



ST. JOSEPH COUNTY 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



Despite the ongoing pandemic of 2021, Michigan State University Extension continued to work for St. Joseph County youth, adults, businesses and communities providing outstanding research-based education and community development programs.

With the learning curve of online programming behind us, we continued to expand and perfect our digital educational offerings.

Considering the health and safety of participants, many of our face-to-face programs provided both an in-person and remote option to participate. Our educators found creative ways to offer outdoor programs and engage with schools

and community groups while maintaining social distancing.

This report highlights only some of the accomplishments of 2021. Be sure to take a glance at the appendix also provided to see the breadth of programs that your county residents attended.

Please reach out to me or anyone from MSU Extension with ideas for programs, contacts for new partners or feedback on our work. It takes all of us to bring the best programming to the district.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support of MSU Extension in the county.

Julie Pioch, District 13 Director

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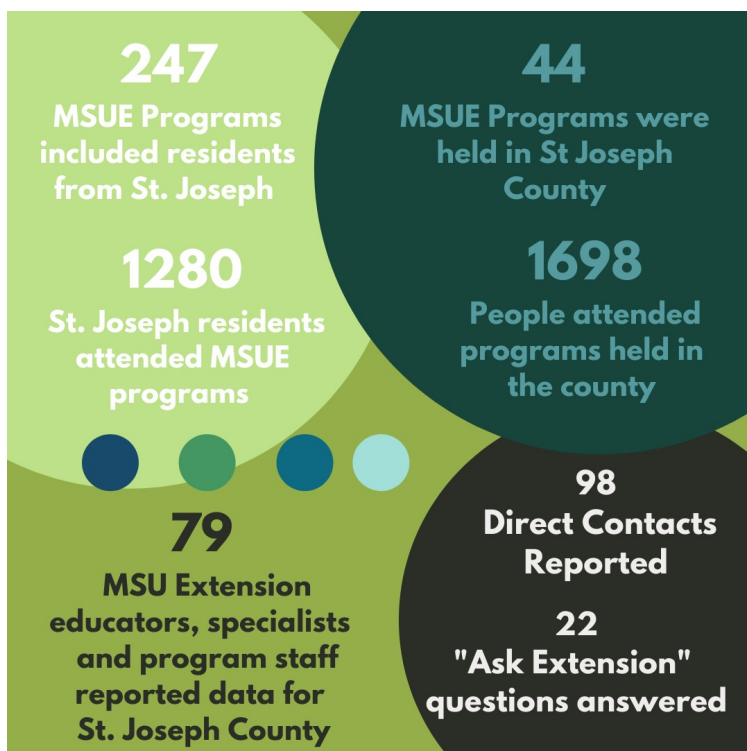
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BY THE NUMBERS



ST. JOSEPH COUNTY GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATION	2019	2020	2021
	\$250,070	\$182,896	\$202,672

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4-H AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

St. Joseph County 4-H

A total of 526 youth were enrolled in 20 St. Joseph County 4-H Clubs in 2020-2021. Our volunteers are the foundation of 4-H. One hundred sixty-one adult and 17 teen volunteers dedicated their time to mentoring, teaching and providing leadership to our youth development programs. With a transition in staff from long time 4-H Program Coordinator Eva Beeker who left in April to Autumn Converse who started one month before fair, we relied heavily on our volunteer leadership groups to keep the 4-H program moving forward. Many thanks to the St. Joseph County 4-H Youth Council, St. Joseph County 4-H Livestock Association and St. Joseph County 4-H Horse Council for taking the reins in 2021! The dedication exhibited over the last year demonstrated the strength and resilience of our county program and highlighted many new opportunities for volunteer driven efforts.

In order to maintain a high-quality program that is safe and welcoming to all youth, much of the 4-H program coordinator's time is spent recruiting, training and coaching our volunteers. In an effort to equip our volunteer leaders with tools to manage conflict, each leader was required to participate in a short online training in order to stay in good standing this year.

Financial Literacy

In partnership with the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, MSU Extension offered the 4-H Financial Fitness and Fun program to youth in 2021. Being involved in a financial literacy program can prepare young people for lifelong financial success. Students who receive financial education are less likely to fall prey to high-cost predatory loans and increase their understanding of money management. Several St. Joseph County youth participated in the financial literacy program which focused on setting financial goals, saving, budgeting, banking basics, and credit and taught in educational modules packed with fun lessons, activities and games. The lessons were taught by members of MSU Extension's Career and Workforce Education Youth Development work team through a mix of live online sessions and individualized modules.

Science Literacy

Science Literacy was another major thrust of youth development work in the county in 2021. Yearlong work with 4-H youth, in classroom settings and summer programs, 96 youth participated in nine science literacy programs in 2021. Two examples included: 1) In Partnership with Three Rivers Library, 4-H program staff presented a series of lessons on beekeeping and pollination, raising rabbits and poultry, goats and horses to young people during the Summer Reading Program.

2) St. Joseph youth were among 15 counties to participate in a Shooting Sports Mail-in Tournament, an event that promoted healthy competition and good sportsmanship while avoiding the COVID-19 health risks of traveling to a statewide event. Participants competed at local ranges and reported scores online. Said one of our volunteers about the event:

"This was the greatest ever. We had a small group this year due to the restrictions and people being busy through the summer and expect to grow again next spring. We had several kids participate who would not normally go to the state shoots due to travel, etc. This was a great way and the kids loved it. I would love to see other events like this."



4-H'ers work throughout the year to prepare their projects for competition at the fair.

4-H Financial Fitness and Fun lessons, activities and games!!



This program is made possible by a grant from the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs



Financial literacy programs are important to the success of young people in St. Joseph County



St. Joseph young people enjoyed hearing about the importance of pollinators to the food supply from MSU Extension 4-H program coordinator Veronica Bolhuis.



AG-CITING #32

The Ag-Citing Experience is now in its 32nd year of providing a unique educational experience for 3rd graders in St. Joseph County to show them where their food comes from and how farmers raise the animals and crops to provide their food. The face-to-face experience was substituted with a recorded version in 2020 due to COVID-19, and although, teachers thanked us for offering that option it was great to see the field trip buses parked at the St. Joseph County Grange Fair once again!

During the program, students heard presentations on livestock and crop species during individual tour stops. Youth and adults served as volunteers to provide the education at each stop and guide them through the grounds. The tour ended with an old-fashioned hay wagon ride led by volunteers from the St. Joe Valley Old Engine Association.

The weather during this was unseasonably cool, which was welcomed, but rainstorms threatened to stop the program for one of the three days. By adjusting schedules and identifying last minute volunteers, all schools but one were accommodated despite the rain delays. In total, 532 students in 25 classrooms from 12 schools (plus 29 chaperones) attended the tour which was staffed by 52 volunteers (20 adults and 32 kids) to fill 102 time slots in three different roles. It truly was a team effort!

A follow-up feedback survey was emailed to all schoolteachers requesting feedback on the program. Of the 25 teachers surveyed, 14 responded with high ratings on communications prior to the program, parking, debarking and boarding, flow of tour stops, hay wagon ride and information learned by students.

Open-ended feedback questions resulted in several insightful comments:

"I liked that all of the stops were slightly different, so the students didn't get bored."

"The pig barn sorting activity was great and engaging. The tour guide for the milk and beef cattle did an amazing job engaging the students."

"It was great to see teenage helpers provide the presentations."

"Melissa [tour guide] was amazing. She did a great job keeping things moving and leading the group. I was so nervous with not having chaperones this year, and I think it actually went smoother this way since she was such a great leader for our class. She made it very easy for me to keep the class together from the back of the line."

Students from one class wrote thank you letters. Here are a few notable quotes:

"Thank you for the fun time at the fair. My favorite part of the fair was the Baby barn, the rabbits, the sheep, the chips [donation from the St. Joe Valley Old Engine Association], the hay ride, the ducks, the cows, the pigs, the chickens, the turkeys, and you taught [sic] me a lought [sic] of things. I loved the field trip it was so fun."

"Thank you for the wonderful time at the fair. My favorite part was, well I liked everything the same I just liked all of it, but it was a little hot but I don't mind cuz if its fun why worry about the heat as long as you have your water."

"My favorite part of the fair was hayride and the bog." [accompanied by a drawn color picture of a pig in a hay wagon]

We receive feedback every year that this is a very worthwhile and special opportunity for children who may never step foot on a farm to learn about where their food comes from and how valuable the farmers are who raise the crops and animals that provide it.

The partnership between MSU Extension and the St. Joseph County Grange Fair Board continues to adapt to the changing times while prioritizing the educational value of this program - not only to local students but also to the entire agricultural community.

An additional bonus this year was an opportunity to showcase our program to the Minister of Agriculture of Guatemala and other top-ranking officials who were visiting Michigan during fair week to learn about MSU Extension outreach in rural communities. Since Guatemala does not have a history of volunteerism, MSU wanted to highlight volunteer roles in Extension, most notably through 4-H and also the Ag-Citing Experience. The visitors were able to see our team in action and enjoy a hayride with us while talking with our local farmers!





AGRICULTURE

MI AG IDEAS TO GROW WITH VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

MSU Extension agriculture educators rose to the challenge in 2021 in being able to continue to pivot their traditional educational efforts to methods that would provide clientele with access to programs and information from their homes or offices. One significant effort developed to meet this need was the MI Ag Ideas to Grow With virtual conference.

This unique event combined the annual events of Ag Action Day, Branch County Farmers Day, and Southwest Michigan Horticulture Days into a week-long virtual program. It featured subject matter tracks from livestock production, fruit and vegetable production, sustainability, soil health and irrigation to horticulture and home gardening. A track was also offered for youth participants. In all, 55 different education sessions were offered.

Each day focused on specific topics with sessions occurring at the top of every hour. The horticulture, home gardening and animal agriculture sessions were featured daily throughout the week. Educators worked with state officials to make it possible for attendees to receive RUP and CCA credits for eligible sessions.

While this program was developed to provide access to education typically delivered at MSU Extension’s in-person programming, the success of the virtual platform exceeded the expectations of the planning team. During the weeklong event participants from 47 counties in Michigan (including St. Joseph) attended sessions and over 980 sessions were accessed by clientele. Attendees included some who had not participated in the traditional in-person programs in the past.

“Thank you so much for putting on this conference. I’ve attended the past few years and I always learn a lot. You guys do a really good job of providing various quality materials and knowledgeable speakers.”

FIELD CROPS WEBINAR SERIES

With 754 registrants, it was a record year for the 2021 Field Crops Webinar series. Sixty-two percent of attendees were full time farmers and 25% were part time farmers. A whopping 880 completed surveys were submitted. Eighty-seven percent of attendees reported they learned something and 372 (42%) said they would make a change on their farm to manage risk and improve production efficiency on 295,366 acres. This totaled a financial impact of \$3,223,318 or an average of \$11/acre toward the change on their farm. What an amazing impact MSU Extension’s six-part webinar series had on Michigan’s field crop industry!

MICHIANA IRRIGATED CORN AND SOYBEAN CONFERENCE

Producing corn and soybeans under irrigation provides both opportunities and challenges for producers and a high concentration of the irrigated production occurs in St. Joseph County. Because of these two factors, MSU Extension and Purdue Extension have collaborated with the corn and soybean checkoff organizations in Michigan and Indiana to conduct a high-profile, multi-state educational program in Shipshewana, IN since 2014. Due to COVID-19, the conference was held virtually in 2021.

One hundred fifty-three producers participated in the virtual conference including several from St. Joseph County. A post season follow-up evaluation revealed that:

- 96% of the respondents gained new knowledge by participating in the program.
- 88% said that they utilized the information they learned on their farms during the 2021 growing season.
- Twenty producers said they earned additional money by implementing the new information they learned at the program. The average amount of additional income was \$18.60 per acre applied to 8,786 acres, producing an actual financial impact of \$163,375 in 2021 alone.

Producers raising corn and soybeans under irrigation in Southwest Michigan have come to rely on this annual event as an important source of information for helping them mitigate the challenges and maximizing the opportunities associated with irrigated crop production.

AGRICULTURE EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS



ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

4 programs with participants from the county
19 participants from the county

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

6 programs with participants from the county
47 participants from the county

FIELD CROPS

28 programs with participants from the county
120 participants from the county

FRUIT & VEGETABLE

11 programs with participants from the county
36 participants from the county

ORNAMENTAL HORT & CONSUMER HORT

20 programs with participants from the county
58 participants from the county





GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY VITALITY

The MSU Extension Government and Community Vitality Team delivers high quality educational programs to community leaders and residents of St. Joseph County. They provide certification programs, group facilitation and one-on-one consulting and problem solving with community leaders and decision makers facing challenging issues.



ZONING ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING

"Take It, Take It, Take It! The information you get will help not only you, but your community as well. You will be glad you did" was the response from one participant as MSU Extension's Zoning Administrator Certificate (ZAC) program completed its 13th year of providing training to those who administer and enforce local zoning ordinances.

This year 48 participants from 29 Michigan counties (including St. Joseph) enrolled. The ZAC program continues to be a trusted source of training for local government officials with 100% of respondents recommending that *"all zoning administrators attend this program."*

The 2021 ZAC program was held virtually over 10 weeks in February, March, and April. Zoning administrators completed eight modules, each focused on a different aspect the zoning administrator's job such as reviewing plot and site plans, inspections and violations, and customer service.

Modules were delivered through a blend of live Zoom meetings and self-paced online sessions. The program finished with participants testing their planning and zoning knowledge through a rigorous 195 question exam. Those who completed all the course modules and received a passing exam grade were recognized with a Zoning Administrator Certificate to acknowledge their professional development.

Over 90% of participants reported that ZAC had improved their knowledge and confidence in fulfilling their roles. This new knowledge and confidence can be seen in what ZAC participants plan to do after the program: 88% plan to "use techniques learned to make better decisions" and 80% plan to "share information with others." One participant said, *"I plan to develop office guidelines, review internal processes, do more research before decisions, interact more often with other ZA's, keep abreast of current issues and changes in law."*

With the move to a virtual format came the opportunity to have ZAC participants interact with each other through online discussion forums to share their own experiences, reflect on course content, and plan actions to take their new knowledge back to their communities. The MSU team offered participants online office hours each week. This addition to the ZAC experience provided a chance for personalized attention and interaction between the teaching team and ZAC registrants.

The ZAC program continues to be a leading source for zoning administrator professional development in Michigan. It also serves as a great way for zoning administrators from across the state to connect and share experiences with one another to build a professional network, including the resources and staff of MSU Extension.

"Excellent instruction, the program notebook and sample documentation will serve as a great resource for now and the future."

"The training can be eye-opening to those that have only worked in a few communities and have gotten used to ""this is just how we do it"" mentality."

"Very knowledgeable and experienced instructors, you will learn from fellow participants about what experiences they go through in their municipalities, and it's a great opportunity to network."

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA)

MSU Extension partnered with the Michigan Association of Regions to host 14 workshops around the state for local and tribal government officials to discuss **the ARPA Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund** spending opportunities. Participants were able to attend the sessions in person or choose to join remotely. One of these hybrid workshops was held at the Van Buren Conference Center in Lawrence. The sessions covered ARPA fund basic rules, best practices and early examples of ARPA spending; practical considerations for contracts, accounting, and project management. Group discussion centered on regional collaboration, leveraging funding sources and setting priorities. [Notes from the session can be found here.](#)

This workshop series had over 750 participants from Michigan's units of government including several from St. Joseph County. When asked about the workshop one participant said:

"Great job! I am thinking more broadly about ways to use our ARPA funds. I was very pleased with the attendance, facilitation, the information shared and received as well as the flow of the workshop. Thank you! I can think of many ways to use this extra revenue. After this webinar, I feel like we have so many more options than I originally thought."



HEALTH AND NUTRITION

FOOD SAFETY TEAM

Investigating Food with Science was created to help teach youth the importance of food safety. This online program uses fun activities to investigate the science behind food and food safety topics. Each week there is an experiment and recipe that includes food safety. Several participants in the 2021 program were from St. Joseph county. Participant comments include:

Ever since viewing the program Investigating Food with Science, whenever my young son sees steam in the kitchen, he insists that I be careful not to get burned. This short story illustrates in a small way, the very real success our programs can have.

"Thank you for teaching young people about food science and food safety in such a fun and engaging way. Excellent job!"

HEALTH TEAM

The MSU Extension health team offers a variety of programs to help people learn to improve their lives through educational programs in social emotional issues, chronic disease, addiction and pain management. Two examples of programs that included residents from St. Joseph County in 2021 are:

Mindfulness for Better Living includes a suite of one-time workshops to help people learn ways to use mindfulness to manage everyday stress. Workshops across a variety of topics were offered throughout 2021. Mindfulness can be defined as paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. Research has shown that practicing mindfulness is effective in reducing stress-related symptoms such as worry, depression and physical tension, and may be helpful in managing chronic conditions.

RELAX: Alternatives to Anger is a four-part educational series designed to help adults, parents and caregivers increase their knowledge about anger issues and put anger management and healthy relationship skills into practice. Through presentations, group discussion and skill-building activities, participants learn what anger is, what triggers anger, calming down and de-stressing methods, the principles of problem solving, effective communication skills and forgiving and letting go of the past.

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

With a focus on reaching those on the community who are eligible to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits (SNAP), MSU Extension works with community partners to present one-time lessons and 6 to 8 session series on nutrition and physical activity education to students, adults and seniors. The SNAP education curriculum is an evidence-based program that helps people lead healthier lives, teaches people about good nutrition and how to make their food dollars stretch further. In 2021, Linda Kline and community nutrition instructor colleagues from neighboring counties reached more than 810 youth and 44 adults in St. Joseph County. Sessions were taught both in person and online. One success story related to an online session included:

MyPlate In Action

Working with pre-school aged children can be challenging and fun at the same time. During a "Show Me Nutrition" online lesson about fruits and vegetables, the book "Handa's Surprise" was read via Zoom into the homes of students from Head Start. While the story was being read, it was noticed that one of the students would reach back to a bookcase full of stuffed animals and grab the animal from the shelf that was being talked about in the story. He didn't talk during the session but was excited to show his special animals. During another lesson with the same students, the class was shown models of different fruits and vegetables and asked if they were familiar with them. During this session, the same child ran to his kitchen and brought back his MyPlate. He then went back to the bookcase and got some play foods and started putting things in the appropriate sections of the plate. Again, he didn't want to talk but he sure wanted to show us he understood everything we were discussing. Visual aids are always good to use during classes and when a child can use their own, things really seem to connect with them.

Teaching virtually can be a challenge but when it all comes together like it did that day, it's definitely a success!

