MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

As I enter my second year as District Coordinator in Branch, I am beginning to have a better understanding of the impact MSU Extension programs are having on the quality of life of the people who live here. I have been visiting with county residents and talking to extension educators who hold or contribute to programs held in the county. I have learned that many residents travel outside the county to attend our programs and I had the chance to work closely with a few county residents during our Issue Id focus groups this past winter. I have come to appreciate the strong partnerships the local office staff have with community partners. These are critical to growing our audience as well as increasing enrollment in the 4-H program.

This report covers many but not all of the programs available and experienced by folks living in the county. For example, the numbers below show how many Branch county residents were reported as participating in face to face or online programs offered through MSUE but I can’t (yet) account for the number of people using our content rich website. In addition, many educators work one on one with businesses and families in the county—those numbers and those personal stories are not always reflected in the reporting system. Today, you will hear from several educators and learn more about those personal stories in this “live” annual report approach. Thanks for your continued support Branch County! Julie Pioch, District Coordinator

EXAMPLES OF CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS IN BRANCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
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<td>Branch County Farmers Day</td>
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<td>Pork Programs</td>
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<td>Financial Literacy Homeownership Ed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Crops</td>
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<td>Quick Start Vegetable Gardening</td>
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TOTAL REPORTED BRANCH PARTICIPANT IMPACT............................2931

TOTAL REPORTED BRANCH COUNTY EVENTS.............147

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<th>Year</th>
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District 13 Digital Reach—www.msue.msu.edu

From July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015 approximately 35,301 visitors from our 7 county district viewed more than 60,000 pages of rich, science-based content on the MSU Extension website. Of those, 52% were first-time visitors. Since launching in April 2012, the MUE Extension website has been visited by more than 75,000 people in District 13, more than 1,000,000 people from Michigan and more than 5,000,000 people world-wide. Search engine rankings make msue.msu.edu one of the most visited Cooperative Extension Systems education sites in the country.
DEVELOPING YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

2015 Branch County 4-H Highlights
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. 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.

- In 2015 Connie Lange managed a strong county program with 828 youth members, 208 adult and 63 youth volunteers enrolled in Branch County 4-H.

Youth Entrepreneurship Program
Branch County 4-H Youth Entrepreneurship Program is in its second year, this year the Y.E.P. program had six 4-H members participated in a four week class on starting a small business. Participants developed a product, wrote business plans, developed advertising, created presentations and participated in events to sell their products. Branch County 4-H Y.E.P. members participate in an activity in creating a product for a small business.

See photos and youth product logos highlighted on the cover of this report.

Branch County Entrepreneurship Program was held for the 2nd year in 2015-16 with 6 county 4-H’ers attending classes.
Youth merchandized their products at Northwood’s Coffee Company in downtown Coldwater and were guests on WTVB FM 95.5 radio’s “Extension Update” program with Ken Delaney where they promoted their products and the 4H program.

Current Branch County 4-H enrollments are 828 members, 208 adult volunteers, and 63 youth leaders.
Developing Youth and Communities, continued

Branch Youth Continue to lead State 4-H Council
Two Branch County members (Davis Fettes and Erin Washburn) were part of the inaugural year of the state youth council. Selected by application and interview, youth council members are involved in creating and teaching leadership programs, review and provide input for newly developed programming and curricula, and act as ambassadors for the state program. Youth meet monthly and participate yearly in the National 4-H Conference in Washington DC, and teach at events like Michigan 4-H Youth Leadership Spectacular.

4-H Youth and Civic Engagement Activities
Branch County 4-H continues to be a part of the statewide 4-H Citizenship Programs including Capitol Experience and Citizenship Washington Focus with 9 youth participating in events. Capitol Experience is a four day immersion in state government in which participants learn all facets of bill writing and the forces that impact process including meeting with lobbyists, state agencies, legislators and community resources in critical issue areas. Nationally, our youth participate in 4-H Citizenship Washington Focus, a week-long training in DC where members learn about our nation’s government and history. Participants visit senators and representatives, participate in mock government, and tour historical sites with trained National 4-H Center staff. Value is added to this experience with a stop in Gettysburg, PA to visit the National Battlefield museum and participate in a tour with a licensed battlefield guide.

Branch County 4-H Foundation Activities
Branch County 4-H Foundation Make the Match Endowment Program with Michigan 4-H Foundation. The Branch County 4-H Foundation is working with the Michigan 4-H Foundation to create an endowment for 4-H youth programs in Branch County. With the initial donation of $10,000 from an individual donor, the local 4-H Foundation has raised over $18,000 towards their $50,000.00 goal. The Foundation provides scholarships to Branch County 4-H Youth for local, state and national programs such as project trainings and Toronto Experience, MSU 4-H Exploration Days, and National 4-H Congress to Branch County 4-H Youth.

Branch County 4-H Foundation provides funding for scholarships for both youth workshops, events and travel experiences and adult volunteer training.
When you support MSU Extension, you help participants learn safe food handling practices, increase their physical activity and improve the quality of their diets. Extension programming also helps decrease incidents of violence and bullying. Encouraging these 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.

MSU Extension helps young people, parents, caregivers, and community members develop and sustain healthy relationships through increased understanding of the social and emotional aspects of an individual’s life. Our educational programs promote positive peer interactions, strengthen communication skills, and demonstrate methods of managing stress that help reduce negative, harmful behaviors.

**Social-Emotional Health**

Suzanne Pish, Extension Educator housed in Branch County delivers Social-Emotional Health programming. Programs include RELAX-Alternatives to Anger, Stress Less with Mindfulness, parenting education and bullying prevention. In Branch County, Suzanne partners with the Branch County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Branch Area Career Center, Commission on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services, Coldwater Community Schools, Friend of the Court and Circuit Court of Branch County. She is also very active on the Great Start Collaborative and serves as the Pediatric Sub-committee Chair. In 2015, Suzanne reached:

- 220 Branch County participants through the Social-Emotional Health and Well-being’s focus area.

Program evaluations revealed:

- Over 50% of program participants leave with improved knowledge or new skills to promote social and emotional well-being with others in their lives and immediate social environments.
- Participants increased their knowledge about the impacts of healthy and unhealthy relationships on individuals and settings.
- One in two participants improved their ability to respond to one’s own social-emotional needs and the social-emotional needs of others. For example, program participants work hard to be calm and talk things through and when they get upset, and try to end on a positive note.

*In partnership with Branch County Circuit Court 104 parents received parenting instruction by Certified Family Life Instructor Suzanne Pish in 2015.*
Fighting Obesity and Hunger in Branch County Michigan

To help people be healthy at every stage of life, Michigan State University Extension delivers affordable, relevant, evidence-based education to serve the needs of adults, youth and families in urban and rural communities. Topic areas include nutrition, physical activity, food safety and food resource management. Programs focus on helping participants gain the skills they need to buy and prepare nutritious, budget-friendly foods, increase their physical activity, breastfeed their babies and stretch their food dollars.

Programs offered in Branch County include:

**Eat Healthy, Be Active** - The Eat Healthy, Be Active program is an opportunity for adults to learn the skills needed to make healthy eating and regular physical activity part of their lifestyle.

**Cooking Matters®** - Participants in Cooking Matters learn how to prepare nutritious foods, choose budget-friendly ingredients and use a variety of cooking techniques to prepare healthy meals for their families.

**Project FRESH**—Education on how to choose, store and prepare fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables. WIC-eligible individuals receive coupons to purchase fruits and vegetables from local farmers’ markets. (Funding support is available to all SNAP, EFNEP and WIC-eligible individuals.)

In 2015, 57 Branch County adults completed a 4 to 6 week series of instruction. The participants reported the following changes:

- 72% (41 of 57) of participants showed improvement in one or more food resource management practice (i.e. plan meals, compare prices, does not run out of food or uses grocery lists).
- 47% (27 of 57) of participants showed improvement in two or more food resource management practices (i.e. plan meals, compare prices, does not run out of food or uses grocery lists).
- 79% (45 of 57) of participants showed improvement in one or more nutrition practice (i.e. plans meals, makes healthy food choices, prepares food without adding salt, reads nutrition labels or has children eat breakfast).
- 49% (28 of 57) of participants showed improvement in two or more nutrition practices (i.e. plans meals, makes healthy food choices, prepares food without adding salt, reads nutrition labels or has children eat breakfast).

Participants learned about the nutrition and health benefits of foods to feed their families in healthy ways.
Keeping People Healthy, continued

Communities Preventing Childhood Obesity

“Branch County We Can!” is a partnership between MSU Extension, Branch County Great Start Collaborative and the National Institute of Health (NIH) that started in 2013. It provided activities and programs that encourage improved nutritional choices, increased physical activity, and reduced screen time for individuals and families in Branch County. The initiative is unique among existing youth obesity-prevention efforts in its focus on programs and activities for parents and families as a primary group for influencing youth audiences. Branch County We Can! is delivering programs, hosting community events, and promoting media messages that encourage youth and families to:

- Choose a sufficient amount of a variety of fruits and vegetables per day; Decrease consumption of high-fat foods and energy-dense foods with low nutrient value.
- Enjoy small portions at home and at restaurants; Substitute sweetened beverages for water, fat-free milk, or low-fat milk.
- Engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most-preferably all-days of the week.
- Reduce sedentary activity by limiting screen time to no more than 2 hours per day.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of healthy foods in the home.
- Limit the availability and accessibility in the home of sweetened beverages, high-fat foods, and energy-dense foods with low nutrient value.
- Enjoy small portions at home and at restaurants & support and enable family physical activity.

To continue the support of the Branch County We Can! initiative, in 2015, Val Albright, engaged children from Branch County Head Start classrooms in Show Me Nutrition series. To link classroom learning to home, parents of the youth were invited to participate in a Cooking Matters series. Promotional frisbees were available at community events to encourage physical activity. The Branch County We Can! facebook page continued to share tips, ideas and recipes related to nutrition and physical activity. The research component of this program ended in March 2016. Data from the work of this collaboration are beginning to be complied. To date, 111 Head Start students’ growth was assessed in April/May of 2015, again in Sept/Oct 2015 and then again in April/May of 2016 show change for the positive. Underweight status decreased from 2% to 1%. The percentage of obese children went from 29 to 23. Students with a normal BMI increased from 48% to 59%.

With the help of the local MSU Extension staff, 10 organizations throughout Branch County were awarded mini-grants in 2015 to start garden projects with the youth that they serve. The project reached many families within Branch County and was so successful that it is being duplicated in 2016.
Branch County FRIENDS Day Camp teaches youth lifelong health habits

Weeklong health and nutrition teaches youth about healthy eating and physical activity.

Branch County parents were taking home tired children and homemade, healthy snacks last week after Michigan State University Extension’s Branch County FRIENDS Nutrition Camp, a weeklong health and nutrition camp that taught 70 local youth ages 7-11 about healthy eating and physical activity. The camp activities were led by 25 local teen counselors.

“Nutrition is a good habit to learn early because there are so many things in the store that aren’t good for you. FRIENDS Camp teaches kids how to decipher between “is this good for me, is this a good choice, do I actually need to eat this or is there a better choice I can make?” said Katie Spalding, 17, fourth-year FRIENDS Camp counselor.

Campers learned how to make healthy snacks each day to understand how they can substitute nutritious foods for high-calorie foods with little or no nutritive value. “I tried a fruit smoothie – with blueberries, strawberries, bananas and yogurt—and it was pretty good,” said first-year FRIENDS camper Sydney Gallop, age 10. “We made peach salsa using onions, cilantro, lime juice, peaches and peppers, and we made cinnamon chips.”

“Obesity and diabetes rates in children are increasing, and MSU Extension hopes to help slow this growing problem,” said Suzanne Pish, MSU Extension educator. “FRIENDS Day Camp is a way to educate youth about making healthy lifestyle choices.”

Campers visited the Hudson Dairy Farm, where they learned about local dairy production and nutrition.

“We try and cook healthy and show her what’s in the food. At FRIENDS Camp, the kids learn where their food comes from and about the animals,” said Dena Knapp, of Montgomery, Michigan. This is Knapp’s second year sending her daughter to FRIENDS Camp.

“The education they learn here can be used to help them as they get older,” said Linda Kochendorfer, of Coldwater, Michigan, FRIENDS Camp parent.
“Nutrition is very important for your body. We learned that if you treat your body right, your body will live longer,” said Sydney Gallop.

Teen counselors lead games and recreational activities to teach campers ways to enjoy physical activity as a part of a healthy lifestyle. Other activities throughout the week included a smoothie bike (a stationary bicycle that when peddled, powers a blender), BeSafe bullying prevention, 4-H science, swimming, a scavenger hunt and Jump Into Foods and Fitness (JIFF).

“Our hope is that these campers have an increase in healthier food and drink choices and an increase in physical activity levels after leaving camp,” said Sarah Sleziak-Johnson, MSU Extension educator. “We want these kids to realize that physical activity can be fun, and you don’t have to spend a lot of money to be active. Simply playing a game outside is a fun, free way to be healthy.”

**Preventing diabetes in Michigan residents**

More than 2.6 million adults in Michigan are prediabetic, and only 7.3 percent have been informed of this important fact. Prediabetes is considered a risk factor for Type 2 diabetes, with a high risk of conversion to diabetes within five years. MSU Extension’s National Diabetes Prevention Program received full recognition in May 2015 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a Diabetes Prevention Recognition Program, proven to change participants’ lifestyles to prevent Type 2 diabetes. As a result of a National Diabetes Prevention Program delivered by MSU Extension:

- 100% of participants said that they became aware of techniques to stay motivated to make healthy lifestyle changes.
- 98% of participants said they learned how to eat healthy away from home.
- 92% of participants were monitoring their food intake.
- 90% of participants were physically active.

Three Dining with Diabetes education series were held in Branch county reaching 36 county residents in 2015. With the success and awareness of the programs held, more are scheduled for 2016.
Jeannie Nichols keeps the Branch county public informed with timely and research based articles in her weekly news columns. She held 2 programs on Food safety and the Cottage Food Law in Branch in 2015.
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.

**Teaching new farmers in a virtual classroom**

Michigan residents interested in engaging in new agricultural enterprises sometimes lack knowledge, experience and technical support to get started. MSU Extension educators and specialists receive numerous inquiries seeking basic, startup information for beginning farmers. Since 2012, they have filled this need through the Beginning Farmer Webinar Series.

In 2015, 23 MSU Extension educators taught 20 educational webinars. Topic-specific webinars included hops production, marketing, beekeeping, cover crops, organic certification, mortality management, vegetable production, sheep and goat production, cow-calf production, farm food safety, pest management, irrigation, fruit production and poultry production. Participants were mostly current or future growers who represented small farms. Four percent of the participants said they were not currently farming.

- Participants represented 54 counties in Michigan, 12 states and three countries.
- More than 1,800 webinar views were recorded for the 2015 series.
- 97 percent of respondents indicated that the series was valuable to their education.
- Six participants were from Branch County.
Helping farmers make business decisions

The 2014 farm bill contained new farm programs that required complex decisions by farmers and landlords in late 2014 and early 2015. In early 2015, 26 Branch County producers took part in MSU Extension Farm Bill programs designed to provide producers and landlords with education, resources and tools to help them be aware of actions that needed to be taken to prepare for making important production and business decisions.

One on one tax consultation, farm succession planning and start-up or expansion plans take expertise and time on the part of highly trained MSU Extension Educators. Farm financial analysis meetings provide a farm analysis to make better management decisions over the long term by looking at cost analysis and trends. Extension educators meet with farm business owners and provide seminars to small groups. 6 Branch agricultural enterprises received consultation and guidance in farm business management and tax strategies in 2015.

Pork Industry Supported by MSUE Team

The MSUE pork team is comprised of both field and campus staff, and an extension veterinarian, who have expertise in pork production and swine management. Along with providing education on hot issues and new technologies they work actively with producers on farm-specific problems. They offer customized, on-farm education to help producers get started, change current practices, and assess animal health and welfare or the environmental status of farms. Members serve on numerous national boards, including the Youth PQA Plus work group, swine health committee and act as advisors to the state veterinarian.

The Pork Team works with a diversifying swine industry, including intensively managed commercial operations, extensive farms, identity preserved groups, show stock producers and youth show pig producers. Their goal is to provide educational opportunities for ALL aspects of swine production.

This past year the MSU extension pork team worked to plan, develop, and deliver educational programs relevant to pork production. These included the Professional Pork Producers Symposium, the Back to Basics – The Importance of Pig Health, state-wide pork industry information meetings, Health Champions Meetings – information for small farms; all to inform swine-farm owners and employees of new technologies, updated production practices, and changing economic, environmental and social considerations. The MSU extension pork team also offered pork producers and employees the opportunity to complete or renew Pork Quality Assurance (PQA) Plus
Supporting Food and Agriculture, continued

and Transport Quality Assurance (TQA) certifications. These certifications are required by numerous market chains and the ability to provide current certifications allow Michigan pork producers to remain competitive in the industry. The TQA is geared towards livestock haulers, as well as crews and personnel responsible for moving and loading hogs.

Overall there were three livestock programs held in Branch in 2015, with 8 other programs held in other counties—67 livestock producers attending.

Soybean Management and Research Technology

Soybean yield increases have not kept pace with those of corn, wheat and sugar beets. On average, soybean producers are losing 1 to 2 bushels per acre due to harvest losses. Soybean producers that irrigate their beans are not satisfied with their irrigated soybean yields. In some cases, dryland yields are higher than irrigated yields. On-farm research and education may help soybean producers overcome these challenges. Each year Several SMaRT programs are held across the state. 11 Branch County producers attended a program in 2015. Farmers reported that the average amount of additional income realized by implementing the new information was $13.40 per acre.

Soybean producers in Branch county were included in a multi-state (Indiana and Michigan) program focused on issues related to irrigated soybeans held in March 2015. Lyndon Kelly unveiled an updated Irrigation scheduling spreadsheet - an important cost saving tool used by producers. 270 people were in attendance—14 from Branch.

Annual educational events provide updates to Branch growers

» Farmers Day in Branch County provide farmers with networking opportunities and a chance to get the latest pest and risk management strategies, results from applied research, post season analysis and regulatory updates provided my MSU Extension. This long standing program and partnership will see its 50th Anniversary in 2017.

» Soil Health and Cover Crops was the topic presented at the 2015 Pioneer Seed Corn Growers meeting in April, 2015. Growers for the Constantine, MI plant were present from St. Joseph, Kalamazoo, Branch and Van Buren Counties in Michigan. This event supported the activity of increasing cover crop adoption and improving soil health. 25 growers were in attendance—36 from Branch County.
Being Responsive to Growers and Consumers in the greenhouse industry

Michigan is the third largest producer of floriculture crops in the nation with $406 million dollars in sales last year. With the increasingly thin margins, growers continue to seek ways of decrease input costs, increase energy efficiency, decrease plant losses and increase the value of their crops.

Within the last two years, increasing consumer concern regarding pollinator health has pressured plant retailers to reduce or eliminate a class of insecticides that has been shown to be harmful to bees in some situations. The public outcry has caused greenhouse and nursery growers to explore alternative pest management practices and alter their traditional pest management programs. Last year, MSUE Extension Educator Heidi Wollager, hosted a variety of programming to help growers produce plants that were “bee-friendly.” The programming was also offered in a webinar format which resulted in 54 webinar views and 78% of survey respondents intended to change their practices as a result of the webinar. In addition to these face-to-face workshops, Heidi wrote numerous articles for the growers including “Bee-friendly plants and pest management strategies – Part I” which had 788 website views. The MSUE team also offered programming on alternative pest management practices and team took 35 greenhouse growers (including 3 from Branch) to visit greenhouses in Ontario, Canada to learn about biological control (using the pest’s natural enemies for control) techniques. In addition to these boots-on-the-ground efforts, MSUE co-hosted a national conference in partnership with North Carolina State University that attracted 187 participants from 35 states and 3 countries. Through this conference Heidi and her team are inspiring new applied research efforts, greater extension efforts, and greater awareness of pollinator issues around the country.
## Extension Educators Serving Branch County

### Staff Located in Branch County Office:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Additional MSU Extension Staff Serving Branch County:

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<th>Name</th>
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