

THE  
2023

# MSU EXTENSION

## ANNUAL REPORT

### NOTE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Like many of you, I grew up singing the iconic lyrics of “This Land is Your Land.” As we recall, it begins, “This land is your land, this land is my land.” With that melody echoing in your mind, I am pleased to present not just your annual report, but also mine. Stepping into this role not too long ago, this annual report has been instrumental in deepening my understanding of the profound impact MSU Extension has had on our county over the past year. I sincerely hope this document serves a similar purpose for you.

In the forthcoming year, I eagerly anticipate actively supporting the educators, instructors, and coordinators of MSU Extension. By doing so, I will gain first-hand experience of the projects, programs, and initiatives detailed in next year’s annual report.

In the meantime, please feel free to reach out to me via phone or email with any questions about this annual report of MSU Extension. While I may not have all the answers, I am quickly learning that someone within MSU Extension does.



M. Scott Korpak, District 7 Director

Served  
7,804  
County  
Residents

406  
Ask-an-  
Expert  
questions  
answered.

27  
active  
4-H  
clubs

113  
residential  
soil test  
kits

162  
program  
activities  
hosted in  
county.

34  
commercial  
soil test  
kits



# 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

## 4-H Way

4-H empowers young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. It's a research-based experience that includes a mentor, a hands-on project, and a meaningful leadership opportunity.

The goal of the 4-H Youth Development model is for 4-H to "provide kids with community, mentors, and learning opportunities to develop the skills they need to create positive change in their lives. "You need to look no further than the amazing youth in the Kent County 4-H program. In 2023, Kent County had **27** active clubs with a total of **554** youth registered in club programs and **109** adult volunteers.

## New 4-H Program Supervisor



In 2023, MSU Extension brought on a new 4-H Program Supervisor, Kellie Kieren! Kellie began her 4-H experience at the age of 5 when she showed animals at the Newaygo County Free Fair. She continued her engagement in 4-H until she aged out of the program. Over the years she engaged in a variety of project areas including goats, rabbits, chickens, horses, pigs, and lambs. Kellie has experience building community partnerships and gaining support for programs. Please welcome Kellie to MSU Extension!

## Exploration Days

In 2023, 13 Kent County youth attended MSU Extension's 4-H Exploration Days event. Each year about 2,000 youth (ages 12-19) and chaperones from across Michigan attend. This fun MSU pre-college program is designed to: increase responsibility, confidence, independence, accountability, problem-solving, decision making and time management skills. It is also designed to increase communication, teamwork, citizenship, and leadership skills, foster the ability to meet new people and make new friends, develop and expand career and personal interests and increase college exploration and access to the MSU campus, and its resources, develop social and academic skills needed for a successful transition to college and life as an adult. Exploration Days provides youth with opportunities to try new things that are not available in their county.



## Adulting 101

In 2023, 16 Kent County youth attended Adulting 101 sessions. The Adulting 101 program helps high school students and beyond demystify the obscure reality of being an "adult" through engaging educational sessions. Each session is packed full of important life skills and tools necessary to live independently. The sessions utilized by Kent County residents were: International Conversations, Medical Insurance, Paycheck & Taxes, How to Buy a Car, Sew What, Eating Healthy on a Budget, and Build & Protect Your Credit. MSU Extension provides a wide variety of topics to help youth and young adults navigate adulthood.

## Teen Mental Health First Aid

In March 2023, Kent County MSU Extension staff trained the 10th graders at Southwest Academia Bilingue in Teen Mental Health First Aid. We began working with 60 students, but two of them transferred to another school during the training leaving 58 completing the program. The Principal of Southwest Academia Bilingue would like us to implement Teen Mental Health First Aid for the school year of 2023-2024. The staff and I saw the confidence in the students grow as they completed the Teen Mental Health First Aid training. During the program when students did not feel confident in themselves other students in the cohort would state "You are not alone".

## SPIN Clubs

In 2023, 32 Kent County youth participated in SPIN (special interest) clubs such as Vet Science, Discover 4-H, Sewing Club, Berry Fun Canning Class, Mock Interviews, Sewing Camp, and a tour of the Kent County Recycling & Education Center.

# SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS



## Beekeeping Programs

In 2023, 83 Kent County residents attended beekeeping programs. Some of these programs were: Pollinator Champions, Pollinator Protection, Trees for Bees, Is Beekeeping Right for Me, Beekeeping Workshops, and more. Our Is Beekeeping Right for Me course introduces honey bees, covers the time required, physical demands, and financial resources of beekeeping, and suggests ways to help all pollinators.

## MI Fruitcast

Cheyenne Sloan and Lindsay Brown are leading a statewide fruit podcast called MI Fruitcast. The podcast launched the last week of November, before the Great Lakes EXPO. This podcast will be available on the MSU Extension [website](#) and Spotify.



## New Apple Specialist & IPM Educator

Lindsay Brown is a Michigan State University Extension Tree Fruit Integrated Pest Management Educator covering West Michigan and based in Kent County. Lindsay started in her role in August.



## GLEXP0 2023

Our team of vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, and community food system educators and specialists organized 77 out of 96 recorded educational activities offered at the 2023 Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable, and Farm Market Expo & Michigan Greenhouse Growers Expo ("GLEXP0"), Dec 4-7. This year's theme was "Innovation" as our guiding principle. Attendance included 3,199 people, which is up by 197 from last year's GLEXP0. 276 of these attendees were from Kent County. There were 412 exhibitors with booths at the Main Trade Show and the Farm Market Trade Show, an increase of 20 over last year.

## Breakfast on the Farm

Breakfast on the Farm is an MSU Extension program offering a free, farm-cooked breakfast and self-guided farm tour. On Saturday, July 29th, the 42nd Breakfast on the Farm event took place at De Grins Oer Dairy in Mecosta County. The farm is operated by Tjerk and Ramona Okkema and their children Cora, Dirk and Evelyn. The event was attended by 1,305 visitors and volunteers, 49 were from Kent County.



276  
Kent County  
residents  
attended  
GLEXP0.

990 people  
attended MI Ag  
Ideas to Grow  
With  
Conference, 33  
from Kent  
County

33 Kent  
residents  
attended  
Pesticide  
Applicator  
Review  
sessions.

45 Kent  
residents  
attended Virtual  
Breakfast  
weekly  
webinars.

55 Kent  
residents  
completed  
Foundations of  
Gardening

# CONSUMER HORTICULTURE

## Smart Gardening Outreach



In 2023, MSU Extension's Consumer Horticulture team reached over 3,560 people through outreach at the Home & Garden Show, Windmill Island Garden Events, The Michigan Honey Festival, Lavender Festival, and the UP State Fair. 1,010 Kent County residents attended these outreach events. The Michigan Home and Garden Show held at DeVos Place serves as a huge platform for MSU Extension's Consumer Horticulture team to present smart ideas for gardeners. Smart Gardening outreach at the West Michigan Home and Garden Show spanned four days. Specially trained Extension Master Gardeners provided mini lessons and educational tip sheets as they interacted with thousands of guests, presented at 45-minute seminars throughout the event, and had an on-site exhibit. This was prominently advertised by Showspan (partner) with printed materials, mailings, radio and TV interviews.

## Dig In! 2023 Series

In 2023, MSU Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs) across Michigan were provided an opportunity each month to tap into MSU Experts where they learned new and exciting science topics. Each online session featured interactive Smart Gardening topics taught primarily by the MSUE Consumer Horticulture team and faculty, to help them stay connected while enriching their knowledge. This is provided so that all EMGs can complete their 10-hour continuing education requirement without cost, from wherever they are located. 1,322 people participated in this series in 2023, 111 of them were from Kent County. Sessions included topics such as Birds and Berries, Spotted Lanternfly and How Not to Advance Invasives, Where do Your Annuals Come From, Inviting Native Plants Into Your Garden Design, Waterfront Garden Design, Creepy Insects and Cool Pollinators, and more.

## Foundations of Gardening

In 2023, our MSU Extension Consumer Horticulture Team had 645 participants total (55 from Kent County) in two (Spring and Fall) 10-week sessions of the MSU Extension Foundations of Gardening Course, which is a course open to both the public and those wanting to later apply to the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program to volunteer. From the Spring FOG course of 417 participants, 108 participants applied and were accepted into the MSU EMG Program. The MSU Consumer Horticulture Team held 10 "MSU EMG Program Onboarding" sessions statewide to train them to become MSU EMGs, which involved both in-person and online volunteer training sessions.

## Shindig at the GIG

The annual fundraiser known as Shindig for the GIG is a community event that combines education and philanthropy. Registered guests were exposed to all the new educational displays.

and improvements in MSU Extension's Grand Ideas Garden while enjoying a relaxed evening of silent bidding on plants, products, and services. Funds collected allow the garden to function from one year to the next. 126 people attended the event, 98 of them were from Kent County.



## Plant Quest

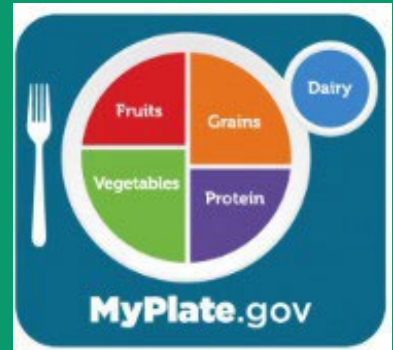
The consistent development of improved plants as well as the numerous tried-and-true species means there is always something new to learn in the world of horticulture. The goal of Plant Quest was to introduce participants to plants appropriate for every kind of site and taste. Topics included: Woodland Treasures for Shady Gardens, The Wild World of Vegetables, Color in the Garden, and From Lawns to Riches. Overall, Plant Quest was a successful program that reached participants across the nation. 62 of the 631 attendees were Kent County residents.

# HEALTH AND NUTRITION

1,481  
Youth-seniors  
attended Health  
& Nutrition  
programs in  
Ottawa County

## SNAP-ED

In 2023, SNAP-ED Instructors taught 924 Kent County children in 51 classrooms about food and nutrition. The Show Me Nutrition, Teen Cuisine, Eat Healthy Be Active, Cooking Matters, and Jump Into Food and Fitness series help educate children about the importance of increasing their vegetable and fruit consumption, as well as increase their physical activity. The children learned about healthy eating, food resource management, physical activity and reduced sedentary behavior, healthy eating behaviors, and food resource management behaviors.



Instructors also taught 557 adults and seniors about eating healthy on a budget, making healthy eating part of their lifestyle, physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight through several different programs. A few of these include Eat Healthy Be Active, Cooking for One, Food Demonstrations and Cooking Techniques, Cooking Matters, Senior Project Fresh, and more.

## FOOD SAFETY

In 2023, 231 Kent County residents took classes and utilized resources from MSU Extension's Food Safety Team. These classes covered a variety of topics that helped residents gain the knowledge and training to prevent food borne illnesses. Some examples of the classes attended are:



- ◆ Food Safety for Food Service Workers
- ◆ Michigan Cottage Food Law
- ◆ Safe Food= Healthy Kids
- ◆ Food Safety Q & A
- ◆ SERV Safe
- ◆ Preserving MI Harvest (various)
- ◆ Food Preservation
- ◆ Blanching and Freezing
- ◆ Packing Safe School Lunches
- ◆ Pantry Food Safety – it's your job!

## HEALTH & MINDFULNESS

In a continued effort to manage our physical and mental health in 2023, residents found resources by taking part in several session opportunities. These sessions explored mindfulness basics such as breathing, moving, eating, walking, thought surfing, taming your busy mind, and more. Research has shown that more mindful people are happier and report less anxiety, symptoms of depression, anger and worries. Some of the session topics were:

- ◆ Stress Less
- ◆ Tai Chi
- ◆ Brief Practices in Mindfulness
- ◆ SLEEP series.
- ◆ Mindfully Feeding Infants & Toddlers
- ◆ Teaching Kids Mindful Eating
- ◆ Mental Health First Aid
- ◆ Relax, Alternatives to Anger
- ◆ Wits Workout Mondays
- ◆ Caring for the Caregiver
- ◆ Importance of Adult Sibling Relationships
- ◆ Matter of Balance
- ◆ Powerful Tools for Caregivers
- ◆ Chronic Pain PATH
- ◆ Mindful Lunch & Learns
- ◆ Changing Negative Self-Talk
- ◆ Diabetes PATH
- ◆ Dining With Diabetes
- ◆ Be Kind to Your Mind
- ◆ Maintaining Health During Challenging Times

483 Kent  
Residents  
attended  
Health and  
Mindfulness  
programs.



# KENT COUNTY 2023

## FINANCIAL LITERACY

In 2023, 257 Kent County residents attended a variety of financial literacy webinars. MSU Extension provides resources and education on money management, foreclosure prevention, buying your own home, retirement planning and more to help residents and their families be more financially healthy. Some of the webinars Kent County residents attended are:



- Homebuyer Education
- E-Money
- Wealth Building
- Surviving and Thriving on a Fixed Income
- Navigating Money Challenges
- Make a Spending Plan Work for You
- Financial Preparedness for Disasters
- Mortgage 101
- Enjoy the Holidays on a Budget
- Who Gets Grandma's Yellow Plate
- Savvy Tips for Starting a Small Business
- Your Money Goals
- Tips to Build & Protect Your Credit
- Property Tax Foreclosure Basics
- Top 10 Credit Tips
- How Much Home Can You Afford?
- Student Loan Repayment Options



## HOMEBUYER EDUCATION

In 2023, 117 Kent County residents attended MSU Extension's Homebuyer Education Seminars. This was an increase of 40 residents from 2022. These same seminars also reached 882 total participants with valuable information about the home buying process, advantages of homeownership, the steps in the home buying process, the costs of homeownership, the importance of good credit, how to determine how much house you can afford, mortgage loan basics, and how to maintain your investment.

## MAKING IT IN MICHIGAN CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW

Making it in Michigan is a premier food trade show and networking conference hosted by the MSU Extension Product Center. In 2023, 367 food business owners, retail buyers, and affiliates (71 Kent County) attended this event for educational sessions and buyer interaction to expand their food and agricultural business. The event took place at the Lansing Center on April 20, 2023.



## PRODUCT CENTER

In 2023, Kent County had 456 residents utilize courses and consultations from the MSU Extension Product Center (111 increase from 2022). The MSU Product Center supports innovation and growth for business, industry and entrepreneurs in food, agriculture and natural resource sectors. Residents utilized the following programs offered:

- Counseling Consultations
- How to Start a Food Truck Business
- Fire Safety for Food Trucks
- Becoming a Vendor at Making it in Michigan
- Kalamazoo Station Incubator Kitchen
- Presentation on Cottage Food Law
- Kalamazoo Station Workshop on Labeling and Packaging
- MDARD and MEDC Webinar
- AgXploration

**456 Kent County residents were assisted by the Product Center in 2023**

# KENT COUNTY 2023

## Introduction to Lakes

In 2023, the Introduction to Lakes Online course was utilized by 20 Kent County residents. This course is designed for interested individuals, decision makers, local leaders, resource professionals, and lakefront property owners interested in gaining knowledge about inland lakes and connecting with others who have a similar interest. In this introductory course, participants increased their knowledge and understanding of the following topics: lake ecology, watersheds, shorelines, aquatic plant management, Michigan water law and community involvement.



## Birding 101

In 2023, 35 Kent County residents attended MSU Extension's Michigan Birding 101 online series which covers foundational topics like choosing and using binoculars and guidebooks, best locations for spotting seasonal migrations, adding bird-friendly plants and yard features, and more. This state-wide program attracted over 750 registrants! A follow-up survey reported new bird conservation practices in their own yards, such as better management of feeding areas, keeping cats indoors, adding native plants, and reducing pesticide use.



## Kent District Library Lab Expo

In April 2023, Kent County staff Kelsey Bockelman and Kendra VanOrder provided programming related to invasive species and animal byproducts to 250 youth at the Lab Expo hosted by the Kent District Library. Youth of various ages participated in hands-on experiences highlighting STEAM based learning.

## Child & Family Development

In 2023, 254 Kent County residents attended a variety of Child & Family Development classes. MSU Extension provides a wide range of free online classes for parents and caregivers of children of all ages and early childhood professionals. Some of the webinars Kent County residents attended are:

- Positive Discipline
- Sleeping, Crying, Driving Infant Safety
- Guiding Principles for Highly Successful Parenting
- The Resilience Toolbox
- What Children Need to Know to Start School
- The Parent Talk System
- Mindfully Feeding Infants and Toddlers
- ABC's of Early Literacy
- Purpose of Play
- Reducing Challenging Behaviors in Toddlers
- Understanding a Toddler's World
- Making Food Fun
- Helping Children Manage Stress
- Mathematics for Infants and Toddlers
- Learning to Talk
- Building Early Emotional Skills
- Together We Can
- Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorder and Neurodiversity



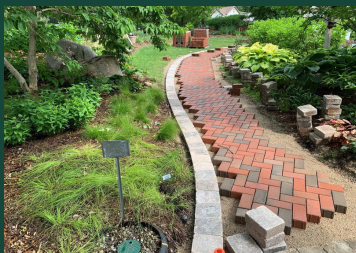
- Parenting in the Digital Age
- Screen Time
- Importance of Outdoor Play
- ABC's of ACES
- Building Strong Adolescents
- RELAX Alternatives to Anger
- How Children Develop

# KENT COUNTY SUCCESS STORIES

## Little Garden Has a Huge Impact

The MSU Extension Grand Ideas Garden (GIG) has become a jewel in West Michigan, inspiring and providing respite for thousands of guests each season. Through colorful signage and plant displays, guests can learn about new plants and earth friendly gardening techniques that are easy to replicate at home. The GIG has a proven track record as a platform for education for garden enthusiasts and the public. New exhibits continue to evolve based upon national gardening trends and emerging issues.

In 2023, many changes took place on the Kent County property which offered upgrade opportunities for both safety and aesthetics. Once Kent County had their grading configuration for the new Fleet Services building in the back of the MSUE building, a design was created to provide better access and guest traffic flow to some of our key educational areas, including our “sunny native” garden. A new fenced enclosure was installed by the County to provide better security for our growing area as well as for our volunteers. The county also installed supplemental security lights all around our shed to light up volunteer activities in late fall when day length diminishes. We finished this space off using GIG donations with an attractive path-aligned fence and a poly enclosure to expand our outdoor storage for items such as pots and media. The fence will provide a location for newly created signage that will be both directional and explanatory. It also butts up against a new brick pathway that has transformed accessibility to this important educational component of the GIG.



The newest educational addition to the GIG is a “No Deer” garden, featuring plants that deer generally don’t prefer. The deer herd in the area has gotten so large that many of our favorites are being decimated. This was made possible through a generous donation from a nursery in Northern Kent County. Signage has been created and will highlight the site in 2024.

Four groups were abundant in the GIG during the summer of 2023. Due to an article in a West Michigan teacher’s magazine, hundreds of new guests flocked to the garden seeking the perfect backdrop for photos and family gatherings. The Kent MSUE Horticulture staff held their annual apprentice program in the GIG which takes up most of summer. The team also had two events (one a fundraiser) which attracted over 100 people.

## Eat Healthy, Be Active

One of the participants in my Eat Healthy, Be Active program mentioned that her children, who attended the program with her, went to dinner with their family and had a conversation about sodium. They discussed the importance of being mindful of sodium intake, and why it is best not to consume too much sodium for good health. I am happy to hear that the program is making a positive impact on families and is helping them have a positive impact on others as well. - Submitted by Alexandria Payton, Community Nutrition Instructor

## Cooking For One Success

One of the participants in my Cooking for One series began to consider the information on how to store food and cook only occasionally. This made her realize she could spend less time cooking, eat healthily and control her portions. She stated she is now cooking on Sundays to prepare all her dinners for the week and is walking 3-4 miles, 3-4 days a week. - Submitted by Yesenia Velasco, Community Nutrition Instructor

## Kent County Product Center Client Wins Award

Farm-to-table hot sauce by Fat Baby Hot Sauce, LLC was the 2023 winner of the Michigan State University Product Center’s Value-Added Award. Nate Mehren and Terry Wolter, co-owners of the company, received the award from Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Director Dr. Tim Boring during the Making It In Michigan conference held on April 20 at the Lansing Center.

When asked about support from the MSU Product Center, Mehren stated, “The MSU Product Center was an absolutely fundamental source of knowledge and navigation as we moved through the first year of our existence. We can say with confidence that the act of start-up was, and continues to be, made easier with their assistance and counseling. We are elated to be honored with the Value-Added Award from the Product Center and MSU Extension for the Making It In Michigan event and we look forward to a continued relationship with our friends at the Product Center.”



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