MSU Extension continues efforts to focus programs, serve communities

Since early 2009 MSU Extension has been working to focus its programming efforts to more effectively use its resources and provide vital educational resources to Michigan communities. That effort resulted in the streamlining of administrative functions into 13 district offices and maintained programming staff to serve every Michigan community.

“From the beginning, as we’ve looked at how to realign our organization to improve efficiency, our first thought has always been that we need to continue to offer university resources that are also responsive to our county partners’ needs,” said Michelle Rodgers, MSU Extension associate director.

Through a series of town hall meetings over the past year, MSU Extension leaders explored what county government officials need from the organization. The findings from that effort showed that county government partners support MSU Extension’s need to change and its continuing local presence across the state. They expect MSU Extension to offer programs tied to agriculture and 4-H youth development, and also value agriculture-tourism, community development, land use, economic development, nutrition and health.

“Though we might be changing the way we interact with partners in county government, we’ll remain true to our core values of sharing MSU’s unbiased, research-driven resources to make a difference to Michigan’s communities, families, young people and businesses,” Rodgers said.

Realigned programming reflects focus in key arenas

MSU Extension staff members across the state and the campus have also worked with stakeholders in a number of areas to identify the most important topics upon which to focus efforts to contribute to helping strengthen and advance Michigan into a stronger, brighter future.

This effort resulted in establishment of four program institutes. The institutes and their directors are:

• Greening Michigan: Leveraging Natural and Human Assets for Prosperity--Rick Foster
• Enhancing Michigan’s First Green Industry: Agriculture and Agribusiness--Wendy Powers
• Preparing Michigan’s Children & Youth for the Future--Julie Chapin
• Improving Health and Nutrition for Michigan residents--Dawn Contreras

Within these institutes educators based across Michigan will interact with MSU campus-based specialists to develop programs intended to meet Michiganders’ most pressing needs.

Workgroups have been organized within each institute to strategically address issues. The workgroups are cross-disciplinary and comprise MSU Extension educators from across the state. The teams develop short-, medium- and long-range plans for addressing issues that include regular evaluations to ensure that they are staying on track and are connected to measurable goals.

To see an organizational chart with the institutes and the workgroups, visit www.msue.msu.edu.
Thumb Agriculture Research and Education program

Huron County MSU Extension continues to establish local research plots through the iThumb Agriculture Research and Education (TARE) program to help area farmers increase their yields and profitability.

Two corn plots and one soybean plot were planted on Huron County farms this summer. The corn studies included those examining Round-Up™ resistance, planting rate comparisons, a microbial treatment; and nitrogen treatments.

Soybean studies included those looking at Round-Up™ resistance, comparisons of conventional and food-grade hybrids, planting rate comparisons and an inoculant study.

The corn plots were at the Merle and Don Koth farm, Filion, Mich. and at the Huron Corn Growers facility in Pigeon, Mich.

The soybean plot was at the Wayne and Randy Sturm farm in Pigeon. The Huron County plots were among three soybean plots, and six corn plots in the greater Thumb area.

Following the completion of harvest, the results will be published, and available in booklet form and online. MSU Extension agriculture educators will also present the results in public meetings across the region, including at Thumb Ag Day, Dec. 8 at Ubly Heights Country Club.

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Project FRESH: enhancing seniors’ health and local farmers’ economics

Most Americans of all ages need to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into their daily diets. Senior citizens may avoid purchasing fresh fruit and vegetables.

They may believe fresh produce is too expensive or difficult to consume by one or two people. To help seniors recognize the significant benefits they can achieve by consuming fresh produce, MSU Extension partners with the Huron County Health Department to offer Senior Project FRESH (Farm Resources Expanding and Supporting Health), a farm market nutrition education program.

Senior Project FRESH provides persons over the age of 60 years, who have a gross income of 185 percent of poverty or less and are Huron County residents with a coupon booklet to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers’ markets.

The program also gives seniors the chance to learn about good nutrition and provides them with access to free fresh fruits and vegetables.

Senior Project FRESH is in its fifth year in Huron County and benefited this year from a large expansion that enabled educators to reach more seniors with coupons.

Through donations from the Huron County Council on Aging, Huron County Commissioners, Bad Axe Lions Club, Bad Axe Knights of Columbus, United Way, and the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, MSU Extension staff members provided coupons to nearly 230 eligible seniors.

By redeeming the coupons, seniors are able to get the servings of fresh fruits and vegetables they need for good health. Local farmers also benefit by selling more fresh produce at their farm markets.

Senior Project FRESH is a collaborative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, MSU Extension and the Huron County Health Department. This year it brought $9,140 in income to local growers and farmers who are Project FRESH approved vendors.

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