

# Cass County

## 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

## MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

MSU Extension is alive and well in Cass County. The 4-H program experienced another successful year with the help of our dedicated volunteers! Cass is extremely fortunate to have such an energetic and passionate 4-H Program Coordinator in Stephanie Consford. She is committed to increasing the number of youth enrolled in clubs, volunteers and programming opportunities as well as expanding 4-H youth development opportunities for all youth in the county. Beth Ferry continues to provide statewide leadership in pork production and serves as a valued resource to agriculture producers in Cass. Nora Lee is well known in the community and brings nutrition and physical activity education to school aged youth and adults. Patty Dohm, our office secretary continues to generate quality work and helpful clientele assistance. A new addition to the office in 2015 is Beth Clawson who brings expertise in natural resources, home horticulture, and food systems. The team is small but mighty and is working together to provide services and connect local residents to programs and resources available to them. But keep in mind—MSUE leverages the financial contribution provided from Cass County to extend our coverage much farther than just that provided by those housed in the county. As revealed in our MSUE reporting system, educators located throughout the state are bringing their programs to Cass county and residents are taking advantage of them (see some of those examples in the impact numbers below as well as throughout this report). In addition, Educators and MSUE specialists have been contributing content to the MSUE website making quality researched based information available to all Cass residents at the touch of a button. Also made much easier to find are topical experts, webinars and bulletins— all readily available on the web.



Thank you Cass County Board of Commissioners for your continued partnership in fulfilling the mission of Extension in Michigan. I sincerely look forward to working with you to make sure that Cass residents are getting the most from their Extension service.

*Julie Pioch* District 13 Coordinator

## MEASURING IMPACT

### EXAMPLES OF CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS IN CASS

#### Cass County Participants/Total Participants

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| Field Crops Education .....            | 15/674 |
| Expanding Markets—Farm to Market.....  | 4/46   |
| Food Systems Education .....           | 25/262 |
| Home Garden Hotline .....              | 7/5342 |
| Master Gardeners .....                 | 4/2909 |
| Parenting/Caregiver Education .....    | 31/506 |
| Farm Business Management.....          | 24/286 |
| Building Strong Sovereign Nations..... | 5/10   |

**TOTAL REPORTED IMPACT ..... 1920**

### MISSION

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

[www.msue.msu.edu](http://www.msue.msu.edu)

#### MSU Extension's Expanded Digital Reach



2 million visitors viewed more than 4 million pages



560,000 topic newsletters distributed to more than 8,500 email addresses



Nearly 2,000 Facebook and more than 1,700 Twitter followers

# 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). 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.

## Cass County Program Highlights

In Cass County we serve over 780 youth ages 5-19 years with the support of 262 adult volunteers.

The 4<sup>th</sup> annual “Off the Street Trunk or Treat” event brought together the MSU Extension office and the Cass County Fair Association to create a safe and educational atmosphere for over 1500 youth in the community. We strive to provide a safe and fun place for youth in the community to “Trick or Treat” while teaching youth the skills they need in order to be safe in their community.

The Cass County MSUE 4-H Dignitary Event at the Cass County Fair was a great way to actively engage with our community leaders about the importance of the 4-H Program at the county level. Through this program, we have increased awareness of the 4-H Program and educated youth about proper communication with community leaders

In June 2014 we had 31 youth and 5 adults attend the largest pre-college preparatory experience in Michigan, 4-H Exploration Days. At 4-H Exploration Days youth pre-register for sessions that engage them in active, hands on learning experiences. Youth also have the opportunity to apply and participate in the State 4-H Awards program during 4-H Exploration Days. In 2014, we had one youth apply and participate in the State 4-H Award program in Cass County.

The Cass County 4-H Program also had 3 delegates attend the Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF) trip in July 2014. Youth go to Washington D.C. where they tour the city, meet with State representatives, attend workshops and seminars, and gain valuable life skills along the way. Many youth will say this is the best experience during their time in 4-H.

When you support MSU Extension 4-H programs, youth participants learn life skills that prepare them for the workforce.

In Cass County 780 youth, with the support of 262 adult volunteers enrolled in 27 clubs across the county, are gaining the life skills necessary to be successful adults. These numbers are greater than surrounding counties—showing tremendous tradition and dedication to this premier youth development organization in Cass County.



# DEVELOPING YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

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Each March, Cass County 4-H celebrates the outstanding leaders, seniors, and youth participants in the Senior Leader Award Program. Graduating seniors are recognized, county medals are awarded, and leaders are recognized for their years of service to 4-H. Seniors are also eligible to receive a \$500 college scholarship for the college of their choice.

## New Activities for Cass in 2014

The 4-H program re-introduced shooting sports into our activities by forming a shooting sports club. Three new leaders certified for different aspects of shooting sports with 23 youth interested in joining this program. These leaders plan to get certified in other disciplines throughout the years to expand the program. Currently we have leaders certified in archery and air rifle.

A Swine Quiz Bowl team was developed and led by Cass 4-H youth. Participants formed 3 and 4 person teams and competed against other youth to test their knowledge of swine information and animal care at the Cass Fair. Eight went on to compete in the State Swine Quiz Bowl competition. This effort resulted in the development of youth leaders, participation of youth in a new activity, monetary support from the County Fair Board and increased interest for 2015 at both the state and local level.

## Preparing children for academic success

Youth who are not proficient readers by fourth grade are 68 percent more likely to drop out of high school. Research shows that young children who develop literacy skills prior to entering kindergarten are better prepared to learn to read. In Michigan, there is an educational standard to ensure children from birth to 8 years old have access to learning and development programs.

Children's school readiness improves when parents and caregivers are taught methods that increase early childhood science and reading literacy, and ways to prepare children socially and emotionally. Programming provided through MSU Extension and other organizations prepare children for academic success by giving parents and caregivers the tools they need to help their children succeed in school. MSU Extension is also making learning to read more accessible by putting books into the hands of thousands of children in families living in low-income situations.

- » As a result of MSU Extension trainings and workshops, adults indicated an increase in knowledge of concepts of early childhood development and techniques that promote school readiness and academic success.
- » The March reading challenge was another big success for Cass this year with over 55,000 total pages being read. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> year the challenge was put out to the 4-H youth in Cass County. The top 2 clubs for the 2014 challenge were 4 Kids 4-H Club and Quality Kids & Critters 4-H Club.

# ENSURING SAFE AND SECURE FOOD

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.

## Teaching residents about food safety and reducing foodborne illnesses

From the farm to the kitchen table, food safety is an important issue. Foodborne illness outbreaks occur crossing all socioeconomic lines from production and consumption to preservation of foods. Foodborne illness costs the U.S. economy billions of dollars each year in lost productivity, hospitalization, long-term disability and even death. MSU Extension Cottage Food Law workshops supply Michigan residents with up-to-date, scientifically backed information on food safety.

- » In 2014 8 Cass residents learned about preserving food and preparing safe food for public consumption through training in the Cottage Food Law workshop
- » 3 county residents received Serve Safe certification through the 16 hour MSU Extension food handling training.
- » Food consumers can have increased confidence when buying food products sold by someone with an MSU Extension food safety certificate.

## Education the public on food systems

Educating the general public on the food system is an important first step in bringing people together to solve food security issues as well as expand markets for local food producers. MSU Extension community foods educators presented food system information to 262 community leaders in 2014. Twenty-five of those leaders were residents of Cass County. Participant evaluations revealed that the presentations increased their knowledge of the Michigan Good Food Charter and the benefits of purchasing locally and regionally grown food; their was 100% increase in those who said they would purchase more locally and regionally grown food after the presentation.



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.

# ENSURING STRONG COMMUNITIES

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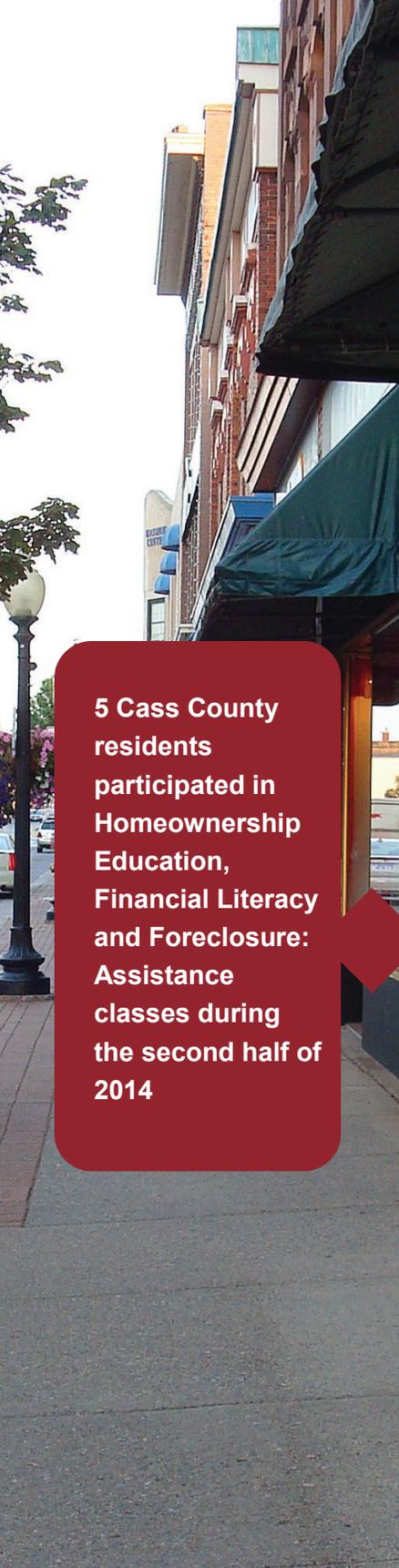
When you support MSU Extension, participants learn how to implement best practices in good governance that keeps communities solvent, productive and engaged; learn effective conflict management skills that help leaders and residents work collaboratively on complex issues; and engage youth leaders in 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.

## Strengthening Michigan's financial capacity

When individuals and families in Michigan are financially healthy, it creates an environment for sustained community prosperity. MSU Extension's financial literacy and housing education programs help families and individuals at any stage of their lives make smart money decisions and work through the homeownership process. These courses help reduce mortgage defaults through counseling new homebuyers as well as homeowners going through the foreclosure process.

Widespread efforts by MSU Extension have led to a significant increase in knowledge gained and behavioral changes across Michigan. Since July 2013, MSU Extension's foreclosure counseling has aided participants spanning 24 counties, across all income levels. As a result of receiving this counseling, a higher percentage of homeowners are able to better communicate with their mortgage servicers, obtain loan modifications and in over half of the cases, keep their homes. As a result of all financial and homeownership education:

- » 84 percent pay their mortgage on time.
- » 80 percent now save money for home maintenance costs.
- » 86 percent maintained or increased their knowledge of predatory lending practices.
- » 54 percent of foreclosure clients were able to keep their homes.
- » 5 Cass County residents participated in Homeownership Education, Financial Literacy and Foreclosure: Assistance classes during the second half of 2014



**5 Cass County residents participated in Homeownership Education, Financial Literacy and Foreclosure: Assistance classes during the second half of 2014**

# KEEPING BUSINESSES STRONG

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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 bio economy 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.

The MSU Product Center Food-Ag-Bio assists counts residents in developing products and businesses in the areas of food, agriculture, natural resources and the bio economy. The 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 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.

## 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. MSU Extension 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.

» 24 Cass County agricultural enterprises received consultation and guidance in farm business management and tax strategies in 2014.



**14 Product Center Counseling sessions took place in Cass County to assist 3 entrepreneurs.**

# KEEPING PEOPLE HEALTHY

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560 Cass youth and Adults participated in programs focused on helping participants gain the skills needed to buy and prepare nutritious, budget-friendly foods; increase their physical activity; breastfeed their babies and stretch their food dollars.

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.

## Working to improve social and emotional health

Many negative factors affect social and emotional health, including ongoing and toxic stress that may result from situations including abusive relationships, bias, damaging coping behaviors and relationship violence. Across the lifespan, people faced with these situations and settings are at risk for a wide range of physical, psychological, social, emotional, cognitive, financial and spiritual health challenges. The United States spends an estimated \$425 billion in direct and indirect costs of violence each year.

RELAX: Alternatives to Anger is designed to actively engage adult learners to increase knowledge and skills around anger management and give them constructive ways to deal with anger. Consistently, more than half of program participants leave RELAX with improved knowledge or new skills designed to promote social and emotional well-being with others in their lives and immediate social environments.

- » 54 percent increased effort to talk things through until a solution is reached.
- » 55 percent increased effort taking time to understand how others feel.
- » 56 percent increased effort working hard to be calm and talk through issues.
- » 56 percent increased effort that if they do get upset, they try to end conflicts on a positive note.
- » 140 participants attended a program in Dowagiac where 28 Cass County residents (caregivers, parents, adults) participated in programs such as RELAX to improve social and emotional health in 2014

# KEEPING PEOPLE HEALTHY

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## Fighting obesity through education

Michigan has the 11th highest adult obesity rate in the United States, according to the CDC. More than 30 percent of adults are obese, and an additional 35 percent are considered overweight. Nearly 80 percent of both adults and youth do not consume adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables.

MSU 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 needed to buy and prepare nutritious, budget-friendly foods; increase their physical activity; breastfeed their babies and stretch their food dollars.

MSU Extension reached more than 87,000 adults and young people across the state through programming.

- 560 of those participants were from Cass County.

Through the program outreach:

- » More than one-third of youth decreased their intake of sugary drinks.
- » Nearly one-third of youth increased their level of physical activity.
- » Nearly half of adults increased their daily vegetable and fruit consumption.
- » More than two-thirds of adults increased time spent being physically active, including three-quarters of older adults.
- » More than two-thirds of adults reported improved ability to make their food dollars go further.

MSU Extension's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) programs teach adults how to make the most of their food dollars, by developing skills such as menu planning, understanding recipes and keeping food safe.



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.





# SUPPORTING FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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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.

## 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. One of several SMaRT programs was held in Dowagiac where 35 Cass County producers were in attendance. Results from the programs revealed:

- » 98% of the respondents gained new knowledge by participating in the program.
- » 83% said that they utilized the information they learned at the programs on their farms in 2014.
- » Twenty three (23) producers indicated that they *actually* earned additional money in 2014 by implementing the new information they learned at the programs.
- » The average amount of additional income realized by implementing the new information was \$13.40 per acre. Because the new information was implemented on 5,338 acres, the *actual* financial impact of the programs was \$71,529 in 2014 alone.

Annual educational events attended by Cass farmers such as Ag Action, Southwest Horticulture Days and On Farm Field Days, 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.

# SUPPORTING FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

## Webinars Provide Farmers with On-demand learning

The Integrated Pest Management Academy Online Webinar Series is an eight session on-demand, online webinar series that allows participants to begin to understand IPM, the tenants on which the concept is based and available resources. It covers basic entomology, plant pathology, soil science, pesticides and scouting. Between 10/14/13 and 8/22/14, there were 1,663 webinar sessions viewed. Viewers reported an acreage impact of 1,207,931 acres and represented at least 439 unique visitors. Approximately 30% identified as growers, .4% as policy makers, 13% as crop consultants, 20% as landscapers, 10% as agriculture educators, 5% pesticide distributors, 3% students, 19% recreational gardeners and 8% were members of the general public. Fifty-five viewers applied for Michigan pesticide recertification credits (140 commercial applicator credits and 63 private applicator credits). 82% of respondents said they intended to increase the adoption of IPM strategies and tools based on the information presented in the webinar.

» Cass county had 12 participants in the program.

## EnviroWeather

Southwest Michigan is home to 13 automatic weather stations, They are part of a network of over 60 weather stations in Michigan maintained by MSU in the EnviroWeather system. This network is used heavily by the plant and animal industries of Michigan for weather-data driven models and tools for management of diseases, insects, water use, and weather-related ag management decisions. Data is updated every 15 minutes available 24/7.



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



# SUPPORTING FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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## **Pork Production in Cass County**

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 (February), the Back to Basics – The Importance of Pig Health (January), state-wide pork industry information meetings (March), Health Champions Meetings – information for small farms (November); 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 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.

## **Cass 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.

# SUPPORTING FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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## The Pork Quality Assurance (PQA) Plus

PQA is a program is an educational tool to help pork producers learn good production practices when raising pigs. The PQA Plus program highlights areas of animal care and well-being and focuses on teaching owners and employees how to raise a safe, healthy and wholesome product for the consumer. Certification in this program is a requirement for numerous market chains and pork processors. In order to maintain market access, producers need to have a current certification in place. Numerous programs were offered to producers in Cass, Berrien and St. Joe Counties over the past year. 189,750 pigs were marketed in this tri-county area under producers that were certified by Beth in the last year. With market pigs averaging \$150 per head at market time this equates to \$28,462,500.00 dollars of value, these pigs had market access because of PQA Plus certification given by MSU extension.

## The Transport Quality Assurance (TQA) Program

The TQA is geared towards livestock haulers, as well as crews and personnel responsible for moving and loading hogs. This certification allows transporters to continue hauling livestock into certain processing plants. In Cass County one trucking company with 3 trucks was certified in TQA in the past year. On average, these one load of hogs equates to approximately \$1200.00. The certified company averages 9 loads per week and 450 loads per year, which equals approximately \$540,000 dollars of value.

## Back to Basics – The Importance of Pig Health

Cass County is one of the locations of the MSU extension's pork team wintering programming each year. Programming is held in 4 locations of the state, with attendance from numerous different counties. Producers from Cass County, as well as other counties in Southwest Michigan attended the Back to Basics – The Importance of Pig Health meeting and received information and training on various production areas. Influenza, euthanasia decision making, sick/hospital pen management and vigilant observation of your herd were all areas that were discussed. During a full-up survey, producers indicated that 81% of attendees would consider incorporating the observation protocols using the "BEST" system on their farms, which was a method presented during this educational opportunity.



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.

## Extension Educators Serving Cass County

### Staff Located in Cass County Office:

| Name               | Role                   | Email             |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Stephanie Consford | 4H Program Coordinator | consfords@msu.edu |
| Beth Clawson       | Natural Resources      | clawsonb@msu.edu  |
| Elizabeth Ferry    | Swine                  | franzeli@msu.edu  |
| Nora Lee           | Nutrition Instructor   | leeno@anr.msu.edu |

### Additional MSU Extension Staff Serving Cass County:

| Name                | Role                                    | Email                |
|---------------------|---|----------------------|
| Debra Barrett       | Youth Development                       | smithde6@anr.msu.edu |
| Brad Baughman       | Commercial Horticulture Educator        | baughm30@anr.msu.edu |
| Joanne Davidhizar   | MSU Product Center Counselor            | davidhiz@anr.msu.edu |
| Zelda Felix-Mottley | Health and Nutrition                    | mottley@anr.msu.edu  |
| Khurram Imam        | Financial and Homeownership             | imamkhur@anr.msu.edu |
| Rebecca Finneran    | Consumer Horticulture, Landscape & Turf | finneran@msu.edu     |
| Ron Goldy           | Vegetables                              | goldy@msu.edu        |
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| Tom Guthrie         | Equine                                  | guthri19@msu.edu     |
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| Jane Herbert        | Water Resource Management               | jherbert@msu.edu     |
| Lyndon Kelly        | Irrigation                              | kelleyl@msu.edu      |
| Adam Kantrovich     | Farm Management/Financial               | akantrov@msu.edu     |
| Jeannie Nichols     | Food Safety                             | nicho115@msu.edu     |
| Kathy Lee           | Dairy                                   | leeka@mau.edu        |
| Mark Longstroth     | Small Fruit and Horticulture            | longstr@msu.edu      |
| Bruce MacKellar     | Field Crops                             | mackella@msu.edu     |
| Daniel O'keefe      | Sea Grant Coastal Communities           | okeefed@msu.edu      |
| Bill Shane          | Tree Fruit                              | shane@msu.edu        |
| Mark Thomas         | MSU Product Center & Entrepreneurship   | mthomas@msu.edu      |
| Heidi Wollaeger     | Floriculture                            | wollaege@msu.edu     |
| Suzanne Pish        | Social and Emotional/Parenting          | pishs@msu.edu        |
| Diana Fair          | Chronic Disease                         | faird@msu.edu        |
| Eric Anderson       | Field Crops                             | eander32@anr.msu.edu |

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