



2020 Annual Report to Osceola 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.

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. 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.

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%.

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/797448955>

CONTACT:
 Michelle Neff by hydemic@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



MSU Extension in Osceola County

2020 By the numbers:

Jan—Dec 2020	
# of programs hosted in County	35
# of participants that attended programs hosted in County	1209
# of programs offered statewide attended by County residents	143
# of County residents who attended programs	984
# of MSUE staff reporting serving residents of County	49
# of Direct Consultations Reported (Field Crops, Com Vitality, Prod Center, Soil tests, gardening, food safety, etc.)	144

General Fund Budget Expenditure	
FY 2019-2020	\$128,040 (budgeted)
FY 2020-21	\$99,618 (budgeted)

4-H 2019-2020	
4-H Adult Volunteers	62
4-H Youth Club Enrollment	517
Total Youth Served (duplicates removed)	1131

MSU Extension District 6 Advisory Council

County	Name	
Clare	Sandy Bristol	Commissioner
Clare	Ken Brown	
Gladwin	Rick Grove	Commissioner
Gladwin	Dick Metz	
Isabella	Jerry Jaloszynski	Commissioner
Isabella	Bob Wachowski	
Mecosta	Marilynn <u>Bradstrom</u>	Commissioner
Mecosta	Vacancy	

County	Name	
Missaukee	Frank <u>VanderWal</u>	Commissioner
Missaukee	Vacancy	
Osceola	Jill Halladay Tim Mitchell	Commissioner Alternate
Osceola	Russ Nehmer	
Osceola	David <u>Eggle</u>	
Wexford	Judy Nichols	Commissioner
Wexford	Mike <u>Soloman</u>	
Wexford	Chris Gentry	Chair



4-H Program Highlights



JACOB STIEG

4-H Program
Coordinator

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As an alumnus of the Osceola County 4-H, Jake Stieg feels that he is giving back to a great program that gave him so many skills. Now it's time to give back to the next generation. He enjoys working and communicating with the agriculture sector daily. "I am helping the youth and farmers of my county and whenever I go out, people know who I am and where I work. At the end of the day, making an impact in my community is my greatest accomplishment," Jake reflected.

Since Covid and working remotely, Jake has had to make some adjustments. He made himself available for all 4-H families to communicate with him via text, phone, or email at any time with a Google number. The Google number allows him to keep his work and personal lives separate while being easy to reach.

What would you like our commissioners and other stakeholders to know about your work during 2020?

During the 2020-year Osceola County 4-H had to transition to a virtual platform. Knowing that our local county doesn't have access to high speed internet was our main concern. We found locations throughout the county where the youth could join over free Wi-Fi and attend meetings while sitting in their vehicles. Representing Osceola County 4-H, I was part of the committee that created the virtual fairs and we were the first fair in Michigan to have a virtual auction in June for the Marion Fair. We also created the Middle of the Mitt Virtual 4-H Fair and were part of the Michigan State Fair.

"During the year, our youth was our focus. In the last two quarters of the year we were offering virtual educational meetings monthly and our average attendance is 75 youth per meeting," noted Jake.

When not working, Jake enjoys spending time on his farm with his wife, their children, and music.

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2020 was as a different year for 4-H. Like many events, our local fairs went to a virtual platform. Some youth decided not to participate, and others took the opportunity to learn by doing. Troy Todd was one of the youths that took this opportunity and did extremely well. Troy has been active in Osceola County 4-H for twelve years and has shown every animal possible at the local fairs. Troy earned 1st place beef showman in the Middle of the Mitt Virtual 4-H Showcase (which was created this year). Troy also represented Osceola County at the 2020 Virtual Michigan State Fair. He again competed in beef showmanship where he did very well. But his highest achievement was being a winner of a \$1,000 scholarship. Youth that were participating in the State Fair had to apply for scholarship. Troy is a great example of what Osceola County 4-H offers. During an interview with Troy, he stated that one of his favorite memories in 4-H is when you teach someone to do something and they succeed in doing it. This is the most rewarding feeling. Congratulations Troy!





Nutrition



RENEE SANDERS

Community Nutrition

Instructor

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“Even though we are not in the office, we are serving our community. We are still answering phone calls for recipes and questions, we are keeping in touch with our community partners, and we are doing our best to offer education to our local schools and community.”

Renee enjoys working closely with small groups of people and teaching them new ways to improve their health through nutrition and physical activity. She is MSU Extension’s Community Nutrition Instructor for Mecosta and Osceola counties. For her, the interaction with consumers is always engaging and fun. “I enjoy building relationships with individuals and families, as well as community partners,” said Renee.

MOISD Cognitively Impaired. For the past few years Renee has been working with an adult cognitively impaired classroom at the Mecosta Osceola Intermediate School District Education building. Pre Covid-19 she went into the classroom and taught the “Teen Cuisine” curriculum and provided a food demo each week. The young adults (18-26) helped her prepare the recipe and they all got to taste it. The pandemic put an end to



that. Outside groups are not allowed in the schools. To complicate matters, there are several students who cannot risk exposure, so they are homebound. The solution? Renee has been able to “Zoom in” with the class and do a new curriculum, Cooking for One, utilizing food demonstration videos with her own instruction to teach the class how to make a recipe. The at-home students, as well as the in-class students are all able to attend the Zoom class. In class, the teacher has purchased all the ingredients for the students to make the same recipe (with the help of their paraprofessionals). One young man always complained when onions were being cut up because he doesn’t like onions. But onions are rich in vitamins and minerals. He

would want them chopped big enough to be able to pluck them out, so he always volunteered to cut them up. Virtually, Renee was able to ask for the students input on what recipes they would make. Oddly enough, this same young man wanted potato leek pizza, which is simply pizza crust with pan fried potatoes lightly seasoned, sliced leeks and mozzarella cheese on top. The students watched the cooking demonstration online, Renee logged off and they went to work in their kitchen. The next week this young man told Renee that the potato leek pizza was some of the best pizza he has ever tasted. When asked about the leeks, he said they were really good. For a young man with such strong opinions about onions to find out that he likes leeks and would eat them again made her glad he chose potato leek pizza for one of the recipes. Trying something new can be scary for most adults, but for adults with cognitive impairment it could have been devastating. This is what nutrition instructors call a win!

When not working, Renee is busy in her garden, raising her grandchildren, camping, puzzling, and painting. Since the pandemic, she has started raising chickens.





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.



Farm Stress



ERIC
KARBOWSKI

Community
Behavioral Health
Extension 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



Finance and Homeownership

MSU Extension Staff



TEAGEN LEFERE

Program Instructor
for Financial &
Homeownership
Education

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5623

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. 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. Below are a couple of Success Stories that happened in spite of COVID. They also help demonstrate why Teagen is such an amazing employee and how she strives to meet our residents' needs.



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. 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.

The Osceola County treasurer, Lori Leudeman, retired at the end of 2020. She contacted me regarding a few people I had worked with to apply for the Hardest Hit Funds through Step Forward Michigan program. She just wanted an update on the status of their applications. She had referred several homeowners who were delinquent in their property taxes to me to assist them in applying to Step Forward over the past 5 years. The last half of her email was thanking me for my help. "My last day is tomorrow, so you'll be dealing with Tonia Hartline, the new Treasurer starting Jan 1. She knows all about the program, and she'll be using my email address if you need anything. I am so excited to retire! Have a lot of lists to start on. I appreciate all you do for the people of our counties! It was always so much easier to be able to send people to you for help, than to wonder how they would ever figure out how to complete an application like that. You truly make a difference!" Lori



Social Emotional Health



SHANNON LINDQUIST

Social-Emotional Health Educator

Retired

My sincerest thanks to the County Commissioners for their support over the years, and also for the support of the human service agencies in our county who were always willing and eager to collaborate.

This will be a very different annual report from what I've submitted in the past, not just because of the pandemic, but because this is my last annual report. I retired November 1, 2020 and wanted to give a brief synopsis of the 20 years I have worked for MSU Extension and Osceola County.

On April 22, 2000 I started my job with the title Home Economist. The title has changed several times over the years but the focus...**providing research-based information to the residents of our county**...has not. I have provided programming across the life span during my tenure beginning with nutrition, then child development and social-emotional health.

A favorite program throughout my time with MSUE has been the "SuperSitters: Babysitting Basics" class. Nearly 600 Osceola County youth attended the series through the years and recently I received this "success story:"

"My daughter (Sydney) and her boyfriend (Ryan) came over for a visit yesterday and we were talking about babies, and Ryan said it was the best thing to be an Uncle. He could babysit and play with the kids and then give them back. He credits his ability to be a good babysitter to Shannon's babysitting class in Evert Middle School when he was younger (about 15 years ago). He still has his notebook and remembers everything she taught him. He is now a Police Officer and can use some of the things he learned in babysitting class with kids in his community as well."



This last year at Extension, with the pandemic throwing a wrench in the way we all do business, has been a challenge to say the least. Working from home and providing all of my programs online was very different but it went much smoother than I ever imagined. At the beginning of every online program when I introduced myself I mentioned where my "real" office was, Reed City, MI Osceola County!

My sincerest thanks to the County Commissioners for their support over the last 20 years, and also for the support of the human service agencies in our county who were always willing and eager to collaborate. Shannon Lindquist

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