



CALHOUN COUNTY 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



Despite the ongoing pandemic of 2021, Michigan State University Extension continued to work for Calhoun 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 provides a snapshot of our accomplishments from 2021. 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 Michigan State University Extension in Calhoun county

Julie Pioch, District 13 Director

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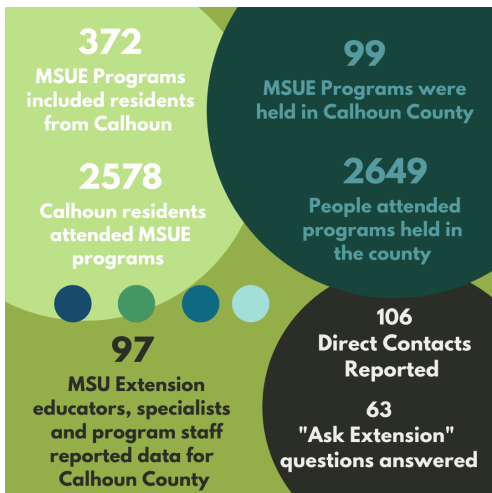
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BY THE NUMBERS



CHILDREN & YOUTH PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS

- CAREER EXPLORATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**
11 programs with participants from the county
58 participants from the county
- CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT**
12 programs with participants from the county
38 participants from the county
- HEALTHY LIVING**
4 programs with participants from the county
5 participants from the county
- LEADERSHIP & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**
10 programs with participants from the county
20 participants from the county
- SCIENCE LITERACY**
14 programs with participants from the county
318 participants from the county



AGRICULTURE EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

- ANIMAL AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT**
15 programs with participants from the county
55 participants from the county
- BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**
12 programs with participants from the county
63 participants from the county
- FIELD CROPS**
40 programs with participants from the county
239 participants from the county
- FRUIT & VEGETABLE**
10 programs with participants from the county
28 participants from the county
- ORNAMENTAL HORT & CONSUMER HORT**
29 programs with participants from the county
137 participants from the county

CALHOUN COUNTY GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATION	2019	2020	2021
	\$133,596	\$137,570	\$137,744



4-H AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

A total of 685 youth were enrolled in traditional Calhoun County 4-H Clubs in 2021. There were an additional 592 youth who participated in other enrichment programs.

Kathy Fischer, Calhoun 4-H Program Coordinator manages 121 volunteers who dedicate their time and talents mentoring, teaching, and providing leadership to the program. The 4-H Leader's Council works with Kathy to coordinate fundraising, volunteer recognition and county wide service projects.

In order to maintain a high-quality program that is safe and welcoming to all youth, much of our 4-H program coordinators' time is spent recruiting, training and coaching volunteers. To equip our volunteers with skills to manage conflict, each leader was required to participate in a short online training in order to stay in good standing in 2021.

FOCUS ON SCIENCE LITERACY

Throughout the pandemic, MSU Extension 4-H Youth Development programming continued to reach young people by engaging in activities that focused on learning and exploration while maintaining safety protocols. For example, together with our partners at Voces of Battle Creek, Kathy worked with the Early Learners Program (grades K – 4th) and Creative Leaders United (grades 5-8) to stay connected with youth while they were at home. They participated in science related 4-H programs that included investigations, scientific process, and a lot of fun. Each week the Voces staff would deliver a box of supplies to each youth, that the 4-H Coordinator had compiled. They connected via zoom once a week and did the activities together. The youth learned how to go through the scientific process with activities including paper airplanes, tin foil boots, and where germs grow.

Home experiment kits were also made available for 4-H club members and families to pick up each month that focused on fun ways to explore science concepts. Kathy and volunteers engaged young people via zoom as they completed the activities.

Fifteen youth from the Endless Possibilities 4-H Club all joined on Zoom to build a jiggling rod. Parents were actively engaged in helping kids with the project. One parent said: *"Thank you so much for putting together this activity for the kids. My son could not wait to show is rod to his Grandpa and have him help test it out."*

Face to face programs also focused on science literacy in 2021. For example, as part of an ongoing series of environmental science lessons in partnership with the Gull Lake Homeschool Partnership, a lesson called "Edible Aquifers" was used to teach a challenging topic to students grades K- 5th. Using a messy and food-oriented activity to explain the layers in the aquifer and the flow of groundwater was a great success. Not only did the students have fun, but a week later when the lesson was reviewed from the previous week the students were able to remember what the different layers did to help keep our water clean. Other lessons in the series included teaching the youth about pollinators and winter animal survival.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION & PROMOTION

Coordinating youth activities at Crane Fest in Bellevue in October provided a nice opportunity to work other local organizations and to expose 213 participants to 4-H and a variety of outdoor education experiences. 4-H youth and adult volunteers engaged participants with the Hoover Ball, several livestock and outdoor activities and talked about their 4-H experiences with the young people who participated.



Started as a safe and engaging outdoor activity in early 2021 for 4-H clubs across the county, the 4-H Council finally completed their community service project creating Little Free Libraries to be installed around Calhoun County.





COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

FOOD SPICE - STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL ECONOMY THROUGH SUPPORT OF FOOD AND FARM ENTERPRISES

MSU Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) along with MSU Product Center provide business support to food and farm businesses across the state. Through a special initiative called Food SPICE (Food Systems Partners Investing in Communities and Entrepreneurs), the teams have partnered with local Battle Creek agencies including the City of Battle Creek's business development office to assure that local entrepreneurs receive the support they need to launch, expand, and access financing.

The program started when Jamie Rahrig, Michigan Good Food Fund Specialist at CRFS began partnering with John Hart, City of Battle Creek's Business Development Director. Identifying an opportunity to leverage funding and resources by providing sector specific technical assistance to the City's food enterprises, the two developed a partnership. When awarded funding from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Services, CRFS hired Maria Graziani to support the local food businesses. Coming to MSU with a background in farm business management and experience owning and operating her own businesses, Graziani has been able to offer food and farm entrepreneurs with customized, one-on-one counseling, connects them to services from accounting to marketing, and helps them prepare for and access financing.

Through the program, Graziani hosted two Battle Creek Food Mixers, networking events for food and farm businesses to connect with resource providers, e.g., financial institutions, economic development, and business coaches, which had a combined attendance of 40 people. Food SPICE partners participated in capacity building workshops to learn ways to increase inclusion and racial equity in outreach and facilitation at their organizations.

Graziani provided business and financial planning and grant writing assistance to:

Devon Wilson, **Sunlight Gardens**, an organic, urban farm in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Battle Creek;

Sprout BC, A regional food box business, supplying Calhoun County and MI-based regional farm products direct to consumers, along with;

L. Simone Brands, a father-daughter Battle Creek producer of fresh squeezed bottled lemonade;

Harrington and Earth – a Black woman-owned local food hub, café and aggregator of local-produce, and;

Café Rica, a locally owned coffee bean roaster, purveyor of MI-produced products and soon expanding into more product manufacturing and locally-produced grocery.

Javier Fortoso, who recently opened a second location,

Torti Taco Bar and Grill, 80 Michigan Ave, Battle Creek, is working with the Food SPICE team on recipe analysis, packaging, and labeling to launch his infamous salsas into the market.

Counseling hours for Calhoun County farm and food producers since totaled 16.25 hours of 1-to-1 time. Several of these producers also engage in MSU courses including the Farm Business Recordkeeping for the Global Majority, a 6-month series for farmers of color to increase understanding and preparedness of their farm business records. Recruitment and planning for that program began in 2021 and kicked off in January, 2022 and will provide 22 hours of risk management training.

Food and farm businesses located in SW Michigan, are encouraged to reach out to learn more about [Food SPICE](#).

CONSUMER HORTICULTURE

EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER

Since 1978, over 40,000 Michigan residents have been involved in the MSU Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Program. Through volunteer outreach and community service, EMGs share science-based, environmentally-sound gardening knowledge. In 2021, three new Extension Master Gardener trainees from Calhoun County successfully completed their 13-week coursework. There are 33 active EMG's working in the county.

WHAT IS "ASK EXTENSION"?

MSU Extension's "[Ask Extension](#)" is an online tool used by community members to get answers from MSU Extension experts. Questions received range from food safety, agriculture and gardening, to natural resources questions relating to frogs and snakes to land use and home ownership. Once questions are submitted, they are "wrangled" by a team at MSU Extension and forwarded to the MSU expert who can answer the question. With our national extension service network, some are answered by colleagues from other universities when needed.

Seeing what questions are submitted also helps MSU Extension educators see trends and identify needs for other educational products like articles or research projects. Highlights for 2021 include:

- 7,470 questions answered;
- 163 MSU Extension staff and 26 MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers answered questions;
- 10 of the top 20 responders were MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers;
- 63 Calhoun County residents used the online tool.



GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY VITALITY

CITIZEN PLANNER

The MSU Extension Citizen Planner (CP) program provides lay planners a unique program to learn the fundamentals of planning and zoning. Thousands of Michigan residents have graduated from the program since 1999. In 2021, 91 people participated in the CP program via Zoom (3 from Calhoun County) and 206 completed the self-paced CP Online program (4 from Calhoun County).

KEEPING ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE KNOW

The Current Issues Affecting Michigan Local Governments Webinar Series was designed for elected and appointed officials at all levels of local government and their staffs, as well as any Michigan resident interested in learning about the biggest issues public officials are dealing with. MSU Extension partners with the Michigan Association of Counties and Michigan Townships Association and the MSU Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy to present community-engaging topics. Fourteen Calhoun County participants joined more than 200 in attendance.

ARPA FUNDS TRAINING

MSU Extension partnered with the Michigan Association of Regions to host 14 workshops around the state for local and tribal government officials to discuss American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund spending opportunities. Participants were able to attend the sessions in person or join remotely. 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. This workshop series had over 750 participants from Michigan's units of government including 12 from Calhoun 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."

FISCALLY READY COMMUNITIES SERIES

Several Calhoun County community leaders joined 390 others in attending a four-part series, created to assist communities establish, measure, and maintain policies to increase operational and financial effectiveness and safeguards. The Fiscally Ready Communities series was a program designed by MSU Extension in partnership with the Michigan Department of Treasury to help local governments work toward fiscal health by sharing best

practices in fiscal sustainability. The series topics included: Financial Best Practices Overview, Budgeting for Fiscal Sustainability, Capital Asset Management and Planning, and Managing Internal Controls.

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.

In 2021, 48 participants from 29 Michigan counties (including Calhoun) 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.

HOME BUYER EDUCATION & RESOURCES @ MIMONEYHEALTH.ORG

MSU Extension provides relevant and up to date online information and offers several monthly webinars to assist homebuyers, renters, and those seeking to improve their personal financial literacy. MSU Extension staff are HUD-certified housing counselors who educate potential, current and future home buyers to understand the complex buying process and learn the true costs of responsible home ownership. One of the offerings is a four-hour homeownership course that covers all aspects of selecting, financing and closing on your first home. Participants learn about the ins and outs of this important purchase. Spotting predatory lending and fraudulent practices are also discussed. An educated consumer will be more confident and successful with making important personal and financial decisions about homeownership. Eight residents of Calhoun County participated in one of 5 monthly sessions on home ownership in 2021.



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 29 from Calhoun County 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! Producers from Calhoun County attended each program in the series.

MICHIANA IRRIGATED CORN AND SOYBEAN CONFERENCE

Producing corn and soybeans under irrigation provides both opportunities and challenges for producers and a great deal of irrigated production occurs in Calhoun 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 Calhoun 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.

INTEGRATED CROP AND PEST MANAGEMENT UPDATE SUCCESSFULLY "HYBRIDIZED" IN 2021

The MSU Extension Field Crops Team hosted the 2021 Integrated Crop and Pest Management Update on December 20, 2021. The program is offered annually so that businesses and farmers can make their year-end bulk purchasing decisions based on demand and availability. Normally held at the MSU Livestock Pavilion, the meeting was held online in 2020 due to health considerations with the pandemic. Having received positive feedback from attendees about both in-person and online formats, the 2021 meeting was held as a hybrid program with the in-person at MSU and the virtual offered concurrently via Zoom. Continuing education units (CEU's) for Certified Crop Advisors and pesticide use re-certification credits for private and commercial operators were offered to attendees. Four hundred and two ag producers participated with 17 from Calhoun County.



HEALTH AND NUTRITION

FOOD SAFETY TEAM

In 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic progressed forcing people to stay home, interest in gardening and preserving food at home skyrocketed. This was seen by the enormous interest in our online Food Preservation classes as well as in retail settings where garden seeds, canning jars, lids, and canners became precious commodities and very hard to access. After moving quickly to pivot MSU Extension Food Preservation classes to an online format there was an explosion of interest as evidenced by more than 10,000 people registering for online classes from June-December 2020.

Continuing into 2021, we recognize that online learning offers opportunities to reach more people with education on safe home food preservation practices. Distance learning can address the discrepancies caused by socioeconomic and geographic differences, schedules, and ease of accessibility. The team reached 7,189 people in nearly 400 programs including 29 from Calhoun County. Food Preservation classes were offered from mid-January through early December 2021. Each program included a lesson, and a panel to answer consumer questions. In 2021, a variety of food preservation topics were covered in order to provide research-based education and resources to consumers on safely preserving food at home.

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. Health team highlights for 2021 include:

- Mindful Mondays Lunch & Learn teaches and encourages the use of mindfulness self-care skills to help participants feel better and enjoy life more. 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 such as cardiac disease and diabetes. Topics covered in these Monday sessions included breathing techniques, mindful eating, changing negative self-talk, and mindfulness for parents and caregivers. This online series reached more than 2000 participants including 57 from Calhoun County.
- RELAX 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. In 2021, programs reached nearly 600 participants with many from Calhoun County.

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

With a focus on reaching those in 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, Community Nutrition Instructors completed series with 668 youth and 99 adults and reached 263 youth and 397 adults through one-time presentations for a total of 1427 participants. Education was provided both in person and online and in partnership with organizations such as The Haven, Battle Creek Montessori Academy, Voces, Heritage Commons, Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, Arbor Academy, Battle Creek Community in Schools, Community Action Agency and the Calhoun Juvenile Home. As reported by Ali Rogers, Calhoun based Community Nutrition Instructor –

“In July, at the Battle Creek Communities in School farmer’s market, I talked with parents, students and school staff about the success of the Cooking Matters at Home program that we taught online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CNI’s were given glowing compliments about how much the students and parents learned, how the classes gave them something to look forward to, and what an impact they made. I had teachers and school staff come up to me and ask when we would get another class going. One parent told me they had ten children in the home, and learning how to cook healthy, affordable food was a lifesaver. They said that their children are now becoming interested in cooking and meal prepping together, and for the first time, they actually want to try healthy foods.”