



Allegan County

2015–2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

Michigan State University Extension is the community-based educational arm of Michigan State University (MSU), working in partnership with counties throughout the state. We help people improve their lives by bringing the vast resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses.

For more than 100 years, Michigan State University Extension has helped grow Michigan’s economy by equipping Michigan residents with information they need to do their jobs better, raise healthy and safe families, build their communities and empower their children to dream of a successful future.

We provide the highest quality research- and evidence-based educational programs to meet the needs of our local communities. Our staff have access to MSU AgBioResearch scientists, other MSU researchers, and land-grant university researchers throughout the nation.

This report is a snapshot of work done by MSU Extension staff with Allegan County residents over the past year. We value our relationship with the leadership in Allegan County and with all of your constituents. Working in partnership, we make a positive difference for people across the county. Thank you for your support.

Betty Blase District 7 Coordinator



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MISSION:

Michigan State University helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities.

CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS

4-H Children and Youth programs.....6061

 4-H members (traditional club enrollment)615

 Special Interest program participation2682

 Youth in school enrichment programs2129

 Youth in 4-H camping programs.....635

 Youth volunteers70

 Adult volunteers237

4-H reached 19% of the youth in Allegan County ages 5-19

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MSU Extension's Expanded Digital Reach



More than 3.7 million people viewed more than 7.2 million pages on MSUE website



~1.3 million newsletters covering 90 topic areas were distributed to about 16,900 email addresses



More than 3,500 Facebook followers and more than 2,800 Twitter followers.

Based on data for 2015-16 program year.

Keeping Businesses Strong



When you support MSU Extension, you help participants understand the economic, environmental and social benefits of purchasing local and regional foods.

MSU Extension and the MSU Product Center help Michigan entrepreneurs develop and commercialize high-value, consumer-responsive products and businesses in the food, agriculture, natural resources and bioeconomy sectors. When you support MSU Extension, you help participants understand the economic, environmental and social benefits of purchasing local and regional foods. You also help young people develop business skills that will help them succeed as adults and help communities capitalize on their ecological, social and cultural assets. This fuels the economy by creating and retaining jobs, and helps ensure a healthy tax base.

Building entrepreneurial spirit and skills

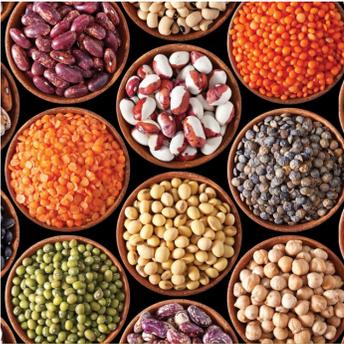
As the backbone of the economy, small business owners play a critical role in the prosperity of the nation. But to be a successful entrepreneur, one must have not only the ambition and moxie to take a risk, but also the business sense and skill to make a profit. To ensure the business owners of tomorrow – today's youth – are triumphant in their future endeavors, they need to learn the entrepreneurial concepts that pave the way for success.

MSU Extension is helping to meet this need by providing youth and the adults that support them with the skills and resources necessary to turn ideas into business ventures. Through simulations and workshops, youth learn how to develop business plans and operate their own companies, as well as how to be more entrepreneurial in their everyday 4-H experiences.

In 2016:

- Ten youth from Allegan County learned about starting a licensed food business from MSU Product Center counselor Joanne Davidhizar in an educational program in partnership with Allegan Area Educational Service Agency.
- Davidhizar and MSU Product Center Counselor Tina Conklin provided counseling sessions about cottage food law or business start-up to 22 potential or new business owners in Allegan County.

Supporting Food and Agriculture



When you support MSU Extension, you help participants learn profitable and efficient business and production practices.

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. Allegan County remains a powerhouse in Michigan agriculture. MSU Extension staff provide education and research in many areas important to local producers. Participants learn profitable and efficient business and production practices as well as how to optimize and reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and conserve and protect water resources. This strengthens Michigan's economy while connecting farmers to local food opportunities and global markets.

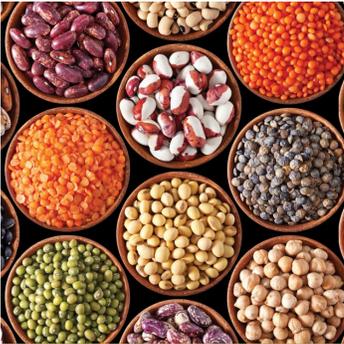
Blueberry production:

MSU Extension educators Mark Longstroth and Dr. Carlos Garcia-Salazar worked with local blueberry growers beginning with Ag Action Day in January, Southwest Michigan Hort Days in February, Blueberry Integrated Pest Management training in March, pre-bloom meetings beginning in April, Spotted Wing Drosophila training in June, and Integrated Pest Management sessions through the summer until November to prevent pesticide resistance and reduce non-target impacts in small fruit production.

Christmas Tree production:

Allegan County is fifth in the state in production of cut Christmas trees with annual sales valued at over \$810,000. As part of the Michigan Christmas Tree Association's winter meeting, MSU Extension educator Jill O'Donnel and Dr. Bert Cregg from MSU Departments of Horticulture and Forestry reviewed current MSU research and Extension activities relevant to Michigan's Christmas tree industry, including coning of Fraser fir, tree improvement trials, the Collaborative Fir Germplasm Evaluation project, interspecific hybrids, delayed coning seed orchard, low input systems and cover crops. At the Association's summer meeting, Dr. Robert Goodwin, GIS and Remote Sensing Analyst with MSU, discussed drone use along with potential opportunities and challenges in Christmas tree and nursery production.

Supporting Food and Agriculture



When you support MSU Extension, you help participants learn profitable and efficient business and production practices.

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training:

On June 3-4, MSU Extension and the Michigan Food and Farming Systems conducted the first GAP workshop for Latino blueberry growers at Trevor Nichols Research Center (TNRC) in Fennville. MSU Extension educators included Dr. Carlos Garcia-Salazar and Phil Tocco. The first day was a review of the GAP main topics related to blueberry production and was attended by 20 growers. On the second day, risk assessment procedures were reviewed and several farms were visited so that participants could practice the procedures. Participants received a format to start developing their own GAP manual. A follow-up training was scheduled for June 17-18 to assist with the development of the GAP manuals.

The training on June 17-18 was also held at TNRC to prepare bilingual (English/Spanish) berry growers for third party Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits. This workshop was offered to blueberry growers interested in updating their GAP program to be in compliance with the FDA Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) Product Safety rule. Presentations were in English and training notes in Spanish and English. Assistance in Spanish was provided during the training, especially during the hands-on sessions.

Classroom sessions included:

- Introduction to GAP to minimize food safety issues
- Blueberry pre- and post-harvest microbial contamination
- Worker health and hygiene
- Field sanitation
- Water quality

The Saturday hands-on training included:

- USDA checklist – GAP MDA
- How to develop your own food safety manual
- How to conduct a risk assessment prior to a third party audit

At the hands-on segment, trainees developed food safety manuals and conducted a risk assessment at a nearby farm with the assistance of the MSU Extension instructors. After training, MSU Extension will follow up with growers that may need further assistance to develop their manuals and conduct the farm risk assessment. Growers and farmworkers participating in this training received a certificate of completion.

Supporting Food and Agriculture



Field Crops:

Corn, soybeans, wheat and forage crops are all important crops in Allegan, both for the sales value of the crops and for livestock feed. MSU Extension educators provided a wide variety of educational and research programs in 2016 in support of this segment of the agricultural industry. This included:

- Soybean Management and Research Technology (SMaRT) field trials and meetings conducted by Mike Staton. There were seven on-farm trials in Allegan County in 2016 involving 5 producers. Three trials evaluated Radiate, a foliar product containing two plant hormones. Two trials evaluated ILeVO, a new seed treatment offering some control of sudden death syndrome, a growing problem in Allegan County. One trial evaluated two white mold fungicides, one of which was first labeled for soybeans in 2016. One trial evaluated Blackmax 22, a humic acid product marketed as promoting plant and microbial activity and higher crop yields.
- The 2016 Pest and Crop Management update was held in Allegan County in February at the Trestle Stop in Hamilton with 25 participants. Several MSU experts spoke about insecticide seed treatments, wheat, soybean and corn disease management, forage improvement on a budget, and weed control.
- The MSUE Field Crops webinar series held from February 22nd - March 28, 2016 gave participants a preseason opportunity to learn key production points from MSUE educators. Six weekly one-hour webinars shared key 2016 field crop production points from MSUE traditional winter meetings with underserved audiences in a condensed distance-learning format. The six webinars covered:
 - Overcoming Weed Management Challenges in 2016-Dr. Christy Sprague,
 - Field Crop Disease Management Update-Dr. Martin Chilvers,
 - Forage Improvement on a Budget- Dr. Kim Cassida,
 - Nutrient Management Research in Field Crops- Dr. Kurt Steinke,
 - Evaluating Insecticide Seed Treatments-Dr. Chris DiFonzo, and
 - Cover Crop Termination Strategies-Mike Plumer, Conservation Ag. Consultant



Supporting Food and Agriculture



The MSU Product Center Food-Ag-Bio assisted Allegan county residents in developing products and businesses in the areas of food, agriculture, natural resources and the bio-economy during 2016. The MSU Product Center innovation counselor has special training to deliver these services to local residents. Business counseling is conducted on a one-on-one basis and may take place at the MSUE office or the client's home, farm or business location. The assistance provided is tailored to meet the needs of the client and may include things like:

- developing a business plan
- navigating the regulatory maze
- accessing the supply chain or
- seeking funding options.

The innovation counselor also assists clients in accessing specialized services they may need that are offered through Michigan State University like feasibility studies, nutritional labeling and packaging assistance.

One hundred fourteen counseling sessions took place in Allegan County to assist 16 entrepreneurs in starting new businesses and expanding existing businesses during the past year. One new venture was launched. Farms developing a value-added product were assisted. Small food processors seeking to launch a new food product were able to access technical expertise in food product testing, classification, labeling and packaging. One agri-tourism business also received technical assistance.

The partnership between Allegan County, MSU Extension and the MSU Product Center Food-Ag-Bio is providing support for entrepreneurs in supporting economic development across West Michigan.



Ensuring Safe and Secure Food



MSU Extension efforts in ensuring safe and secure food lead to a healthy population, which in turn helps keep health care costs in check and our communities viable.

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.

Participants include food service employees, nonprofit organizations that prepare food for the public and food preservers who want to create safe products.

In 2016, Allegan County residents received high-quality, research-based education in the areas of food safety and food preservation. Those learning opportunities included:

- **ServSafe training:** This 8 or 16-hour training provides comprehensive educational materials to the restaurant industry through face-to-face and online instruction. In 2016, MSU Extension educators Jane Hart and Jean Nichols provided several classes in Allegan and adjacent counties available to local food service staff.
- **Safe Food Preservation—**The basics of home canning, by MSU Extension educator Jane Hart at the Saugatuck-Douglas District Library, (8 participants) at the Branch Farmers' Day (2 Allegan participants), at the Farm Bureau "Growing Together" conference. (2 Allegan participants) and home food preservation basics by MSU Extension educator Jane Hart at Allegan Ag Day. 8 Allegan adults and 3 Allegan youth in attendance.
- **Making freezer jam** by MSU Extension educator Jane Hart at the Allegan Middle School. This 2-day class focused on food safety, the basics of measuring, and making strawberry freezer jam. 25 Allegan youth in attendance.

Developing Youth and Communities



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).

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As outlined in [“Showcasing the science in ‘animal science’”](#), youth use science in all aspects of raising animals. Anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, chemistry, ethology (study of behavior), virology (study of viruses), bacteriology, endocrinology (study of hormones) and many more scientific fields play a large role in animal production.

With the adoption of the National Research Council’s report, [“A Framework for K-12 Science Education”](#), MSU Extension and Michigan 4-H are working to increase science literacy through the inclusion of the [Scientific and Engineering Practices](#) described in the framework. These eight practices help guide youth through thinking about science while making the subject a little less intimidating.

Samantha Modreske was chosen to be the Michigan AgrAbility Ambassador at the Easter Seals’ “Walk With Me” event, and appeared at the John Ball Park Zoo in Grand Rapids in May. Michigan AgrAbility provides direct services to farmers with injuries, illnesses or aging conditions so they can continue the occupation and lifestyle they love.

Samantha credits her experiences in 4-H and FFA for her positive outlook and attitude. Samantha is 15 years old and a freshman at Hopkins High School. She is actively involved in helping on the family hog farm, 4-H & FFA and showing livestock, including hogs, goats, and broiler chickens, and helping her sister with dairy calves. She has shown since she was 9 years old. Sam, as she prefers to be called, has Spina Bifida, wears bilateral leg braces, and use crutches to get around. She has no feeling in her legs from the knee down, and also has issues with mobility and balance. But as you can see, this does not stop her!



Developing Youth and Communities, cont.

Whether it is written, spoken or visually represented, the way we express ourselves makes a big impact on our daily lives at home, work and play.

Building communication skills for a lifetime

In Japan, there is a national holiday called “Children’s Day”. This May, 420 students at three Allegan County elementary schools, Washington Street, Dix Street, and Alamo, learned about this Japanese National Holiday. Working with Saya Kaneda, the 4-H Resource Volunteer from the MSU Asian studies department, youth did hands-on activities which included origami helmets and carp banners. They received their names in the Japanese handwriting of katakana which made them very excited as well. This was a great opportunity to introduce the Michigan 4-H Japanese summer exchange.



China Art Project:

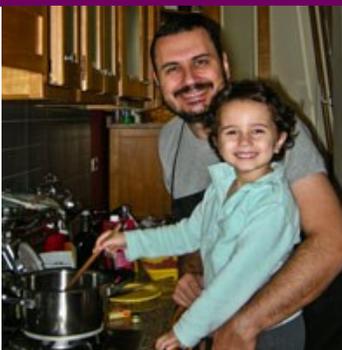
This year, 1,437 elementary students from Allegan County participated in the MSU Extension “China Art” project. Students were from the following schools: Alamo/Dix Street, Brandon, Cooper/Gilkey, and Washington Street elementary. With artwork submitted by students from across the state, we were very pleased that 34 pieces from Allegan were selected to be sent in the art exchange to China. These pictures tell stories without using words, allowing children from the United States and from China to communicate with each other through art. Several of the Allegan pieces selected are shown on this page.



Keeping People Healthy



Encouraging healthy behaviors helps reduce food and health care costs by helping prevent chronic health conditions and providing safe environments throughout a person's life span.



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. 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 relevant, evidence-based education to help people in Michigan stay healthy throughout their lifespans. Programs teach participants how to buy and prepare nutritious, budget-friendly foods and increase physical activity.

In 2016, MSU Extension staff Christian Kleinjans and Sue Elwell delivered nutrition education at sites throughout Allegan County. Community partners included ARC, AAESA Hilltop, Love Inc., Positive Options, Bridges of Hope, Christian Neighbors, and MiWorks!, as well as Allegan, Glenn, Martin, and Wayland school districts. During the past programming year, 110 adults in Allegan completed the nutrition series of classes, while 55 more adults participated in one-time nutrition presentations. Additionally, 255 youth completed the nutrition series of classes through participation at their school, and 25 additional youth participated in one-time presentations. Results from a statewide evaluation of our nutrition programs showed that:

- 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

Chronic Disease Prevention and Management:

MSU Extension educator for chronic disease prevention and management, Christi Demitz, participated in strategic planning for the Healthy Allegan County Coalition and the Multi-Agency Community Collaborative in 2016. She also met with the free health clinic and with Allegan Hospital regarding Diabetes PATH/Dining with Diabetes workshops and hopes to schedule regular classes at those locations in 2017.

Keeping People Healthy

Encouraging healthy behaviors helps reduce health care costs by providing safe environments throughout a person's life span.



Providing education on Mindfulness and Alternatives to Anger in Michigan communities

Provided in collaboration with West Virginia University Extension, **Stress Less with Mindfulness** introduces participants to the experience and practice of mindfulness to reduce stress. Mindfulness can be defined as paying attention in a particular way: On purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.

Research has shown that practicing mindfulness is effective in reducing stress-related symptoms such as worry, depression and physical tension, and may be helpful in managing chronic conditions such as cardiac disease and diabetes. In July, 2016, MSU Extension Program Instructor Georgina Perry provided **Stress Less with Mindfulness** to seven members of the Gun Lake Tribe at a Community Education session in Shelbyville.

The goal of **RELAX: Alternatives to Anger** is to help young people, parents and caregivers foster healthy relationships so they can live, learn and grow in a safe, affirming and fair environment free from violence, abuse, bullying and harassment. Participants learn to better manage their anger and stress at home, in the workplace and in school.

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 December of 2015, Perry offered the **RELAX Parent Caregiver** training to Community Action—Allegan Head Start for 16 participants.

Perry also taught **Mindfulness for Children** at the same location last December, sharing with parents several techniques of mindful awareness that can help children learn to pay closer attention to their thoughts, feelings and emotions. This workshop addressed ways to help children reduce stress and anxiety to enhance their well being.



Children can be taught how to pay attention and pause before reacting to stress.

Photo credit: Pixabay.



Making the Most of Our Natural Assets



Better land stewardship benefits communities by protecting and enhancing Michigan's natural resource assets.

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.

Clean Boats, Clean Waters: Volunteer Leader Training

"Clean Boats, Clean Waters" program volunteers in our community can make a big difference in the fight against the spread of unwanted aquatic invasive species. Volunteers share up-to-date information with boaters about inspecting and cleaning their watercraft and equipment, and how to manage invasive species if found.

A training for volunteers was held on May 24th at the Luella Collins Community Center in Shelbyville as a partnership between the Michigan Lake and Stream Association, the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, and Michigan State University Extension.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES OF CONCERN IN MICHIGAN

Invasive aquatic species are non-native plants, animals and pathogens whose introduction causes, or is likely to cause harm to the environment, economy or to human health. Species of concern include:

- Eurasian Water Milfoil
- Curly-leaf Pondweed
- Purple Loosestrife
- Rusty Crayfish
- Zebra Mussel
- Quagga Mussel
- Spiny Water flea
- Hydrilla

Making the Most of Our Natural Assets



Better land stewardship benefits communities by protecting and enhancing Michigan's natural resource assets.

Land Stewardship

2016 Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summit:

For tribal populations, cultural values and traditional knowledge from past generations hold the solutions to the challenges we face today and in the future. Food is the direct physical link between themselves and the land. It is a critical component of their identity, spirituality, community relationships, health, environmental well being and sovereignty. Sustainable agriculture and soil health are important components of the relationship between the tribes and their land. Continued training on practices that support both are included in programs such as the **Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summit**.

From April 21 - 24, 2016, the 2016 Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summit was held at the Gun Lake Pottawatomi, Jijak Camp in Hopkins, MI. Michigan State University Extension participated in the planning and delivery of programming including:

- Conservation Planning for Season Extension,
- Soil Health, and
- Small Vegetable Production training for tribal educators

There were also MSUE-taught sessions open to all attendees demonstrating the rainfall simulator and a discussion of tillage and cover crops on soil health and structure.

Cover crops:

Cover crops are a hot topic in agricultural circles, thanks to MSU Extension senior research associate Dean Baas, who 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 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.

Ensuring Strong Communities



MSU Extension efforts in ensuring safe and secure food lead to a healthy population, which in turn helps keep health care costs in check and our communities viable.

When you support MSU Extension, participants learn how to implement best practices in good governance that keeps communities solvent, productive and engaged; learn effective conflict management skills that help leaders and residents work collaboratively on complex issues; and engage youth leaders in decision-making. In the personal finance area, MSU Extension helps youth and adults alike learn the skills they need to increase their savings, manage their spending avoid predatory lending and reduce mortgage defaults. All of these outcomes help lower the cost of governmental services and lead to personal and community stability, strong neighborhoods and safe communities.

Improving the fiscal health of Michigan communities

Only with healthy, vibrant communities can Michigan residents be expected to thrive. To help Michigan prosper in a sensible, sustainable fiscally responsible way, MSU Extension launched the Center for Local Government Finance and Policy in late 2015.

The center is led by MSU Extension economist Eric Scorsone, who has assisted multiple cities during fiscal crises including Detroit, Flint and Lansing. The center will advise cities during fiscal hardships so communities can find a sustainable path forward. It will also develop fiscal tools and offer outreach to help communities improve their fiscal health. In addition, the center is committed to connecting legislators with experts in public policy and forging partnerships in the public and private sector.

The center's efforts include:

- Assisting in the development of performance metrics for government budgets, strategic plans and public accountability reporting.
- Providing an overall assessment of long-term and short-term trends in revenues, expenditures, debt, general fiscal health and recommendations regarding adoption of financial policies.
- Publishing an annual local government fiscal health report for communities wishing to improve fiscal health.
- Publishing an annual legislative mandate report that identifies the costs imposed on local governments and their impact on fiscal and operational health.

Extension Staff Serving Allegan County

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- Reuben Roberts (Kent/Allegan)
- Carrie Jo Anderson (Kent)
- Dick Bethel (Kent)
- Harold Mast (Kent)
- Jerry Miller (Kent)
- Mary Jane Belter (Ottawa)
- Mike Bronkema (Ottawa)
- Greg DeJong (Ottawa)
- Matt Fenske (Ottawa)
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MISSION:

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities.

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