MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

Michigan State University Extension is serving the residents of Mecosta County by providing a variety of programs and resources to help people achieve their greatest potential. We offer a variety of resources through our Land Grant University. Whether it is a youth program designed to help kids learn responsibility, or disease identification for a grower’s specialty crop, we’ve got the backing of researchers and specialists on campus and across the state in each Extension office.

Our Staff is trained to connect people to the resources they need to grow food for their family, to prepare food safely and efficiently, to provide nutritious meals for their family, to work together to find common goals, and help grow our communities.

In this day and age, a simple Google search brings up “answers” to life’s many questions. It’s easy to get answers. But are they the right ones? How do we know what will work best for us? That’s a whole new challenge, and one that we are prepared to handle. We’ll help you navigate the wild frontier out there.

Along the same line, technology has provided us with opportunities to teach from a distance. It allows participants to learn in their spare time, on their own schedule, and from the comforts of their own home or farm. MSU Extension provides many opportunities for online learning, as well as the traditional classroom style, office appointment, phone call, or farm visit. Throughout the years we have adjusted our methods to meet the needs of the changing world, but we hold on to some traditional values of face to face interactions and “hands-on” learning.

Whatever the need, we are here to serve you. We will do our best to provide you with the information you need to make your life better. Whether it’s health, agriculture, entrepreneurship, or teaching youth skills to carry forward throughout their lives, the cooperative extension service extends the research of the university while meeting the needs of the local community. We thank our local governments, partners, and residents for providing us with the needed resources to maintain a local office, a strong 4-H Program, and a touchpoint for local service.

Shari Spoelman

District Coordinator

MEASURING IMPACT

CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS

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<tr>
<th>4-H Members</th>
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<td>Food Safety</td>
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<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td>Other Health &amp; Nutrition</td>
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MSU EXTENSION’S DIGITAL REACH

More than 3.7 million visitors viewed more than 7.2 million pages.

1.3 million newsletters covering 90 topic areas were sent to about 16,900 email addresses.

MSU Extension has more than 3,500 Facebook followers and more than 2,800 Twitter followers.

DISTRICT 6 DIGITAL REACH

From Jan 1, 2016, to Dec 31, 2016, 51,592 visitors from the 7 county district viewed more than 138,129 pages of rich, science-based content on the MSU Extension website (msue.msu.edu). Of those, 52.1 percent were first-time visitors. Search engine rankings make msue.msu.edu one of the most visited Cooperative Extension Systems education sites in the country.
When you support MSU Extension 4-H programs, youth participants learn life skills that prepare them for the workforce – especially for highly sought after jobs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Extension programs help children develop early literacy skills that support school readiness. They learn leadership and decision-making skills in 4-H that increase their likelihood of becoming civically active. 4-H’ers also demonstrate reduced high-risk behaviors such as drug use, and learn to complete tasks, solve problems and seek any help they might need from peers and adults. 4-H involvement also helps participants avoid or reduce involvement with the court system. This helps ensure more young people succeed in school, attend college and contribute to their communities. More successful young people in communities results in greater tax revenues and consumer spending and increases the likelihood that young people will stay in, or return to, their communities.

**Mecosta 4-H is Strong**

Mecosta County 4-H has a broad reach across the county. Over 340 youth are 4-H members in Mecosta County, meaning they are actively involved in 4-H programming all year round. These 4-H youth are led by over 100 volunteers who guide them in learning life skills. Through the work of these volunteers, Mecosta County 4-H has over twenty 4-H clubs that meet at least 6 times per year with 4-H members. Outside of 4-H membership, MSU Extension reaches over 1,000 youth in other programs and events in Mecosta County.

**Breakfast with Santa**

Mecosta County had eight teen leaders and two adult volunteers assist with Breakfast with Santa at the Kettunen Center in Tustin in December. This program is for area youth to enjoy doing various arts and crafts along with having a pancake breakfast and visiting Santa. Our teen leaders and volunteers helped make this program a success by staffing interactive stations for attendees to visit.
Developing Youth and Communities, continued

National 4-H Congress

The day after Thanksgiving, 21 youth from all over Michigan, including 2 staff chaperones, set off for Atlanta, Georgia for the annual National 4-H Congress. Two youth from Mecosta County, Kaley and Caleb Arquette from the Windy Hills 4-H Club, got to take in this year’s event. They had a successful journey and came back to Michigan overwhelmed with positivity for the things they learned including leadership, community activism, and how important volunteerism is for their community.

2016 Mecosta County Fair

For 2016, the livestock sale at the fair was moved to Thursday night of fair week. This change showed great community support of the 4-H program by bringing even more buyers out to the sale which supported the youth with a whopping $213,000! All of this support from community members and businesses goes right back to helping area youth continue in their livestock projects and fund educations.

A Day in the Ring for Special Abilities! A new opportunity featured at the fair this year was an event called A Day in the Ring. This event was an opportunity for special needs youth to have the opportunity to experience a livestock show. Participants got paired up with a 4-H mentor to learn about the animals and how to show them. After that, they got to show off their skills in the show ring. Participants and mentors enjoyed lunch together afterwards and had some social time.
Mecosta County 4-H Camp

Mecosta County 4-H partnered with Cran Hill Ranch to host 4-H camp in 2016. The partnership with Cran Hill opened up many opportunities for youth to participate in activities not previously offered at camp. Camp was five days long and was staffed by 19 volunteers and had 26 campers. Camp was fun for all and 4-H is headed back to Cran Hill for camp in 2017.

Camp counselors learn leadership, teamwork, empathy, and communication skills while they lead campers to learn social skills, sharing, and self-esteem. These skills are essential life skills for youth to learn before entering adulthood.

Exploration Days

Three 4-H members competed for State Awards in Dairy Science, Beef Science, and Equine Science. Of those three youth, two were able to bring home the honor of winning the highest award within Michigan 4-H—a State 4-H Award. Along with these three members, seven other 4-H members attended Exploration Days accompanied by two volunteers.

Exploration Days gives youth the opportunity to participate in sessions covering over 200 topics of things they might not normally be exposed to. This is a great way for 4-H'ers to learn about new things and experience this pre-college experience on the campus of MSU.
When you support MSU Extension’s efforts to enhance residents’ access to an adequate supply of safe, affordable food, program participants will focus on food safety measures in the field and at harvest, learn proper food preparation and food preservation techniques, and bring community partners together to strengthen access to healthy food supplies. This leads to a healthy population, which in turn helps keep health care costs in check and our communities viable.

Reducing foodborne illness through education of individuals, small businesses

The National Institutes of Health estimates that every year, 48 million people in the United States become ill and 3,000 die from pathogens in food. Causes range from outdated home food preservation practices to unsafe sanitizing practices at public events and small businesses. Since 2013, MSU Extension food safety and preservation programs have taught almost 10,500 Michigan residents safe food handling, food preservation and methods to reduce foodborne illness.

In Mecosta County

- A ServSafe certification class was offered in April. Six participants enrolled in this course to become certified to safely prepare food for their customers.
- A salsa making class was opened up to the Mecosta community. Participants were shown how to safely can salsa and then spent the afternoon canning with locally grown produce.
- Mecosta county residents also participated in food preservation, Cooking for Crowds, and Cottage Food Law classes held at the Mecosta County Commission on Aging Summit and in other counties.

Through face-to-face and online learning, Michigan communities receive high-quality, research-based education using U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines for safe food preservation.

- 95% of participants report they will follow research-based and tested recipes for home food preservation.
- 86% of youth participants gained knowledge about food spoilage organisms and learned how the organisms’ growth can be slowed or prevented.
- 85% of participants can correctly list strategies for cross-contamination prevention.
- 91% know correct methods of cleaning and sanitizing surfaces.
Improving nutrition and increasing physical activities in Michigan communities

Limited income and poor nutrition affect quality of life and can increase healthcare costs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than 30 percent of Michigan adults are considered obese, and one out of every three deaths in Michigan is caused by cardiovascular disease, influencing the quality of life and adding billions of dollars each year in economic burden.

MSU Extension delivers affordable, relevant, evidence-based education to help residents in urban and rural communities stay healthy throughout their lifespans. Programs teach participants how to buy and prepare nutritious, budget-friendly foods and increase physical activity. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Education is funded through a statewide grant from the federal Government (Farm Bill). “SNAP-ED” plays a vital role in helping to improve nutrition among low-income individuals.

SNAP-Ed instructors provide education either through one time presentations or series. The following are evidence based curriculums that are used in Mecosta County:

- **Show Me Nutrition**—used for Pre-K through Jr. High - each level adds to previous instructions and exposes children to healthy food, physical activity, body image and media influence through instructions, activities and sampling.
- **Cooking Matters**—this curriculum has material catered to Teens, Adults, Families, and Parents, and includes both a nutrition lesson and cooking instructions which is co-led by local Chef Don Zimmer.
- **Project Fresh**—encourages participants of the Woman Infants and Children (WIC) program to eat more Michigan grown fruits and vegetables.
- **JIFF (Jump Into Food and Fitness)**
- **Ten Tips to a Great Plate**

- 79% of youth participants improved their abilities or gained knowledge about how to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Guidelines.
- 79% of adult participants made a positive change in at least one nutrition practice, such as preparing foods without adding salt, or using the Nutrition Facts labels to make food choices.
- 73% of adult participants made a positive change in at least one food resource management practice, such as planning meals in advance or comparing prices when shopping.
Cooking 101 & Sparty Chefs!

Cooking 101 is a beginner cooking class for youth 8-9 year olds. Youth were able to experiment with recipes, start their own cookbook, and learn table etiquette. Among other topics, youth learn how to use MyPlate, avoid spreading germs while cooking, measure and mix ingredients, test baked goods for doneness, brown meat, and set the table for a family meal. The youth followed a curriculum and all youth became enrolled in the Mecosta County 4-H program. In 2016 the MSU Extension offered 2 Cooking 101 workshops and graduated 25 participants.

Cooking 101 Participants Ryder Newman, Hannah O’Gora, Sarah Yonker & Jadyn Herzog

MSU Extension Health and Nutrition staff and volunteers attend community events and provide education throughout the county.
Dining with Diabetes

Dining with Diabetes (DWD) is a five-session workshop designed for people with pre-diabetes, Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. Through DWD participants acquire skills to prepare healthy, nutritious meals using less fat, sodium and sugar without reducing the flavor of foods. Participants complete the program objectives by identifying the cause of diabetes, learn tools to self manage diabetes, and put into practice diet and exercise goals. In 2016 MSU Extension offered four Dining with Diabetes programs graduating 63 adults!

L-R, Dining with Diabetes partners include: MSU Extension volunteer Chef Don Zimmer; Clinton Zimmer, owner Red Fox Market; Scott Lombard, Spectrum Health Big Rapids & Reed City; and Extension Educator Pam Daniels.

Dining with Diabetes participants from Red Fox Market, Big Rapids.

Personal Action towards Health for Diabetes, Chronic Illness, and Chronic Pain

PATH—Personal Action Towards Health is a six week educational workshop held in group settings. PATH programs include (three) different self-management workshops—Chronic Pain PATH, Chronic Illness PATH and Diabetes PATH. The goal of PATH is that participants master program objectives including, skill building techniques aimed at improving their self-management competence to better control chronic health conditions. In 2016, MSU Extension offered 5 PATH workshops in District 6 and graduated 58 participants.

PATH participants, Big Rapids, MI
When you support MSU Extension’s natural resources education programs, participants learn about income-generating opportunities, ecological principles, natural resource issues and the role of natural resource professionals. They also explore public policy issues related to environmental stewardship. Our programs can lead to increased income for families that retain their natural resource assets, help landowners become better stewards of their land, and protect land management opportunities for future generations. Better land stewardship benefits communities by protecting and enhancing Michigan’s natural resource assets.

**Raising awareness of the benefits of cover crops**

Cover crops are a hot topic in agricultural circles, thanks to an MSU Extension specialist’s message that’s resonating with the right crowd. Dean Baas, a senior research associate, conducts cover crop and organic agriculture research and education.

Cover crops are plants seeded into agricultural fields, either within or outside of the regular growing season, with the primary purpose of improving or maintaining ecosystem quality. Environmental benefits include enhanced biodiversity, increased soil infiltration and attraction of honeybees and beneficial insects.

Researchers are focusing on ways cover crops can be used by farmers to bring diversity to the crop system; to reduce reliance on fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides; and to determine the impact of cover crops on overall operation economics. Initial studies have shown that:

Farming benefits include reduced erosion, improved soil quality through increased porosity, soil organic matter and water-holding capacity, as well as the addition of beneficial microbes.

Cover crops help retain nutrients that otherwise would be lost.

Cover crops add nitrogen through fixation while combatting weeds and breaking disease cycles.

**Local Cover Crops Education**

A field event focusing on using multi-species cover crops for grazing management was held in the area in 2016, under the direction of Extension Educator Jerry Lindquist. The role of cover crops in grazing was also discussed at the beef producers meeting in Paris.
Agriculture & Natural Resource Day

Agriculture and Natural Resources Stewardship - ANRS Day was held at Cran Hill Ranch in May for local third grade youth to learn more about being good stewards to the environment. Third graders and volunteers visited eight different stations set up around Cran Hill Ranch to explore natural resources and agriculture.

Activities such as planting flowers, learning about pigs and their impact on the environment, types of rocks in Michigan, and animals in our water systems were explored. Over 190 students attended this event with teachers and chaperones.

Gardening

Mecosta County residents availed themselves of many consumer horticulture programs throughout the area in 2016. They participated in:

- Grand Ideas for the Garden
- Native Plants
- Master Naturalist
- Composting
- Smart Gardening for Pollinators
- Plants of Distinction
- Master Gardener Basic Training

Better land stewardship benefits communities by protecting and enhancing Michigan’s natural resource assets.
Michigan’s Dragon at Hardy Dam: A unique trail on an international scale is in development

The State of Michigan boasts many notable outdoor adventure venues that cater to a variety of user stakeholder groups. Snowmobiling, hiking, paddle sports and ORV infrastructure is well established throughout Michigan. At the same time, mountain biking, snow biking, and hiking enthusiasts enjoy several remarkable, yet shorter, courses scattered throughout the State. But no trails in this category can be found anywhere in the world at this scale—until now.

The Dragon trail will be a truly unique adventure sports destination for people from around the state, region, nation and world that promotes West Michigan’s triple bottom line - financial, social and environmental performance measures. While "pond" often conjures up images of small, quiet, idyllic blue patches of water, Hardy Pond boasts over 50 miles of shoreline and over 4,000 acres of fresh water! The Dragon trail will span over 47 miles along the banks of the Hardy Pond upon the majestic Muskegon River as it winds through Mecosta and Newaygo counties, crossing the massive Hardy Dam, the third largest earthen dam in the world.

Collaboration

This highly collaborative and ambitious initiative has been five years in the planning and involves Mecosta and Newaygo County officials (administrators, commissioners and parks officials), three township supervisors, Consumers Energy, the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) and West Michigan Mountain Biking Association, the Newaygo Nationals Association, both county Economic Development and Convention and Visitors Bureau offices, two Chambers of Commerce, Spectrum Health/Tamarac, Nestle Waters North America, MI Works!, Muskegon River Watershed Assembly, Michigan State University Extension and others.

Trail Highlights

The Dragon trail is a non-motorized, multi-use, natural surface trail which will include:

- A challenging 47.5-mile mountain biking and pedestrian adventure loop trail designed, engineered and endorsed by the IMBA. It will be one of the largest loop trails of its kind anywhere in the world that will be managed by the Mecosta and Newaygo county parks boards and maintained through revenues and fees generated from the trail.
- The proposed trail will be located exclusively on land owned by Consumers Energy and is virtually unspoiled with stunning water views, challenging valleys, and 23 proposed bridges along the trail.
- This professionally engineered, constructed, maintained, and managed trail will take two full years to complete, and requires Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approval.
- Will connect to The Edge Pathway System and the North Country Trail, with a planned connection to the White Pine Trail State Park.
- Provides direct access to the Muskegon River for multi-sport events.

Cost and Economic Impact

The $1.2 million Dragon trail project enjoys a wide range of local and regional support, including an important pre-funding investment of $300,000 by Newaygo and Mecosta counties for the construction of the trail. These monies will serve as a catalyst for additional momentum and investment. In addition to providing an incredible attraction to biking and hiking enthusiasts of all ages and abilities, a comprehensive economic impact study conducted by Michigan State University’s Center for Economic Analysis reveals that, as a result of this project, the west Michigan region can expect:

- An annual increase in economic activity of over $4.15 million per year
- An annual increase of nearly 105,000 visitors
- The creation of 70 new jobs

For additional information you may contact Ryan Coffey at coffeeyr@anr.msu.edu or (231) 924-9677.

A massive non-motorized hiking and biking trail being developed around the Hardy Pond in Mecosta and Newaygo counties will put West Michigan on the map when it comes to outdoor adventure destinations.
Michigan agriculture continues to be a growing segment of the state’s economy. The production of commercial food and nonfood agricultural operations is growing rapidly. The number of households raising a portion of their own food and raising livestock or gardening for pleasure or relaxation continues to increase. When you support MSU Extension, you help participants learn profitable and efficient business and production practices. Participants also learn how to optimize and reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and how to conserve and protect water resources. This education leads to better use of time, money and human capital, and helps retain and create agricultural jobs. These measures strengthen Michigan’s economy while connecting farmers to local food opportunities and global markets. In this way you help MSU Extension encourage growth in a sustainable and prosperous Michigan food and agriculture system.

Preparing youth for future careers in agriculture

As a pillar of Michigan’s economy, agriculture must continue to grow and thrive. One way to ensure this success is to prepare an informed and skilled workforce ready for careers in this essential sector.

To meet this need, MSU Extension offers youth a continuum of learning opportunities in the agriculture industry. These opportunities range from interactive experiences such as 4-H Renewable Energy Camp and World Food Prize Michigan Youth Institute, to educational resources such as the Youth Business Guide to Success animal marketing curriculum and zoonotic disease prevention tools. Through these experiences and resources, as well as county 4-H projects, youth are educated about agriculture and prepared for careers in this important industry. In the last program year:

Mecosta County Youth

Mecosta County youth participated in special classes held at MSU, Great Lakes Natural Resources Camp and Kettunen Center, including:

- Dairy Reproduction and Artificial Insemination
- Dairy Cattle Science State Awards
- Blueprint for a Successful Sheep Project
- Blueprint for a Successful Swine Project
- 4-H / FFA Livestock Judging
- Zoonotic Disease Prevention
- State Rabbit & Cavy Show
Beef Producers Update

A meeting for beef producers was held in Paris in January 2016. To address issues for beef producers to stabilize their bottom line in the roller coaster cattle market, the MSU Beef Team held meetings to address the cost of production containment. Speakers included Jerry Lindquist, MSU Extension Grazing Educator; Kevin Gould, MSU Extension Beef Educator, Dr. Dan Buskirk, MSU Beef Specialist; and George Quakenbush of the Michigan Cattleman’s Association. Topics addressed included:

- New Trends in Cover Crops Grazing
- Soil Improvement and Profit
- Beef-Cow-Calf Enterprise Budgets
- How are You Selecting Your Most Value-a-Bull Inputs?

Bull Breeding Soundness Exam

The MSU Beef Extension Team once again organized regional Bull Breeding Soundness Exam Clinics in 2016, with one of the clinics held at the Wernette Farm in Remus. Producers were able to reduce the risk of a less than optimum breeding season by having bulls tested for reproductive performance. Full lab results were given for each bull tested along with direct veterinary contact regarding bull management and recommendations if follow-up work was needed. MSU Staff that participated included Dr. Dan Grooms DVM, MSU College of Veterinary Medicine, and Kevin Gould, Extension Beef Educator from Ionia County.

Amish Vegetable Meeting

Over 50 people attended the annual vegetable meeting held in Stanwood for the Amish community in March. The focus of the training is to provide education not only on growing vegetables, but to make sure the growers are following Michigan food safety guidelines for sale of the produce.

Dairy

Mecosta County dairy farmers participated in Dairy education meetings at various locations in 2016. Topics included:

- The Veterinary Feed Directive
- Optimizing Dairy Farm Profitability
- Ag Marketing Update
- Managing Dairy Herd Reproduction
- Bovine Leukosis Virus Project
# Extension Staff Serving Mecosta County

## Staff Located in Mecosta County Office:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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## Additional MSU Extension Staff Serving Mecosta County:

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Ken Brown
Jack Kleinhardt (Commissioner)
Vanessa and Trudy Foster
Christine Hammond
Kevin & Bonnie Smalley

**Gladwin County**
Terry Walters (Commissioner)
Dick Metz
Ron Morley

**Isabella County**
Jerry Jaloszynski (Commissioner)
Kathy Methner

**Mecosta County**
Marilynn Vargo (Commissioner)
Vacancy

**Missaukee County**
Cindy Jones
Frank Vanderwal (Commissioner)

**Osceola County**
Chris Gentry
Pam Wayne (Commissioner)
Russ Nehmer

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