



Thank you for another great programming year! We couldn't do our work for the residents of Kalamazoo County without your continued partnership!

Julie Pioch, District 13 Director
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Parchment first graders powering up with green protein smoothies during gym class.



Kalamazoo County Based Staff

- Jeremy Jubenville - Floriculture
- Christine Charles - Regenerative Ag Systems
- Mariel Borgman - Community Food Systems
- Beth Clawson - Natural Resources
- Amanda Hulet - Community Nutrition Instructor
- Jane Toll - Community Nutrition Instructor
- Valorie Snyder - Community Nutrition Instructor
- Veronica Bolhuis - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Sam Lawrence - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Wrifton Graham - Master Gardener Coordinator
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**Kalamazoo County
General Fund Appropriations**

2021 \$293,521
2022 \$316,500
2023 \$329,600

601
EXTENSION PROGRAMS INCLUDED
KALAMAZOO COUNTY RESIDENTS

4,311
COUNTY RESIDENTS ATTENDED
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

135
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE
COUNTY

193
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS
REPORTED

23,787
ESTIMATED CONTACT HOURS FOR
KALAMAZOO PARTICIPANTS

**KALAMAZOO COUNTY
MSU EXTENSION WEBSITE**

61,806 PAGE VIEWS
16,284 VISITORS
16% REGULAR CONSUMERS

302 4-H Youth Enrolled

134 Adult Volunteers

23 Community Clubs

1623 Total Youth Reached

113 Residential Soil Tests
50 Commercial Soil Tests

142 "ASK EXTENSION" Questions

**812 Youth Reached via
SNAP Education**

**71 Kalamazoo County
Extension Master
Gardeners**

Health Programming Reaches Nearly 300 in Southwest Michigan

*"It's so easy to feel stuck and tired with chronic illness. You have helped me to improve my life."
— Chronic Pain PATH Participant*

Being healthy means tending to our unique physical health needs, however that takes shape. Whether practicing tai chi in a sunny park or ensuring our immunizations are up to date, we can improve our physical health by managing chronic conditions, preventing injury and illness, and embracing joyful movement to the best of our individual abilities.

Social-emotional and mental health is also key. We can care for this part of our health in a multitude of ways, from practicing mindfulness to learning how to support someone in a mental health crisis. This allows us to cope with negative situations and feelings, foster strong and healthy relationships with others and ourselves, and live with purpose and meaning.

Good sleep, access to healthy foods, supportive relationships — what it means to be healthy is different to us all. That's why MSU Extension is here to support all the ways we can live healthier lives and build healthier communities, by bringing the vast knowledge and resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses.

In 2023, nearly 300 residents from Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties participated in health and food safety programming including Stress Less with Mindfulness, Personal Action Toward Health (PATH), RELAX: Alternatives to Anger, Home Food Preservation, Safe Food = Healthy Kids, the Michigan Vaccine Project, A Matter of Balance, and SLEEP Education for Everyone (SLEEP) just to name a few.



2023 Great Lakes Expo

"I cannot say enough good things about this conference. The presence of University information and education (understandable for growers) combined with the industry resources is unmatched for the horticulture industry anywhere else." --- GLEXPO Participant

The Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO, Michigan Greenhouse Growers EXPO (GLEXPO) and Lavender Conference is an annual event that draws thousands of farmers from Michigan and beyond to the DeVos Place Convention Center in Grand Rapids each December.

Attendees included fruit growers, vegetable growers, fruit and vegetable growers, and greenhouse growers with 121 attendees from Kalamazoo County. In 2023, the multi-day event had nearly 3,200 attendees in more than 90 educational sessions and workshops with sessions on specialty crops, greenhouses and farm marketing.

MSU Extension's team of vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, and community food system educators and specialists organized 77 out of 96 recorded educational activities offered. The 2023 show offered 54 Michigan Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) credits, 47.5 Ohio RUP credits, and 100.5 Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) continuing education credits.

Organizers also put together two separate bus tours in conjunction with GLEXPO. The Farm Market Bus had 152 participants on three buses visiting six farm market and agritourism operations to the east and northeast of Grand Rapids. The Greenhouse Biological Control Essentials: Setting Yourself Up for Success Workshop and Bus Tour visited Walters Gardens in Zeeland.



Kellogg Biological Station LTAR Cropping Systems Field Day 2023

The newly funded Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) program at MSU's Kellogg Biological Station in Hickory Corners is focused on meeting future sustainability challenges for cropping systems of the Upper Midwest. The research is designed with stakeholders to advance both food production and positive environmental and societal outcomes for agriculture.

While only in year two, this LTAR experiment is uniquely valuable because it will ask these questions over decades and, thus, be able to identify both the short- and long-term trade-offs in economic and environmental benefits. This was the first of hopefully many free, annual field days co-hosted by KBS LTAR and MSU Extension and will be a significant means by which research updates on the site will be shared and community will be invited to connect to the site.

There were 90 attendees in total. Attendees included 13 people from government agencies, eight Extension staff and educators, 16 farmers, 12 for profit companies, four MSU staff, seven NGO representatives, 22 researchers and students, and eight individuals with unknown affiliations.

We distributed a post-event paper survey to assess learning impacts of each topic area discussed during the field day and the change in knowledge of the LTAR experiment. We received evaluations from 43 participants representing over 42,700 acres of field crop production.

World Renowned Biologist Gives Presentation to 4-H Youth

D. Bruce Means, President Emeritus with the Coastal Plains Institute and Land Conservancy, and adjunct professor of biological science at Florida State University presented "Snakes and Frogs: Fieldwork in the Tropics" in October to nearly 300 youth via Zoom, with several Kalamazoo County youth in attendance.

D. Bruce Means has published more than 310 scientific articles, technical reports, and popular articles on his research in *National Wildlife*, *International Wildlife*, *Natural History*, *BBC Wildlife*, *National Geographic*, *Fauna*, *South American Explorer*, and other magazines. His books include several on the ecology of Florida and *Stalking the Plumed Serpent and Other Adventures in Herpetology*, as well as the forthcoming *Basecamp in the Tropics: My Adventures Discovering Biodiversity in South America*.

The "Wild Spartans" series offers monthly presentations to 4-H youth to examine working with fisheries and wildlife. Via Zoom, youth climb through bogs, peer into bear dens, mist net songbirds, snorkel for fish, and perhaps even tag deer. Youth meet researchers, learn about their field work, and the education and career path they've followed to get there.

Citizen Planner Program Helps Local Governments

The MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program provides in depth education and skills building for Michigan land use decision makers such as elected officials, planning commission members, zoning board of appeals members, local government staff, and other community leaders. In 2023, 72 attendees participated in the training from Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties.

Short term evaluations have consistently shown that Citizen Planner participants gain skills, knowledge, and confidence in fulfilling their important local government role. However, many of the issues covered in Citizen Planner like drafting and approving a master plan, adopting new policies, or amending local zoning ordinances take many months to fully implement for Michigan communities.



Kalamazoo County Youth All Species Education Night

On January 19, 2023, the Kalamazoo County 4-H staff and Kalamazoo County Livestock Superintendents Association held its second annual all species livestock education night. More than 60 youth and their families participated.

During the sessions, youth were introduced to a variety of topics to broaden their knowledge and possibly influence their decisions about raising other animals. They rotated between five different educational stations that included communication and how to properly do injections. Youth learned about species that they weren't raising, the different cuts of meat and the evaluation of that meat.



Smart Gardening for Kalamazoo EMGs

From January through November, 1,321 MSU Extension Master Gardeners joined timely “horticulture centric” programs with 59 of the 71 EMGs in attendance from Kalamazoo County. Each online session featured interactive Smart Gardening topics taught by the MSU Extension consumer horticulture team and faculty, helping them stay connected while enriching their knowledge. To allow greater access and increase convenience, all sessions were recorded and recording links were sent out immediately after the session.

A Grape Way to Learn About Food

Preschoolers at Comstock Learning center were in for more than just a food tasting after last October’s Show Me Nutrition class. The little ones completed the fruits lesson of Show Me Nutrition and then got to try a small cup of mixed fruit; these included green grapes, special dark red, narrow “spooky” grapes, blackberries, and golden raisins. As the children ate, they talked about how fruits can be fresh, canned, or dried. Many children were shocked to learn that the raisins in their cups were simply grapes that had been dehydrated. How can that be? The classroom teacher asked to keep a spare fruit cup so that she could show the preschoolers how fruits change when we add or take away water.

The following week during the Show Me Nutrition class, the preschoolers were excited to share what happened to the grapes and raisins from the previous week. The full, fresh grapes from last week had shrunk and developed wrinkly coats after sitting in a bowl with no water. The golden raisins, however, were submerged in a bowl of water and had nearly tripled in size! The raisins now had a rounder shape, smoother skin, and some even appeared more green than yellow. The children beamed with pride as they explained what they saw happening to the grapes and raisins.

One child pointed out, “[the raisins] look like grapes and [the grapes] look like raisins.” As SNAP instructors, we are in a unique position that enhances kids’ learning at school. The subject of food makes any reading, math problem, or science experiment more relatable and personal to kids. After all, everyone eats food. The grape/raisin hydration experiment is likely one of the first science experiments that the three and four-year-old preschoolers have ever done. Hopefully, it is an inspiration to keep learning about food and science as they continue to grow.





Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership

In September, 100 Kalamazoo County residents attended the Gull Lake Natural Shorelines presentation at the Gull Lake Country Club in Richland. Issues discussed included environmental stewardship and natural resource management, water quality and quantity, plus workforce development, community resource development, and innovation.

The Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership (MNSP) and the Michigan Inland Lakes Partnership share several organizations and agency members, and work together closely to achieve shared goals: protecting our lakes from pollution and degradation, and managing our lakes as ecosystems connected to their surroundings.

Partnership Objectives:

- Train contractors and landscape professionals about shoreline technologies and bioengineered erosion control.
- Educate property owners about natural shorelines and technologies that benefit lake ecosystems
- Research, demonstrate, and develop natural shoreline technologies that benefit lake ecosystems.
- Encourage local and state policies that promote natural shoreline management.

Additional information may be found at shorelinepartnership.org.

MSU Extension Partners with Kalamazoo County to Discuss Housing Strategies



Michigan is facing a housing challenge of serious proportions as discussed in Michigan’s Statewide Housing Plan. The lack of affordable, attainable and workforce housing is becoming a critical issue that limits the full potential of our communities. Regional, tribal, and local officials and staff have a responsibility to help communities address housing demands and ensure an availability of a wide range of housing types and prices. Despite the challenges, there are a diverse range of planning and regulatory tools available as solutions.

In October, MSU Extension, in partnership with Kalamazoo County’s Housing and Planning & Development Departments, offered a three-hour training to 38 attendees at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center to help Kalamazoo communities plan for and implement strategies to improve access to attainable, affordable and inclusive housing.

This interactive program provided participants with:

- Perspective on Michigan’s current housing situation and trends as well as local data.
- Strategies communities can use to assess their current housing situation and plan for the future.
- An overview of zoning and other policy tools that communities can implement to meet their housing goals.
- Two scenario-based learning activities to gain experience and confidence in housing discussions around planning and implementation.
- Additional housing resources including two checklists to assess a community’s housing plans and policies and a list of potential funding sources.

Communities that proactively plan and implement greater access to attainable housing can improve residents' quality of life and overall prosperity.

MSU Extension Partners with KVCC’s ValleyHub to Solve Farm to School Food Processing Dilemma

One of the biggest barriers to serving locally-grown produce in schools is getting the food into a usable form. Most schools are best suited, due to equipment, staffing and time constraints, to use produce that has already been washed and chopped. There is a lack of scale-appropriate infrastructure in Michigan schools to process produce grown on small-scale, diverse local farms. Some food hubs in the state have added processing capabilities to address this need.

School Food Service Directors like Dan Gorman of Montague Area Public Schools are looking for creative solutions to be able to use locally grown produce. Since chopping potatoes by hand is labor and time intensive, Dan’s idea was to test the feasibility of purchasing some appropriate scale processing equipment to be able to wash, chop and freeze potatoes within the school district for distribution to in-district schools, and potentially even other schools in the region.

He received a USDA Farm to School Grant in 2021 to purchase the equipment. Also in 2021, MSU Extension received funds to support farm to school supply chain projects in support of the 10 Cents a Meal program from Michigan Department of Education and MDARD who offered to support the potato processing program at Montague schools. However, due to supply chain issues, their equipment did not arrive in time to conduct the trials for the potato processing project on-site.



From Kalamazoo Public Schools Dining Services (posted on Facebook):

"A 9-month project that we have been working on with ValleyHUB KVCC and Michigan State University Extension has come to fruition today!! By our powers combined, we are serving over 1000 lbs of local diced potatoes to students across the district...This potato makes sense with our equipment, in our kitchens, with our time constraints, for our students. And it was grown by OUR Michigan farmers."

Therefore, the MSU Extension team leaned on Kalamazoo Valley Community College’s ValleyHUB, who have similar processing equipment, to run the trials. Potato specialists from MSU were consulted to determine the right variety (surprisingly, varieties typically used to make potato chips work best) and processing steps.

This not only resulted in a turn-key process for Montague schools to implement when they get their equipment up and running, but also a new product for ValleyHUB that has generated a lot of excitement among their school customers. In one single day in December 2023, Kalamazoo Public Schools served over 1,000 lbs of potatoes grown by Crisp Country Acres and processed by ValleyHUB to students across their district. This product development partnership will serve as a model for further creative solutions to solve the farm to institution processing puzzle across the state.