



MSU EXTENSION

BENZIE COUNTY

2023 - 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

I'm delighted to share the results of another successful year of partnership between **Benzie 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 outreach 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.

We continue to provide our programs in a variety of spaces and delivery methods that are convenient for our participants to engage in and access. Our partnership with you makes this all possible. On behalf of the MSU Extension team serving **Benzie County**, thank you for another great year. We look forward to your continued support and hope you will be able to join us during one of our upcoming programs.

~ Jennifer Berkey, District 3 Director

267

Programs accessed
by residents

12,727

Reached by
social media

2,085

Reached through
programming

2,900

Reached
indirectly



**48
VENDOR
BOOTHS**



NORTHWEST MI ORCHARD & VINEYARD SHOW



**Over 310 tree fruit & wine
grape producers
in attendance**

NW MI ORCHARD & VINEYARD SHOW

The annual Northwest Orchard and Vineyard Show was another great success with over 310 tree fruit and wine grape producers in attendance and 48 vendor booths at the Grand Traverse Resort. Dr. Brent Black and members of his team from Utah State University (USU) joined us again to provide an update on the Specialty Crop Research Initiative project in collaboration with MSU on precision orchard management.

This year he was joined by Dr. Alfonso Torres-Rua, an expert on irrigation and water management, who discussed new technologies for mapping and remote sensing of irrigation needs and water stress. Richard Price and Dr. Todd Einhorn presented some of the MSU side of the research project on remote sensing for yield estimations and experimenting with variable rate irrigation in tart cherries.

The 2024 tree fruit educational sessions featured other new topics and speakers including a talk on forest carbon offsets by Daphna Gadoth-Goodman from the MSU Forest Carbon and Climate Program agritourism and cost studies for value-added products by Parker Jones from the MSU Product Center.

This year's program also featured a section on agritourism, including a panel of local and statewide growers who have integrated agritourism in diverse ways on their farms.



**NORTHWEST
MICHIGAN
ORCHARD AND
VINEYARD SHOW**

The program is presented by the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Foundation in collaboration with Michigan State University Extension, AgBioResearch, Cherry Marketing Institute, Parallel 45, Michigan Wine Collaborative and the MSU Northwest Michigan Horticulture Research Center.

In 2023, Benzie County Extension Master Gardeners were involved in **538** volunteer hours helping individuals and communities grow!



MSU EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

This year, through volunteer outreach, MSU Extension Master Gardeners continued to share science-based gardening knowledge, engaged citizens and empowered communities in environmentally responsible gardening practices. In 2023, MSU Extension Master Gardeners volunteered for 538 hours in Benzie County, a time contribution valued at \$17,108. MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer activities impacted county residents by improving quality of life, empowering youth, protecting waterways, and improving food security. Providing flowering plants to support butterflies, bees, and other pollinators was also the focus of several projects in 2023.

In addition, MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, in partnership with SEEDS, hosted middle school students from the SEEDS EcoSchool program at Benzie Central Middle School. During six consecutive weekly visits, students learned about plants, gardening, and pollinator conservation,

while working in the gardens alongside MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteers.

MSU Consumer Horticulture staff and MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers hosted a plant diagnostic clinic at the Benzonia Library every second Tuesday of the month May through October of 2023. Residents were welcomed to bring samples of plants, insects, diseases and other problems. MSU Extension staff and Master Gardener volunteers provided the expertise to diagnose problems and provide management recommendations for 27 county residents. In addition, Benzie County residents were able to receive answers to their horticultural questions by using either the online service Ask Extension or MSU Extension's statewide Lawn and Garden Hotline (1-888-678-3464), which are hosted by teams of MSU specialists, educators, and MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers. County residents are always welcome to call, visit, or email the MSU Extension office for assistance with horticulture issues.



In 2023, Staff met with 215 clients across the state



MICHIGAN AGRABILITY

Michigan AgrAbility provides assistance to people in the agricultural industry with an injury, illness, or physical disability to enable them to continue working at no cost to the individual. United States Department of Agriculture—National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) funds AgrAbility and works at both the national and state levels through land grant universities in partnership with state disability organizations. Currently, 21 states hold AgrAbility grants. In Michigan, Michigan State University Extension and Easterseals MORC (Macomb Oakland Regional Center), collaborate to deliver the program and often work closely with Michigan Rehabilitation Services to help pay for assistive technologies to help farmers continue their work.

The vision of AgrAbility is to enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities, so that they, their families, and their communities continue to succeed in rural America. This may include gainful employment in production agriculture or a related occupation, access to appropriate assistive technology needed for work and daily living activities, evidence-based information related to the treatment and rehabilitation of disabling conditions, and targeted support for family caregivers of AgrAbility customers.

Over the past year Benzie County MSU Extension is pleased to have Samantha Wolfe housed in Benzie County, providing services both locally and statewide.

Throughout the last year, she has:

- Shadowed a farm site assessment for AgrAbility with a client who has mobility issues and fatigue at their beef operation. The client will work with Michigan Rehabilitative Services to provide accommodations, which could be extensive and costly.
- Collaboratively wrote and received a Dairy Business Innovation Alliance grant with another educator to support expansion of a goat cheese production facility in Kalkaska County.
- Began to build relationships with partners and collaborators at Easterseals MORC and in the community to help build a solid foundation for upcoming work with AgrAbility.
- Organized and facilitated the Michigan AgrAbility Project’s annual meeting with partners and stakeholders in Grand Rapids in December.



5,657 participants,
a 52.17% increase
from 2022

68 unique direct
programs

169 distinct
sessions



FARM STRESS

Farming can be an incredibly unpredictable, dangerous, and stressful occupation. MSU Extension is committed to supporting agricultural professionals as they navigate tough times and make decisions that impact their families, livelihoods, operations and farms. Combining farm business management guidance with mental and behavioral health expertise, MSU Extension’s team of more than 20 dedicated professionals provides innovative resources and support to the agriculture community—from teletherapy and financial services to free, online education and community presentations.

In 2023, the MSU Extension Farm Stress team conducted the highest to date of programs to a record number of participants: 68 unique direct program activities, which spanned 169 district sessions with 5,657 participants. 103 individuals enrolled in the Rural Resilience online Desire2Learn. MSU Extension’s farm stress specialist Dr. Remington Rice appeared in several key media outlets to promote resources for farmers, including MichiganAgToday, UpNorthLive, WPBN-TV, AgriSafe Network’s Talking Total Farmer Health podcast and more. As a result, several new farmers have reached out to access our resources.

Dr. Rice cherishes many of the stories of individual farmers he and MSU Extension have helped, including a recent meeting with a Michigan fruit farmer:

“I journeyed to his farm, expecting a brief conversation, but what unfolded was a three-hour revelation. This farmer, disenchanted with his vocation and contemplating selling his farm, was recently divorced, and felt hopelessly adrift. We explored the roots of his passion for farming – pride in his work, cherishing public interactions at his farm stand and stewardship of the land. As he recounted his story, he rekindled his love for farming and found new meaning and purpose. Today, his farm flourishes, and he passionately advocates for the MSU Farm Stress Program, sharing his story at Research Station events and among fellow farmers. His transformation is a beacon of hope for all.”

-Dr. Remington Rice



4-H

LIVESTOCK FAIR

Benzie youth have the option to participate in the Northwest Michigan Fair (NWMI) or the Manistee County Fair to show off their hard work in livestock production and art and crafting for the year.

In 2023, Benzie County was represented at NWMI Fair by two Clubs with 15 youth participants in Beef, Sheep, Poultry and Rabbit projects. Through their participation, they leveraged donations via the MWMI 4-H Livestock Auction and the Paul T & Frances B Johnson Foundation totaling nearly \$500 for the Benzie 4-H Soccer program. Benzie County youth were also present at the Manistee County Fair.

BABYSITTER TRAINING

Michigan 4-H prides itself on empowering youth with hands-on opportunities to explore future careers and entrepreneurship while enhancing their financial literacy and developing important skills for the workforce.

This includes 4-H Babysitter Training through the 4-H Military Partnership: a class offered on-demand to community youth 4-H ages 12 to 19 that prepares youth with the tools needed to be safe and effective caregivers to young children in the community. Topics covered include Child & Caregiver Safety, First Aid & CPR, Child Development, Food & Nutrition, Entertainment, and the Business of Babysitting.

In June of 2023, five new babysitters completed the program by participating in a weeklong, 40-hour, hands-on training to be the best, safe & effective babysitters in Benzie County.

1,720 lbs. of meat donated to Veteran's Affairs

- 280 lbs. of pork
- 1,420 lbs. of beef
- 20 lbs. of poultry





4-H EXPLORATION DAYS

BENZIE AREA YOUTH SOCCER

**150
SOCCER PLAYERS**



Find Your Path to 4-H/Career & Workforce Prep

4-H Exploration Days provides a hands-on experience of what 4-H and Michigan State University have to offer and helps youth develop life skills to use now and in the future. With more than a 50 year history of bringing youth from across Michigan to the campus of Michigan State University, 4-H Exploration Days will return June 21-23. This three day pre-college program is open to any youth 12-19 years of age. Youth will experience campus living, develop and expand their career and personal interests, and increase their responsibility, independence, accountability, problem-solving, decision making and time management skills. In 2023 we sent three young people from Benzie County – two of whom received a full scholarship through Tractor Supply Clover Campaign Funds, made possible from our local Benzonia Tractor Supply.

Our 4-H Soccer Program is a popular sporting event that has been a staple of Benzie County 4-H since 1980. Benzie 4-H Soccer returned to Benzie and Lake Ann fields in fall of 2023. All 4-H youth, age five through eighth grade are eligible to play 4-H soccer each fall. In 2023, 4-H Soccer enrolled 150 youth, an increase from 130 youth players in 2022. Most notable, we were able to field three independent teams for youth ages 10—13 years. This is considerable, as this is our hardest bracket to fill. We also added New Covenant Christian Academy (NCCA) to our list of partner schools, joining Frankfort-Elberta Area Public Schools and Benzie County Central Schools.

Avery Kelly, who received a full scholarship to attend, had such a great time that she has endeavored to recruit as many of her friends to attend with her again in 2024.

BENZIE AREA YOUTH SOCCER - FALL 2023 SEASON



**NEW COM-
PARTNER
PROGRAM
SION**

4-H + TSC
Tractor Supply Co. Proudly Supports
Creating Opportunity for All Kids

**MUNITY
AND 4-H
EXPAN-**





In 2023, the culmination of three years of hard work and community partnership building has paid off in a big way for Benzie County 4-H. Benzie 4-H Horse & Pony is making a comeback with help from our community partners at Flintfields Horse Park and Traverse City Horse Shows (TCHS). This year, Benzie 4-H spearheaded and represented fundraising efforts with Flintfields and TCHS on behalf of through their Charity Ticket Fundraising program.

TCHS Charity Ticket Fundraising program dedicates 100% of its general admission ticket sales to local non-profits. This initiative supports community causes and fosters partnerships, introducing new audiences to elite equestrian sport and our events while spotlighting the organizations that serve Northern Michigan. Focused on youth, families, health, the environment, and community building, TCHS's Charity Ticket Fundraising program creates a unique avenue for meaningful engagement and shared growth between the horse shows and the wider community.

This partnership allowed us to raise much needed funds to revive local 4-H Horse & Pony programs. It also began cultivating a lucrative community partnership for our

equine inclined 4-H youth providing insight into the types of horse programs that take place at Flintfields: a level of riding and riding disciplines that are typically only available to view during the Olympic games and a plethora of willing industry contacts willing to engage with youth discussion and questions about their journey and the equine industry as a whole.

In 2023, the TCHS Charity Ticket Fundraising program helped us raise over \$2,500 for District 3 Horse & Pony programs. This money will be used to host a 4-H Schooling Show and Fall Tack Sale annually in Benzie County, as well as begin making it possible for more local 4-H Horse Shows in our area and to support the rebuilding of local 4-H Horse & Pony projects.





315 students reached
530+ lbs. of food saved
from landfills by using
share table

\$2,800 saved by
re-servicing food

38% of clients using
student food pantry are
getting food for
themselves and their
family

77% want more fresh
fruits and vegetables

46% cite limited financial
resources as a reason
they visit the pantry

Nutrition and Physical Activity Education

EXPANDING THE WORK AT FRANKFORT - ELBERTA AREA SCHOOLS

Policy, system, and environmental changes are a way of making sustainable changes within our community so that healthy choices are available to all community members. These changes help to improve places where people live, learn, work, play, eat, and worship. MSU Extension works closely with area partners to help write guidelines, alter the way things are done, and improve spaces so all people can be supported in leading a healthful life.

MSU Extension coached Frankfort-Elberta Area Schools in two different initiatives: cafeteria share table and student food pantry.

- A share table is a designated spot in the school cafeteria where students can place uneaten, unopened school-provided food for other students to take, which helps to decrease food waste. Common items placed on the share table include milk, packaged fruit, cheese sticks, and breakfast muffins.
- The student food pantry is run by students and helps provide other students experiencing food insecurity

with nutritional foods to eat for snacks or meals when not at school. MSU Extension helps the food pantry by providing nutritionally dense, easy to make recipes that are packed into Panther Bite Bags along with the ingredients.

- Extension also assisted with conducting a school-wide student feedback survey to help guide the pantry in giving students foods they want but will also provide them the energy they need for the day such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, and low or no-sodium pre-packaged foods.

“We’re not only feeding the students, but we’re giving them knowledge about how to make food for themselves.”

-Emily Stevenson, pantry coordinator
 Quote taken from The Benzie County Record Patriot

“We’ve started putting the share table in the hallway before school starts, this way kids can grab fruit to have for snack.”

-Food service staff



422 youth reached in 2023
 30% increased fruit consumption
 33% increased vegetable consumption
 27% improved participation in physical activity



20 Red Bag Meal participants
 64% tried the MSU provided recipes
 71% are satisfied with the amount of food in the bags
 86% want more fresh produce



YOUTH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Youth in grades Pre-K – 12 in Benzie County participated in a variety of MSU Extension nutrition and physical activity lessons in 2023. Our direct education classes partner with schools where more than 50% of students receive free/reduced priced meals. These classes engage students in interactive nutrition lessons, get them up and moving in short physical activity breaks, and help them discover new foods through taste tests. Middle and high school students go more in depth by learning how to safely cook healthful foods. These students learn knife safety, how to read and follow recipes, and how to adjust recipes to fit their tastes. These are also basic skills that can serve them in finding future employment.

RED BAG MEAL PROGRAM

The Red Meal Bag Program is a partnership with Benzie Senior Resources, Benzie Area Christian Neighbors (BACN), and MSU Extension. This program provides meal bags twice a month to homebound seniors in the area. Bags are packed by BACN volunteers, delivered by Benzie Senior Resources through the Meals on Wheels program, and include nutrition, physical activity, and mental health information provided by MSU Extension.

The first bag of the month is a standard grocery bag, while the second bag of the month highlights a fruit or vegetable, and has a recipe for participants to try along with all the ingredients needed to make the recipe.

“It was so good. I don’t even care that there were beans in there. I guess I like beans now!”

-Crystal Lake Elementary School student after trying black bean brownies

“Enjoy getting the bags, it’s like Christmas! Love the fresh stuff. I can’t always afford groceries so this really helps.”

-Red Meal Bag participant



MICHIGAN SEA GRANT

This year, Michigan Sea Grant co-sponsored and co-planned the 16th annual Freshwater Summit, which is an annual conference that discusses the latest research, projects and initiatives that impact the Great Lakes and Grand Traverse Bay regions. Speakers covered invasive carp, non-chemical control of Eurasian watermilfoil, per-and polyfluoroakyl substances (PFAS), and other topics. After attending, 125 participants further understood the importance of freshwater resources.

Sea Grant also hosted an ecosystem approach update in Grand Traverse County for area conservation group leaders.

Staff also presented and hosted an information table regarding Sea Grant activities in the Great Lakes Basin at the No-Spills Conference—an environmental and emergency response event focused on preventing hazardous material spills in the Great Lakes and its tributaries.

Throughout the year, Sea Grant staff answer questions from community members related to Lake Michigan sport fishing, commercial fishing, and tribal fisheries.

NORTHERN MI COUNTIES ASSOC.

Benzie County commissioner delegate Art Jeannot and alternate Karen Cunningham were active participants and represented Benzie County in the Northern Michigan Counties Association (NMCA). Approximately 30 counties in the northern lower peninsula are members and participate regularly. NMCA exists as a local forum for commissioners and administrators to learn about and discuss topics of particular interest or concern to county government in the northern lower peninsula. Association support service is provided by MSU Extension.





MSU Product Center supports innovation and growth for business, industry and entrepreneurs in food, agriculture and natural resources.



The MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program offers land use education for locally appointed and elected planning officials, zoning administrators and interested residents throughout Michigan.

MSU PRODUCT CENTER

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

NoBo Mrkt is a collaborative café and beverage bar that drives the local food economy through curated food items from 12 regional businesses. The MSU Product Center met with the market’s leadership team to discuss the final financing space. This collaboration resulted in an additional \$1M in loans. The Product Center is also an advisor on NoBo Mrkt’s restaurant incubator program, titled “The Hatch” for aspiring chefs from the region to test concepts in the market’s dedicated food stalls, pop-up events and catering opportunities.

The MSU Product Center hosted a marketing workshop at the Great Lakes Incubator Farm in Traverse City. After a presentation, beginning farmers applied their new knowledge to decipher marketing signals from real food brands in a facilitated discussion.

Parker Jones, innovation counselor, was elected by a body of over 10,000 member owners to serve on the Oryana Board of Directors. In this role, he helped onboard a new CEO for the first time in 12 years and updated the organization’s bylaws to foster a high functioning board.

MSU Extension staff presented to the Community Development Coalition of Northwest Michigan on the current state of local agriculture. Regional economic and community developers learned about the growing need for agricultural businesses to differentiate and expand upon offerings to stay viable and profitable. One of the routes discussed was agritourism. The Coalition is developing an agricultural health index to channel financial resources to this sector.

CITIZEN MASTER PLANNER

MSU Extension’s award-winning Citizen Planner program was hosted by East Bay Charter Township and included 25 participants from the Grand Traverse Region in October/ November 2023. Citizen Planner is an intensive, yet accessible, six-session training series designed to build skills and a comprehensive understanding of Planning and Zoning. Participants commonly include professional planners, zoning administrators, elected officials, planning commissioners, zoning board of appeals members and other interested parties.

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