE staff reporting programs for Isabella County	91
# of Direct Consultations Reported (Field Crops, Com Vitality, Prod Center, Soil tests, gardening)	248
# people served in Isabella County	3,002

General Fund Budget Expenditure	
FY 2019-2020	\$161,743

4-H 2019-2020	
4-H Adult Volunteers	159
4-H Youth Club Enrollment	660
Total Youth in 4-H Programs	1581

Popular programs in Isabella County in 2020

	FACE TO FACE	VIRTUAL
FARM STRESS	X	X
4-H LIVESTOCK		X
MINDFULNESS		X
HOME FOOD PRESERVATION	X	X
NUTRITION (ADULT AND YOUTH)	X	X
CAREER EXPLORATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (YOUTH)	X	
CHINA ART – SAGINAW CHIPPEWA TRIBE	X	
OCEAN EXPLORERS (YOUTH)		X
SPA WORKSHOP (YOUTH)	X	
FINANCE AND HOMEOWNERSHIP	X	
SOYBEANS	X	
MID MICHIGAN LIVESTOCK NETWORK	X	



4-H Program Highlights

For Kristi Schreiber, 4-H Program Coordinator, the ability to create new and innovative programs for youth to enjoy is what she enjoys most. Throughout 2020, she enjoyed working more closely with colleagues across the district and state in programming efforts to better serve the wonderful volunteers and 4-H families in Isabella County.



KRISTI SCHREIBER

4-H Program
Coordinator

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MSU Extension 4-H offered some unique programming opportunities for the youth of Isabella County in 2020. Our “Ocean Explorer’s” programming that stretched from June - October was a huge hit with youth audiences and families.



COOKING WITH KRISTI

Learn

- new recipes
- kitchen safety
- cooking terms & techniques

Your free enrollment includes access to a private Facebook group where you can access six videos to watch on your schedule. You will also receive a PDF to go along with each video that includes the recipe and other valuable info.

This series is recommended for youth 10 and up or younger with help from an adult.

<https://events.anr.msu.edu/Cooking2021/>

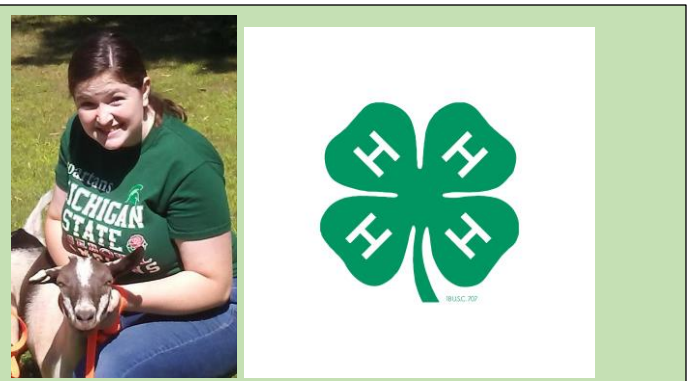


In addition, Kristi was able to create a “Cooking with Kristi” virtual on demand series to be launched in January of 2021. With nearly 100 youth registered, this program has become a hit. Other virtual

programs that are being launched in 2021 are a canine project program and youth beekeeping. Isabella County has a very rich 4-H tradition and we have so many valuable volunteers. Kristi has enjoyed getting to know them better while updating the Volunteer Central system at the beginning of the pandemic.

When not working, Kristi is training and showing her award winning Belgian Tervuren (during non-covid times) in conformation, agility, herding, obedience and tracking. She is an avid reader and enjoys cooking and trying new recipes.

When it was determined that fairs weren't going to be able to meet as usual, MSU Extension stepped in with a virtual showcase opportunity for youth. Here's a success story from one of Isabella County's youth:



My name is Madelon Humphreys, and I am 17 years old. This year was my first year of animal showmanship in 4-H, and while it definitely didn't go as planned, it was a great year for many reasons. The middle of March was pretty sad overall. My classes moved online and opportunities that I had been waiting for my whole life were changing right before my eyes. Then, 4-H said no face to face events and the fair was cancelled. My sister and I brought our goats home in April and we were so sad that no one would be able to see how good our goats got, and we couldn't get good feedback so we could improve. Shortly after this, however, MSU Extension announced the Middle of the Mitt Showcase and I was so excited to be a part of it.

It ended up being a great event! For my video, I walked my goat around, stopped and set him, and answered some goat terminology questions. Then I showed my goat doing a down and back. Filling out my feed record was fun too. I put a lot of creativity into my letter and I liked filling out the financial information. I'm so glad that 4-H representatives were able to put something together for members to be a part of! I got great feedback from my judges and I will use their critiques for next year.

Something that I have to remember during this difficult period is that there's always something positive, even during the darkest times. The Middle of the Mitt Showcase was a positive thing that gave me hope during the pandemic, and I am grateful that MSU Extension was able to make this 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 "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.

Pollinator garden at Papa's Pumpkin Patch.





Farm Stress



ERIC KARBOWSKI

Community Behavioral
Health Educator

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“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



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)

Community Nutrition Instructor Sabrina McGee enjoys working with people and teaching them how to make small changes with big impacts on their lives and their family’s lives. When not working, she likes to read.



SABRINA MCGEE
Community Nutrition
Instructor

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“Even though we had to change the way classes were taught, I think we were still able to reach our community members. Being able to teach virtually allowed participants with transportation concerns or no childcare to be able to attend our classes still.”

Eat Healthy, Be Active. During the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to reduce face: face interactions, Sabrina shifted the way she worked to continue to reach people and teach nutrition education. During the summer, she taught three Prescription for Health classes using our “Eat Healthy Be Active” curriculum in partnership with Mid-Michigan Health Department, Mt Pleasant Farmers Market and a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. We had 24 people participate and graduate from the three multi-session classes. Each week that the participant logged into the Zoom class they received a coupon book worth \$10 to use at the local farmers market to purchase Michigan grown fruits and vegetables. We gave out a total of 256 coupon books with the value of \$2,560 that was spent at the Mt. Pleasant Farmers Market. This program allowed these 24 participants to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption and helped support our local farmers.



MSU Extension Office Management



NONIE GROSS
Office Manager

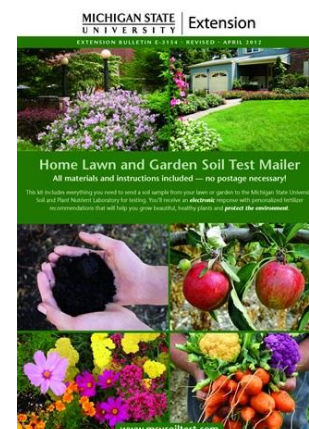
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Nonie Gross loves to golf and travel. She also enjoys concerts and spending time in the UP. When she’s not enjoying leisure activities, she’s working as the MSU Extension Office Manager, keeping things running smoothly for customers and staff members.

Nonie says she enjoys serving the residents of Isabella County,

especially the ones who have never heard of MSUE. “They are always so thankful/grateful for us and the information we provide.”

During the Covid-19 pandemic and the stay home order that placed all non-essential workers working from home, Nonie continued to assist clients and answered their questions. She went to the office 1 to 2 days/week and would schedule times to meet customers for soil test kits, farm record books, plat books, pesticide bulletins and 4-H items.



“Our residents are taken care of even when we aren’t able to be in the office.”



Food Safety



KARA LYNCH

Food Safety

Educator

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“Being familiar with technology and adapting our programs to reach people is an example of the ability MSU Extension has to connect with our community.”

Kara Lynch enjoys reading, cooking, attending sporting events, exercising, gardening and outdoor recreation. She’s looking forward to resuming those activities that have been suspended by the pandemic.

Kara is also a Food Safety Educator for MSU Extension, serving all the counties in District 6 - Isabella, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Osceola, Missaukee and Wexford. She likes the variety of her position, the diversity, the community connections, and the programs she delivers. During 2020, with the move to all virtual programming in the spring, and the general public’s increased connection to gardening and preserving food, Kara and the entire Food Safety team did a lot of programming!



Canning food became more popular during the pandemic. While working from home has its challenges, staff like Kara witnessed some really great results with programming online. By having online classes, instead of face:face, she increased her reach for food preservation classes by over 4,000%. And her Safe Food = Healthy Kids program increased by over 1,700% because of the ease of connecting remotely to our classes. One of the other benefits to online programming is that we are reaching a more diverse audience, some of which we could not have been otherwise able to connect with. The online classes have been free of charge. Becoming more familiar with technology and adapting our programs to reach people is an example of the ability MSU Extension has to connect with our community. Collaborating with local partners such as Mid-Michigan College and Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe has continued to show success as well.

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

Explore more: https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_health/index and click on either *Food Preservation* or *Safe Food & Water* to find out the many classes we offer.

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