



2020 Annual Report to Wexford County



A Message from the District Director Spring 2021

2020 will be a year to remember for many reasons. The creativeness, 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.

During the pandemic and subsequent stay-home orders, 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.

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.

Working from home with the tools and support needed to help them succeed in a remote environment, MSUE educators have continued to assist farmers, elected officials and decision makers, parents, families and

In 2020, we expanded our capacity to provide high-quality virtual education. In this report, you will find stories of strength and effort, stories of resilience and creativity. There is no doubt this pandemic has pushed us all to the edge from time to time, but we have worked together to get beyond it and to continue to do the good work we do and deliver the best for our residents. We are looking forward to a time when we can all meet in person safely again.

youth by meeting with them on virtual platforms through online meetings and webinars. With the work they have accomplished over the last months, staff have reported some of the benefits and disadvantages to "virtual" learning:

- Programs that are recorded allow 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.
- There are more opportunities available to everyone – once a program is made virtual anyone can sign up, regardless of where they live.
- 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 this experience in on-line program development and investment in capacity will augment our face to face work (**once that resumes**) and provide greater access to our work than ever before. Thank you for your continued support!

Shari Spoelman, District Director

Spoelma4@msu.edu



Response of MSU Extension to the impact of Novel Corona Virus

In late March, MSUE pivoted all of our programming to online formats to comply with the original Stay Safe, Stay Home order (EO2020-42). Within six days of that order, we launched the [Remote Learning and Resources](#) website and our teams immediately began modifying programming to a digital format that would provide equal educational value right in people’s homes. This online space provided a platform to launch this effort and since then has become a robust virtual one-stop-shop for everything MSU Extension has to offer online. Within a few days into quarantine, staff had new programming spooled up and ready to present digitally. A few noteworthy examples include:

Adulting 101: Staff members quickly pivoted from a face-to-face program offered in a few locations to a series of one-hour presentations called **Adulting 101**. Topics include things such as what to look for when renting, tips and tricks for easy cooking, how to keep your finances in order and the right way to do household tasks such as ironing and setting a table. Once promoted via social media, it went “viral,” attracting more than **3,000** registered participants statewide and was recommended by school districts. This program has now become a regular recurring series and engaged a team of program staff to share in its delivery.

Gardening Cabin Fever Conversations – Gardening became a highly popular series of webinars via Zoom and Facebook Live designed to get people’s minds off of being cooped up inside and get them thinking about their garden spaces. Sessions focused on lighthearted but educational conversations about topics like seed saving, houseplants, pollinator health, community gardening and container gardening. The webinar’s success of more than **500 attendees per session** prompted organizers to continue programming during winter 2021.

[Educational Resources for Parents, teachers and families](#) were compiled to assist with remote and home-based learning. 4-H Curriculum, videos, tip sheets and virtual learning tools were developed and continue to be added to and improved as we begin the Fall school year.

[Rapid Response For Agriculture](#) was a site developed in 2019 to provide a single point for farmers to access resources developed in response to several weather related emergencies. In 2020, our agriculture team immediately rose to the challenge to assist the industry with resources and management tools to aid them through the pandemic emergency.

One first response was a series of articles and best practice options for the [floriculture industry](#) who were limited in the ability to sell to their wholesale markets. Other resources were aimed at keeping farm employees safe and [how to best manage operations](#) while still meeting consumer demands for a fresh, safe food supply during emergency conditions created by Covid-19.

Canning food became more popular during the pandemic. While working from home has its challenges, food safety staff witnessed some really great results with programming online. By having online classes, instead of face:face, the reach for food preservation classes increased by over 4,000%.

Adulting 101: Preparing for Life and College

DATE & TIME:
 April 9 2 pm
 Budget and Credit

April 16 2 pm
 Rent Smart

April 23 2 pm
 Cooking 101

April 30 2 pm
 Household Tasks

LOCATION:
 Virtual through web

COST:
 Free

Prepare yourself for the future!

SPONSORS:
 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension
 MID MICHIGAN COLLEGE

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:
 Older youth (11th and 12th Graders)

DESCRIPTION:
 Learn some quick tips that will help you navigate life and college. Budget and Credit-Explore the basics. Rent Smart-Learn what to know when you rent. Cooking 101- Learn some tips and tricks for cooks for yourself. Household Task- Learn ironing, making bed, and other helpful hints.

HOW TO REGISTER
<https://msu.zoom.us/j/257448955>

CONTACT:
 Michelle Neff by hydemic@msu.edu or 989-429-2359

MSUE is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer committed to providing excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all and designed to be free, unless noted. We are committed to providing programs and materials accessible to all. Persons with disabilities have the right to request and receive reasonable accommodations.

Join Us Online

Food Preservation Series

Every Thursday 1 p.m. & 6 p.m. EDT

March 18 - Introduction to Home Canning

March 25 - Preserving Maple Syrup

April 1 - Selecting Plants for your Garden

April 8 - With Spring's Arrival, Asparagus Won't Be Far Away

To Learn More Visit:
https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_preservation/events
 To join by phone, call in advance to register at 877-643-9882.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension



MSU Extension in Wexford County

2020 By the numbers:

Jan—Dec 2020	
# of programs offered statewide attended by County residents	197
# of County residents who attended programs	591
# of MSUE staff reporting serving residents of County	67
# of Direct Consultations Reported <small>(Field Crops, Com Vitality, Prod Center, Soil tests, gardening, food safety, etc.)</small>	176

Special Fund Budget Expenditure	
Voter approved millage	
FY 2019-2020	\$157,625 (budgeted)
Includes Lake Street Building rent	\$28,358

4-H 2019-2020	
4-H Adult Volunteers	18
4-H Youth Club Enrollment	77
Total Youth Served <small>(duplicates removed)</small>	164

MSU Extension District 6 Advisory Council

County	Name	
Clare	Sandy Bristol	Commissioner
Clare	Ken Brown	
Gladwin	Rick Grove	Commissioner
Gladwin	Dick Metz	
Isabella	Jerry Jaloszynski	Commissioner
Isabella	Bob Wachowski	
Mecosta	Marilynn Bradstrom	Commissioner
Mecosta	Vacancy	

County	Name	
Missaukee	Frank VanderWal	Commissioner
Missaukee	Vacancy	
Osceola	Jill Halladay	Commissioner
	Tim Michell	Alternate
Osceola	Russ Nehmer	
Osceola	David Eggle	
Wexford	Judy Nichols	Commissioner
Wexford	Mike Soloman	
Wexford	Chris Gentry	Chair



4-H Program Highlights



BRANDIE SIGLER

4-H Program
Coordinator

siglerbr@msu.edu
231-839-5848

"I recognize that many in our counties do not have access to reliable high-speed internet, so I focused my efforts on creating programs that don't require internet. I developed kit programs so youth can participate at their own pace."

Brandie Sigler is the 4-H coordinator in both Missaukee and Wexford Counties. She loves the adaptability of her job. When working hard to get youth involved in our programs, Brandie is able to make quick shifts and be flexible. When COVID restrictions were first put in place, she was able to transition an existing face to face "Babysitting" club at Lake City Schools to a virtual format immediately so she could continue the program without interruption.

What worked especially well because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to reduce face:face interactions?

Manton High School has students that live in both Wexford and Missaukee Counties. Last fall, Brandie partnered with them to bring a new program to students at that school. Brandie brought Spartan Peak Health and Performance to 4 classrooms of freshman health students. Three of the classes were traditional classroom settings, which she led virtually. The 4th class was an independent study. Students had the option to go to a classroom after school, participate virtually, or watch a recording at their convenience. This helped the teacher because she was struggling to find content to deliver to the independent study students. The series was so successful that the PE teacher has requested that Brandie bring "Steps to a Healthy Teen" in her class.

What would you like our commissioners and other stakeholders to know about your work during 2020?

Brandie adapted quickly to the new normal of social distancing and virtual learning. Recognizing that many families in our counties do not have access to reliable high-speed internet, Brandie focused her efforts on creating programs that don't require internet. She developed kit programs that were mailed to youth who could participate at their own pace and use optional internet-based opportunities to share their work with their peers.

Youth now have more access to 4-H programming across the state than they ever have before. The majority of programs in every county are open to youth across the state. This allows for students to find programming that matches their specific interest.

When not working, Brandie enjoys her hobby farm of ducks, chickens, goats, and a new pet pig.



Peak Health and Performance, formerly known as Spartan Performance, provides middle-school and high-school athletes with sound nutrition education. Nutrition education can help young athletes improve their health, their overall eating patterns, and their athletic performance.



4-H Program, cont.



KARIE SAXTON

4-H Program

Coordinator

saxtonka@msu.edu

“Innovative programming, outside the box thinking, and opportunities for collaboration with staff across the state created opportunities for programs that normally would not have been hosted in our county.”

4-H Program Coordinator Karie Saxton joined our team in March of 2020. She also provides 4-H coordination in Kalkaska County and enjoys teaching youth life skills through projects that they have an interest in.

After the Covid-19 pandemic hit and everyone needed to reduce face:face interactions, major limitations were placed on county fairs, and most were canceled throughout the state. Karie worked with the Cadillac Area Livestock Committee to host a virtual showcase for the livestock that would have been shown and sold at the Northern District Fair in 2020. Youth were able to compete in market and showmanship classes, followed by an online auction.

When reflecting on the past year, Karie commented, *“The novel coronavirus pandemic created challenges and opportunities for community members everywhere. Innovative programming, outside the box thinking, and opportunities for collaboration with staff across the state created opportunities for programs that normally would not have been hosted in our county. A couple examples include: Among Us (video game) clubs, cooking around the world, and Ocean Explorers.”*

When not working, Karie enjoys sewing, painting, gardening, running, and raising sheep and chickens.



Nutrition



DENISE GILDE

Community Nutrition
Instructor

gildedden@msu.edu
231-839-4667

As a nutrition instructor, Denise Gilde works with schools and agencies like Love, INC to provide nutrition education across the lifespan. During Covid and the work from home order for all non-essential workers, Denise worked hard to overcome the hurdles we were all presented with and learned many new skills to share with the people she serves. *“When able to get back to face-to-face meetings with community members and partners, I believe we will see even greater program participation. Utilizing what we have learned from this pandemic will be a gift for the future,”* noted Denise.

Grocery Store Shenanigans

Participants are using the information we teach them to choose healthier options at the grocery stores, and in their meal planning.

While shopping at a grocery store, I overheard a familiar voice emphatically telling her children that they could not have a particular cereal they were asking for. As I turned to look, I recognized a mom and her three children who had taken one of my *“Cooking Matters for Families”* class. Mom said *“Remember, we’re looking for cereal that has a Whole Grain as the first ingredient, and the lowest amount of sugar.”* About that time, mom spotted me and said, *“Hey look, it’s our nutrition teacher! If you don’t believe me, ask her.”*



Outdoor Education



LAURA QUIST

Shooting Sports and
Environmental & Outdoor
Education

quistla1@msu.edu

I care about my job and my community deeply. I look for new opportunities that arise out of barriers (like the pandemic).

The changes we experienced have resulted in unexpected benefits and collaborations that will strengthen our programming for youth and volunteers moving forward.

Laura Quist is a state-wide Shooting Sports and Environmental and Outdoor Education instructor. She loves the constant change and challenge her position brings while being able to pursue many of her own passions and bring them to life for others.

After the Covid-19 pandemic hit and MSU Extension reduced face:face interactions, Laura saw some positive outcomes.

Taking youth on “virtual trips and experiences” is one of them.

Examples would include taking youth along with marine educator (and new 4-H volunteer, based in Boston) Madison Dix, as we discovered marine life and explored conservation issues affecting those animals and wildlife places – that would have never been part of a typical club experience before.

Similarly, we met world-renowned eagle researcher, who has worked with industry leaders to reduce electrocutions on powerlines; she got her start in volunteering as a youth, so similar to our 4-H club members. Having the opportunity to converse with caring and successful adults like these is a unique and powerful experience that we might not have taken time to do prior to the pandemic.

What would you like our commissioners and other stakeholders to know about your work during 2020? That

I care about my job and my community deeply. When faced with challenges, I look for new opportunities that may arise out of barriers (like the pandemic). These changes have resulted in unexpected benefits and collaborations that will strengthen our programming and opportunities for youth and volunteers moving forward.

Locally, Laura works closely with the Veterans Serving Veterans group. She serves on the board and works hard to connect them with the many resources of MSU Extension. She has done work to help them increase their native habitat for monarchs.

When not working, what do you like to do that makes you happy?

Spend time with my family, enjoying our farm animals, pets, exploring the state and natural areas.





Youth Career Development



SARA KEINATH

*Youth Career
Exploration/Work
Force Preparation*

skeinath@msu.edu

Sara Keinath is a Youth Development Educator, with specialties in Career Exploration and Work Force Preparation. She loves helping people, especially helping youth to use their voice and increase their confidence.

Tell me about something that worked especially well for you during the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to reduce face:face interactions.

“I am very grateful that we were able to pivot to virtual trainings. Career Education and Money Management classes that are normally held in person were done virtually in 2020, and this allowed us to have more staff involved than we normally would (because of geographical restrictions). Additionally, I was proud of how our State Youth Leadership Council members were able to help clubs and committees in their own counties adapt to virtual settings because we had already been doing the bulk of the work of that council on zoom.”

Mock It Then Rock It! One of the successes Sara has brought to the Wexford -Missaukee area is the Mock Interview Day. Fortunately, this was held in Cadillac at Baker College in February, before the pandemic hit. Mock It Then Rock It: Mock Interview Day was held for all 11th and 12th graders in the greater Cadillac area. On the day of the event, students experienced a practice interview, had their resume reviewed, and attended breakout sessions on relevant topics. In addition to several staff from MSUE, the community wide event had a planning committee with membership from Baker College, Michigan Works, Cadillac Area YMCA, Munson Hospital Cadillac, and representatives from local schools. Being a single mom with two small kids at home, Sara learned first-hand the difficulties of handling everything at home during the stay home stay safe order. She is grateful for all the support she received.

Mock Interviews for students: What can be better than good comments from the youth participants?

- *Very well done, this was very helpful!*
- *I had so much fun, I want to thank everyone who did this*
- *I liked it. It helped me with tips and tricks to do better in an interview and do better on resume.*
- *I was very nervous at the beginning but as time went by I was more comfortable with how my body language was.*
- *This was fun and helped me feel more comfortable talking in an interview. Also learning to handshake correctly.*
- *I learned so much! Wonderful people. Thank you so much.*

Office Management



JESSICA ACKERSON

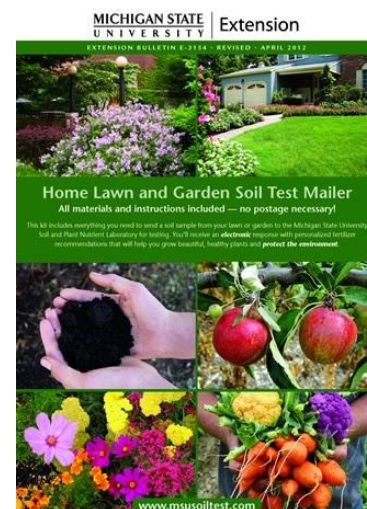
Office Manager

ackers23@msu.edu

If you’ve ever called the Wexford office or stopped in, chances are you’ve met Jessica Ackerson, the Office Manager and Master Gardener Ambassador. She has a passion and instinct for the natural world and for helping people. Whatever your question is, Jess will find an answer for you.

“Being a person who loves

knowledge and science, MSU Extension is a great fit for me. Every day is different and I always learn something new. With every question or concern brought to me, I feel proud in knowing that I can bring the most current knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals and businesses in my community, therefore helping us all grow in knowledge.”





Community Development



JOHN AMRHEIN

Public Policy

Education

amrhein@msu.edu

231-922-4627

"I value in-person meetings, but moving forward with the creation of the Cadillac Area Nonprofit Network in a virtual environment has proven the effectiveness of Zoom to 'help people improve their lives.'"

John Amrhein is a Governance, Leadership, and Finance Educator who enjoys helping people by providing them with tools to assist them in improving their lives. Referring to the mission statement *"Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities,"* John finds it extremely rewarding to see people take advantage of our work to make their lives better. What was a Covid Success story?

Cadillac Area Nonprofit Network. John has an interest in working with nonprofit organizations to help them grow and thrive in their local communities. In fall of 2019, during a "needs assessment" meeting/conversation with nonprofits in the Cadillac area, there were several who indicated they wanted to start a group of nonprofit leaders to discuss their experiences with other nonprofit organizations. The idea was to share questions, successes, problems, challenges and opportunities to learn from each other, and to build a level of teamwork/comradery amongst the participants. "One thing that has worked far better than I imagined during the pandemic-driven Zoom addiction has been the Cadillac Area Nonprofit Network," noted John. By the time organizational details fell into place for the launch of the official Cadillac Area Nonprofit Network, the pandemic had started and work-from-home had hit. Initially, his first reaction was to put the idea on the shelf until face to face meetings resumed. But the changes being required of everyone due to the pandemic actually opened up an opportunity. Nonprofits were struggling to learn how to operate their organizations during the first few months of the pandemic and greatly benefited from meeting with each other over Zoom. The group includes about 2 dozen people, with anywhere from 4-15 typically participating in the calls. The group continues to meet monthly in 2021. Every call has some sharing of ideas that is clearly of value to those on the call.



Other successes from the work of the Government and Public Policy team in 2020 include:

- New Commissioner School celebrated 52 years in 2020 by going totally virtual. The program, for newly elected county commissioners, used a combination of live webinars and self-paced online readings and videos. Participants expressed appreciation for the ability to study around their busy schedules. Educational outcomes surpassed 2018 results.
- The Northern Michigan Counties Association continues its long history of being a place where county commissioners from across the northern lower peninsula gather 8 times each year for lively discussion; sharing successes and concerns, learning from each other, and from guest speakers on topics selected by the commissioners. MSU Extension provides the educational staff support. Due to the pandemic, 2020 saw a transition from in-person to Zoom. Participation dropped off a bit at first, but rebounded later in the year, and early 2021 looks even stronger, with participation up 50% compared to the 2020 average.
 - Wexford County's board chair, Gary Taylor, is an active participant.



Agriculture

Paul Gross is an Agriculture Extension Educator specializing in Field Crops and Soil Health. When not working, he is happiest spending time with his family and friends.



PAUL GROSS

Field Crops
Educator

grossp@msu.edu
(989) 560-1371

"I am utilizing technology to improve efficiency in my work and to reach more people."

Paul enjoys working with farmers and agribusinesses, bringing the research and information from MSU's Extension Specialists and applying it to their farms to improve productivity, profitability and environmental practices. Paul engages in on-farm research in the county to test products, practices, and systems that address issues on their farms.

During the pandemic, Paul worked with his colleagues to develop a stronger online presence for programming. They developed online courses, podcasts, informational videos, and short how-to videos that farmers can view on demand. These have been posted on our social media sites. Covid-19 has forced all of us to be more creative in how we communicate and interact with farmers.



Impact of COVID:

According to Paul, "Like everyone else, Covid-19 changed our world and how I carried out my programming. I am fortunate that I was able to conduct all of my planned on-farm research in the summer of 2020. I was able to travel to fields to monitor pest traps, provide soil samples and scout pests. We utilized pictures and videos for weed, insect, and disease problems when travel was not possible. I am utilizing technology to improve efficiency in my work and to reach more people."



FaceBook Live weekly "Lunch Break" is an ongoing event that brings up to date information from the MSU Extension field crops team and other members of MSU's ag educators and specialists to growers.



Farm Stress



ERIC KARBOWSKI

Community Behavioral
Health Educator

karbows8@msu.edu
(989) 444-2211

“Every connection and outreach made to someone that is struggling can have a lifelong impact.”

Eric Karbowski is our Farm Stress educator who enjoys spending time with his family and friends, football, hunting, kayaking, and cutting wood. He is passionate about working with farmers, creating tools, and developing resources to support those in need. Eric joined MSU Extension to help provide behavioral health supports and services to farmers and farm families in our community. The existing farm stress programs created a nationally recognized foundation that set the stage for the advanced opportunities and supports now available to those we serve. The focus on adhering to the programming models, yet flexibility to be creative and innovative, have proven to be important in allowing resources such as the teletherapy program and “wrap around” model to be implemented. For Eric, his position with MSU Extension is helping him fulfill both personal and professional goals.

Mental Health Minute: When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Eric and his team of colleagues in agriculture were able to make an impact despite the inability to provide in person programming. One of those examples is a program called “Lunch Break.” Once a week, ag educators and Eric provide a Facebook live feed for updates and advice for growers and producers. Each week, Eric provides a Mental Health Minute, and embeds good, sound mental health education for the participants. Sometimes, you don’t know that you can use this information until you receive it.

Teletherapy: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, MSU Extension through a partnership with Pine Rest Behavioral Health, created the teletherapy program for farmers to access supports through online-counseling with master’s level clinicians that have a connection to agriculture. This was timely because the roadmap to support and recovery was already in place, making connecting farmers with the services efficient. It later received funding to help offset cost further reducing access barriers.

According to Eric, “The heralding truth behind behavioral health is that often the effectiveness of the supports we are providing will not likely be publicized. Every connection and outreach made to someone that is struggling can have a lifelong impact. Although we have a large amount of reportable farm stress impact data and outreach engagements, as friends, neighbors, and supporters of MSU Extension, you are supporting the continued development of resources and tools further reducing the impact of stress, mental illness, and the potential loss of life by suicide through our farm stress efforts.”



Responding to Farmers in Need



Integrated Pest Management



ERIN LIZOTTE

Pest Educator

taylo548@msu.edu

“No matter the challenge, MSUE remains committed to serving our stakeholders around the state.”



Pesticide Safety & Education

Erin (Taylor) Lizotte grew up in Cadillac and enjoys living and working in the area she calls home. As an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Educator, Erin likes working with farmers. “I love being out on the farm, solving mysteries, learning from growers, and helping solve problems,” she said. “I am passionate about supporting farmers in their efforts to be good stewards of the land and in retaining their farms for future generations.” Erin’s work focuses on increasing the use of integrated pest management on farms across Michigan. Integrated pest management helps growers make environmentally and economically sustainable pest management choices, protecting both the environment and farm profitability. Her specialty crops include hops and chestnuts and she works across the state providing support in these areas.

Something that was successful or noteworthy that came out of 2020, in spite of Covid:

“The past year was challenging for everyone, but also helped us stretch our thinking about how we serve clients. For the first time, we began offering pesticide applicator education online and the grower response was powerful with over 2,000 growers viewing the online review materials in preparation for the license testing in 2020. This led to the development and launch of an online course for pesticide applicators in October of 2020. We expect hundreds of growers to complete the course annually.”

Christmas Tree Production



HEIDI LINDBERG

West Michigan
Greenhouse and
Nursery Education &
Research

wollaege@msu.edu

616-994-4701

MSU Extension hosted a Christmas Tree Pest Management webinar series in 2020, attended by area growers. The four-part webinar series was organized and hosted by MSU Extension (Bert Cregg, Heidi Lindberg). The webinars were advertised nationally and featured presentations by MSU and MSUE personnel. Their presentations included pest scouting methodology, insect and disease ID and management, and trouble-shooting non-pest damage. We offered pesticide recertification credits for Michigan growers.

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