



Cass County 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



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. In 2020, we expanded our capacity to provide high-quality virtual education.

2020 will be a year to remember for many reasons (several of which we will want to forget). The creativity, 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.

Forced to focus on online programming, 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.

Working from home with the tools and support needed to help them succeed in a remote environment, MSUE educators have continued to assist farmers through the growing season, elected officials and decision makers, parents, families and youth by meeting with them on virtual platforms through online meetings and webinars. With the work they have accomplished over the last months, staff reported to me that they have learned that:

- programs that are produced for a live audience and recorded allow more 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;
- 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 the experience in on-line program development and investment in capacity will not only augment but strengthen our face to face work (once that resumes). Our programs will have greater reach than ever before and MSUE will be a leader in virtual education.

Please contact me for more information and thank you for your continued support!

Julie Pioch, District Director

CASS COUNTY MSU EXTENSION

- Hailey Harmon—4-H Program Coordinator
- Jon Laporte—Farm Financial Management
- Nora Lee—Community Nutrition Instructor



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Program Highlights

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Cass County youth experience the Tractor Operator Certificate Program in February 2020



Cass 4-Her's pride themselves in completing several community service projects throughout the year.

With an increase in participants in 2019, our 4-H youth development program reached 17% of the county youth population. A total of 1649 young people participated, 803 enrolled in community clubs and 846 in short term interest groups or school enrichment programs.

In 2019, 200 adult volunteers participated in programs in Cass County, teaching and mentoring our youth. The 4-H Leaders' Council continued to be active in fundraising, programming and advising 4-H Program Coordinator Hailey Harmon.

For those who live and work in agriculture, it is well understood that there are inherent dangers involved with day-to-day farm operations. Every three days, a child dies in an agriculture-related accident, and an additional 33 children are injured each day in on-farm accidents. The most common fatal events involved tractors and ATVs. A healthy respect for the dangers of farm equipment is critical, and education and training are vital in ensuring the safety of youth working in agriculture. Cass and St. Joseph County 4-H programs worked together to offering the 4-H Tractor Operator Program in February 2020. Upon completion of the program, the 14 to 19 year old's received a certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, allowing them to operate a 20 PTO horsepower or greater, garden or agricultural tractor. Certification is also used by youth who exhibit and participate in local contests, parades and festival activities. The three-Saturday course was taught at the First Baptist Church-Newberg in Jones. The training included educational sessions, some driving practice, written and driving tests and graduation.

With no face-to-face 4-H interactions allowed in order to minimize exposure to the corona virus and keep people safe, Hailey has worked tirelessly to keep 4-H volunteers and youth connected and engaged during these difficult times. Teaching leaders how to use technology, and working with them to find ways to engage clubs in virtual activities has been paramount. She has been diligent in promoting the many programs developed by colleagues across the state to the youth in Cass County.

After assisting leaders to organize a successful virtual Horse Show, one parent said, "Thank you so much for doing this. I needed something to motivate my kids to have a little structure. Daughter and horse weren't in the best of moods, but oh well. The judge's feedback is beyond helpful. So grateful for her. Thanks again for everything you're doing and offering our youth in these crazy times."

Hailey also created 4-H To You! project kits that were sent out to youth weekly. The kits included materials to make a project and a Zoom session link to engage with the instructor and other youth on the project. One parent said, "Seeing the kids come together every week to create their project has been so rewarding. They are learning new skills and getting some social interaction and seeing friends they wouldn't see otherwise."

Cloverbud 4-H To You!

SLIWE! May 21
Paint Your Own Clover June 4
Candle Making with Beeswax June 10



VIRTUAL!
Outdoor Experience
Events.anr.msu.edu/CCOutdoorExperience
September 19
5 Projects For \$17.30!

- Dream Catcher
- Salt Painting
- Fishing Lure
- Sensory Bot
- Clover Paint

\$60 Value



CASS COUNTY 4-H HORSE LEADERS' VIRTUAL FUNDRAISING HORSE SHOW

1. Color Class	15. Adult English Equitation
2. Pony Handling	16. Junior English Pleasure
3. Riding	17. Senior English Pleasure
4. Horse	18. Adult English Pleasure
5. Horsemanship	19. Junior Western Horsemanship
6. Trail	20. Senior Western Horsemanship
7. Horsemanship	21. Adult Western Horsemanship
8. Horsemanship	22. Junior Ranch Horsemanship
9. Lane	23. Senior Ranch Horsemanship
10. Lunge	24. Adult Ranch Horsemanship
11. Trot	25. Junior Western Pleasure
12. Western Pleasure	26. Senior Western Pleasure
13. Western Pleasure	27. Adult Western Pleasure
14. Western Pleasure	28. Junior Ranch Pleasure
29. Senior Ranch Pleasure	29. Senior Ranch Pleasure
30. Adult Ranch Pleasure	30. Adult Ranch Pleasure

Video Submissions due June 10-30

Senior Spotlight
Class of 2020

EMELYN TUCKER



"4-H has taught me to have good sportsmanship and to be humble when I win."

Social media has been effective in spreading the word about online club meetings, programs and was used as a way to highlight the 2020 4-H seniors who missed being honored in person.

Program Highlights

NUTRITION EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Even in a condensed program year, 200 young people and 45 adults from Cass County completed 6 to 8 hours of nutrition and physical activity education and 69 participated in one-time presentations. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-ED) is an evidence-based program that helps people lead healthier lives, teaches people using or eligible for SNAP about good nutrition and how to make their food dollars stretch further. SNAP-Ed participants also learn to be physically active.

Nora Lee has worked over the years building partnerships with all types of Cass community organizations and currently has 27 active local partnerships. Not only does she provide nutrition education classes, but also works with partners to improve their policies, systems, and physical environment to create long term change.

Nutrition with Mrs. Lee

*Third graders in Mr. Z's class
by Mr. Zietlow*

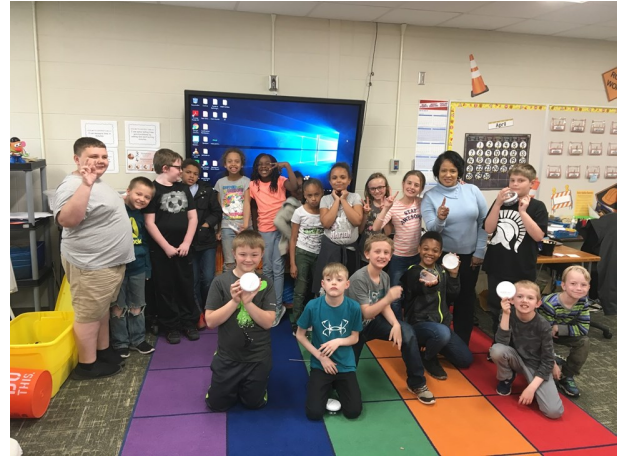
Mr. Zietlow's class has learned a lot from Mrs. Lee this year. Mrs. Lee has visited once a week for six weeks. She has taught the class all the various food groups using MyPlate. MyPlate is the current nutrition guide published by the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, a food circle depicting a place setting with a plate and glass divided into five food groups. The students gained an understanding of the various food groups, learned what foods belonged to each group, and were able to sample some foods. Some of these foods were quite foreign to the students, but many willingly tried new foods.



Per one of students' requests, the class tried to make a newly discovered recipe for a snack at school. It was a success! The students really enjoyed their time with Mrs. Lee, learned about new foods, and will hopefully continue to make healthy food choices.

FOOD SAFETY & PRESERVATION

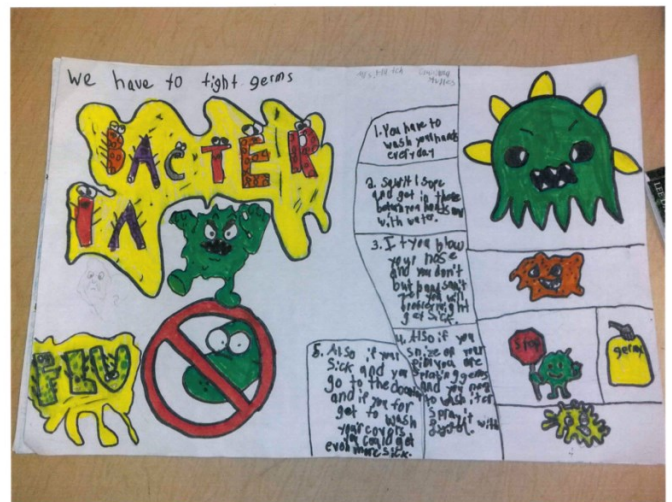
MSUE'S Food Safety Team worked quickly in March to modify their face-to-face curricula into web-based offerings and expanded their programs to offer weekly on-line interactive education. The goal was to reach as many people as possible—taking advantage of their team's expertise and while having to travel to provide quality, research based education. Programs were focused to engage food service workers, homemakers, families and youth on topics such as food preservation, the cottage food law, food pantry safety, and seasonally-themed cooking workshops. From March 2020 through November 2020, more than 2100 participants have logged into these programs (35 from Cass County). The expansion of this team's efforts and the capacity they have built around food safety education is a shining example of success for MSUE's response to the pandemic.



Nora Lee works with youth in schools throughout Cass County to help them develop health living skills.



A student in Mr. Zietlow's class showing her Healthy Cheese Stick Creature creation



After a series of SNAP-ED lessons, students designed educational posters to remind young people to wash their hands.

Agriculture Program Highlights

Prior to the 2020 health crisis, MSU Extension agriculture and agribusiness educators were already providing “non-traditional” options for growers to meet their educational needs, through webinars, blogs, podcasts, email newsletters, and texting. Therefore, when the pandemic stopped face-to-face programs in March, our Southwest Michigan Ag team was prepared for the challenge.

MSUE’s Rapid Response For Agriculture Website was a resource developed in 2019 in response to several weather-related emergencies (freeze, flood then drought!). The site provided a single point of entry for farmers to access resources to help them navigate those disasters. In March 2020, the site was quickly populated with resources and management tools to aid producers through the pandemic emergency. As needs emerged across the various commodities, webinars, articles and on-line tools were developed to help farms keep employees safe, while still meeting consumer demands for a fresh, safe food supply during the emergency conditions created by Covid-19.

Market disruptions caused by the pandemic had great potential to devastate the farm economy and the food supply. MSUE provided leadership in convening partners and information to assist during those first critical weeks and months of the pandemic. For example:

- In partnership with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Michigan Pork Producers Association, MSUE hosted informational webinars for pork producers. The sessions enabled industry experts to update producers on markets, options for animal overcrowding, euthanasia recommendations, disposal options and capacity, financial assistance and mental health resources.
- The greenhouse industry was hit hard when the first Stay at Home order forced large retail outlets to close garden centers. MSUE educators quickly stepped in to provide a series of workshops on alternative marketing strategies to help garden centers quickly shift to sell their plants through curbside pick-up, delivery, and online orders. Over 300 people participated.

After intensive work with campus specialists and state partners, the **COVID-19 Hazard Assessment and Mitigation Program tool** was launched in July, to help ag operations reduce the risk of worker exposure to COVID-19 and mitigate disease spread. The tool is available to all ag related businesses to aid them in designing a pandemic preparedness plan, identifying risks for exposure, and developing mitigation practices supporting worker safety and health. The tool and supporting education materials align with federal, state and local guidance and thus has required several updates to reflect changes in rules and the science related to the virus.

Despite the pivot to Covid-19 related demands, MSUE continued to work on educational and research initiatives critical to producers in Cass County:

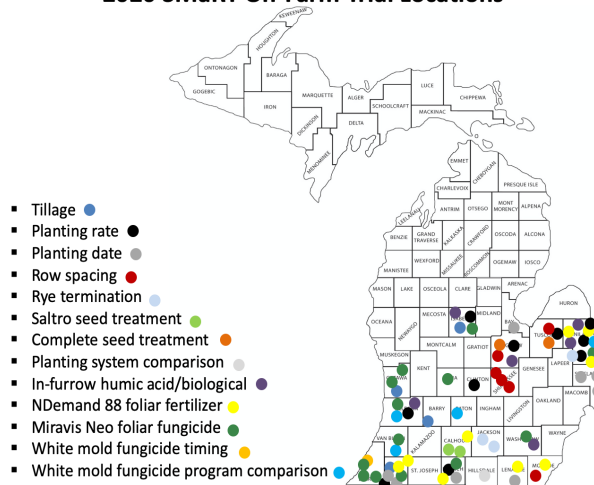
MSUE’s Pork Team is responsible for the development of a Secure Pork Supply (SPS) plan at the state level and for individual pork operations. SPS planning is an effort of the pork industry to protect itself from loss if a highly contagious foreign animal disease (FAD) with severe consequences were to occur in the United States. The goal is a business continuity strategy for pork operations with no FAD infections. \$1.4 Million is generated every day that the Michigan swine industry continues business, and to date, 80% of the 2691 pig farms are better prepared for business continuity in the case of FAD because of SPS planning efforts.

Research projects and demonstration field days highlight on-farm research collaborations between MSU Extension, local growers and grantors. In 2020, research continued as usual with field day events moved to a digital format. Field Crops Educators working in Van Buren, Cass and St Joseph Counties, managed local research plots and used their expertise to highlight results at the Corn Virtual Field Day held September 9, attended by 96 people. This meeting focused on tar spot disease and uneven crop development causes and implications. All are critical issues being faced by producers in Cass County.



Agriculture is a key economic driver in Cass County. MSUE educators work closely with producers and commodity group to make sure research and education meets their needs to strengthen and grow their businesses.

2020 SMaRT On-Farm Trial Locations



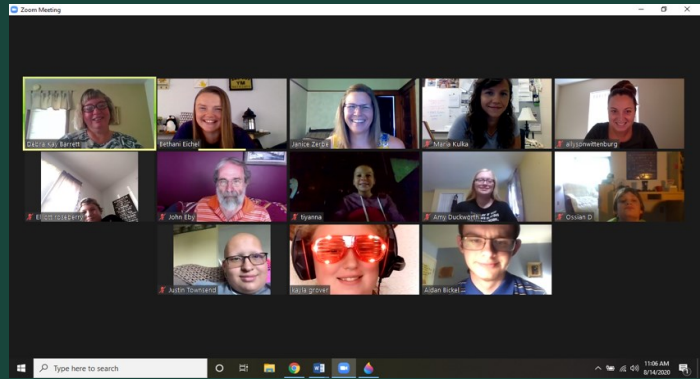
Partnership with the Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee and local growers makes soybean research in Cass County possible. Soybean research trials will be summarized in a report mailed directly to 12,000 Michigan soybean producers.

Virtual Camp Success!

Michigan State University Extension and Educational Talent Search at Southwestern Michigan College (SMC) are in the third year of a very successful partnership that provides collaborative programming for the young people enrolled in Educational Talent Search. Early in 2020, staff members began meeting and planning an entrepreneurship camp that would be offered in August to teach youth about starting their own business. Little did we know at the time as winter turned to spring that this very successful summer camp would have to be adapted to a virtual learning experience.

The attributes and skills of an entrepreneur include being positive, creative, a problem solver, flexible, a communicator and many times a team player. These are coincidentally valuable life and workforce ready skills. This year's virtual camp provided the perfect environment for the staff, participants and adult helpers to not only demonstrate, but grow, these sought-after skills.

During the Aug. 10-14 day camp, nine participants met with instructors, helpers and guest entrepreneurs through Zoom for three hours each day. In addition to using the features of Zoom technology, including breakout rooms, we used Google Jamboards to encourage participant interaction. Working in small teams of three, participants created products from kits and materials mailed to them ahead of time to enhance learning.

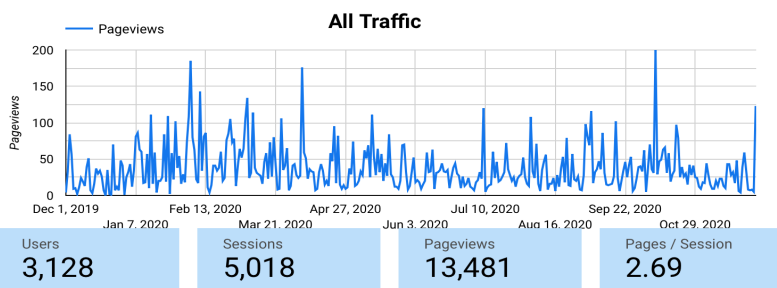


Camp instructors learned new technology to make this virtual camp successful and demonstrated teamwork and on the fly problem-solving. John Eby, SMC's reporter, attended the entire camp and published a great article about it.

Our virtual entrepreneurship camp was a memorable success in part because of how well everyone worked together and supported each other. MSU Colleagues and guest entrepreneurs were very supportive of the kids as we tackled technology, brought pets to the screen for breaks, and provided virtual instruction while teens made candles, bracelets and soap. Several participants hope to attend camp again in 2021, hoping that it may be offered face-to-face.

The camp was successful because the kids pitched in, sharing their knowledge, ideas and problem-solving skills to help make sure that everyone had a good experience.

Cass County Web Stats Dec 2019—Nov 2020



By the numbers: 2019-2020

Cass General Fund Budget	\$104,806
4-H Adult Volunteers	200
4-H Youth Club Enrollment	803
Total Youth in 4-H Programs	1649

Cass Program Activity Jan—Sept 2020

# of programs hosted in Cass	38
# of participants that attended programs hosted in Cass	633
# of programs offered statewide attended by Cass residents	137
# of Cass residents who attended statewide programs	583
# of MSUE staff reporting programs for Cass County	48



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