MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

It is with pleasure that I bring another annual report of the good work MSU Extension is providing in Mecosta County. Through our partnership with the county, we are able to bring state and federal funding into the local Extension office to bring resources of the land grant university to this community.

Our mission is to help people improve their lives through an educational process. We do this by bringing resources from our four Institutes, or areas, of programming:

- Agriculture and Agribusiness
- Children and Youth (includes 4-H)
- Health and Nutrition
- Greening Michigan (Natural Resources, Leadership Development, and Economic and Community Development)

MSU Extension continued to strive to meet the needs of the local communities in 2015 and embarked on a large Needs Assessment process. In addition to conducting an online survey that netted over 5,000 responses statewide, we conducted “Issues Identification” sessions in each District. In our area - District 6 - we held three sessions in the last quarter of 2015. Almost 100 community members attended the facilitated discussions and answered questions like:

⇒ What do you think are the most important areas for Extension to focus their efforts over the next 3-5 years?
⇒ What are the needs and opportunities in our communities that research and education can make a difference by addressing?

Over the next several months, we will be processing the statewide and local data. We expect it will be very helpful in our program planning and resource allocation decisions. I would be happy to share the results of both the online survey and the Issues ID sessions with anyone who is interested.

As always, I thank you for your commitment to MSU Extension and the people we serve in this great state and Mecosta County.

Shari Spoelman, District Coordinator

MEASURING IMPACT

CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS

4-H Members (Traditional Club Enrollment) ................................................. 356
Adult & Youth Volunteers ................................................................. 108
4-H Clubs ......................................................................................... 21
Nutrition Programming for Low Income Families ......................... 1,472
Soil Samples ...................................................................................... 143

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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DEVELOPING YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

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.

2015 Mecosta County Agricultural Free Fair

The 2015 Fair was another success, with 4-H youth getting to show their projects that they worked on all year. From livestock to crafts we got to see how talented our Mecosta County 4-H youth are. We ended the week with our Junior Livestock Association Auction that let the kids sell their market projects to the highest bidder. This was a success as always thanks to the many volunteers that support our youth every year.

Exploration Days and State Awards

Mecosta County 4-H was represented at Exploration Days on the campus of Michigan State University by 15 youth and 2 volunteers. Four of those youth were State Award delegates in Beef Science, Leadership and Development, Equine Science and Dairy Science. Rebecca Herzog represented Mecosta County well and walked away with the win for the Junior Beef Science State Award. Julia Doughty came home with the Junior Dairy Cattle Sciences State Award.

Exploration Days gives youth the opportunity to participate in sessions covering over 200 topics. This is a great way for 4-H’ers to learn about new things and experience the campus of MSU.

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).
Agriculture and Natural Resources Stewardship Day (ANRS Day)

Michigan State University Extension coordinates ANRS Day every Spring for local 3rd grade classes at Cran Hill Ranch. This is an event that features hands-on agricultural and natural resource experiences for the students. This year MSU Extension partnered with Mecosta County Farm Bureau to offer a combined set of rural education and life skills for the youth to experience. Sessions included: Identifying Great Lakes Fish, Smoothie Bike, Lambs, Bees & Pollination, Living Seeds, Petting Zoo, Wagon Ride and How to Harvest A Pizza. In 2015 over 250 local 3rd grades took part in this event. Many local adults volunteered their time to teach sessions.

4-H Camp

In 2015 4-H Camp had a comeback year! It was held at School Section Lake Family Campground in August for 3 days. Thirty campers enjoyed the week making crafts, swimming, doing nature activities, playing group games, meeting new friends, and cooking outdoors.

Camp Counselors— Twelve counselors made the week possible by participating in Camp Counselor Training that took place over several months and then spending the week at camp helping and guiding camper. Being a camp counselor is a leadership experience for older 4-H teens.
Developing Youth and Communities, continued

Holiday Events

- **Breakfast with Santa**– The Mecosta County Teen Club volunteered at the Breakfast with Santa event at Kettunen Center in December. They staffed craft and activity stations for kids who came to see Santa.

- **Trunk or Treat**– Mecosta County 4-H participated in the City of Big Rapids Trunk or Treat event by passing out information and candy. Youth and volunteers dressed up with their animals to promote the 4-H program.

4-H’ers Observe Pig Dissection

In January a large group of 4-H club members, their parents and club leaders had an opportunity to participate in and witness a dissection of pregnant female pig. The female pig died on an area far, and the owner and Dr. Todd Gilbert invited the 4-H youth to take part in the dissection. Since many of the 4-H Club members dream of becoming a large animal livestock vet, they not only gained hands on experience, but were also able to participate in career exploration while shadowing a real vet for the night. The young participants had an interesting and educational night exploring the world of animal science.

SuperSitters Babysitting Basic Clinic

Teaching youth to become good babysitters is the goal of our Super Sitters 4 week babysitting clinic. Shannon Lindquist, MSU Extension Educator, held an afterschool in October at Morley-Stanwood middle school. Topics covered during this series included:

- Child development (including children with special needs)
- Discipline
- Shaken Baby Syndrome
- Nutrition
- Safety and Basic First Aid
- Activities for Children

Vet Science Camp

Two local youth were selected to attend the 2015 4-H Animal and Veterinary Science Camp. Nadine Page and Rebecca Herzog represented Mecosta County staying 5 days and 4 nights on the campus of MSU learning about animal and veterinary science. They visited the Horse, Sheep, Dairy and Swine Farms owned by MSU and the Veterinary Medical Center and Diagnostics Center for Population and Animal Health. Youth were tasked with performing hands-on activities such as suturing, first aid, dissections, and x-ray reading.
ENSURING SAFE AND SECURE FOOD

Teaching residents about food safety
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. The Cottage Food Law took effect in July 2010, allowing home-processed foods to be sold to the public, emphasizing the need for food safety education.

Reducing foodborne illnesses
Food preservation is both a popular hobby and a small business opportunity, but people who preserve food without following scientifically proven food preservation techniques increase the risk of foodborne illness. A survey conducted by the National Center for Home Food Preservation in 2005 found that many food preservers still follow the out-of-date practice of open kettle canning. In 2015, MSU Extension taught residents of Mecosta County:

- ServSafe
- Cooking for Crowds
- Home Food Preservation
- Cottage Food Law
- Food Safety for Food Pantry Workers

Testing for Pressure Canner Gauges
MSU Extension has acquired testing equipment to verify the accuracy of Pressure Canner Gauges. It is important the pressure canner’s dial gauge be checked each year for accuracy prior to use to ensure food is safely preserved. We are able to offer this free service to residents year round.
KEEPING PEOPLE HEALTHY

Extension programming 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 challenges. In the United States we spend 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. To help promote social and emotional wellbeing, in 2015 MSU Extension taught:

- Relax—Alternatives to Anger to child care providers in Mecosta County
- Stress Less with Mindfulness at Higher Grounds (Love INC) and Domestic Violence support group (WISE)
- Positive Discipline to parents and caregivers

Media Smart Youth: Eat, Think & Be Active

In response to rising YOUTH obesity, physical inactivity MSUE was awarded a grant of $1,000 from the National Institute of Health & Child Development for Mecosta County. The purpose of the grant was to reinforce healthy behaviors, including being physically active and eating nutritious foods. The Media-Smart Youth, Eat, Think & Be Active program was part of this effort. MSUE had youth participants from every school in Mecosta County represented in the highly successful 10 week, 2015 program!

Local youth took part in a highly successful 10 week Media Smart Youth “Eat, Think & Be Active” program.
Dining with Diabetes

Michigan ranks 15th in the nation for prevalence of diabetes, with an estimated 10 percent of Michigan adults aged 18 and older had been diagnosed with diabetes – about 758,300 people. An additional 250,200 Michigan adults are estimated to have diabetes but are currently undiagnosed.

Through the National Diabetes Prevention Program, MSU Extension helps participants to learn ways to change their lifestyles and improve their health. Disease Prevention & Management’s Health Educator, Pam Daniels, along with MSUE Mecosta County Chef Don Zimmer, partnered with Community Mental Health New Journey’s Clubhouse to offer a 4 week Dining with Diabetes workshop. There were 18 New Journey Clubhouse members plus their kitchen staff, all of whom completed the course.

Disease Prevention & Management Team Award

Michigan State University Extension’s Health & Nutrition/Disease Prevention & Management team was awarded the National Jeanne M. Priester Award for Dining with Diabetes! The award was given on behalf of Extension Dining with Diabetes program which positively impacts the health of people across Michigan and provides leadership to expand Extension’s capacity to effectively implement health programs.

PATH-Personal Action Towards Health

PATH workshops help provide people with the skills and tools needed in the day-to-day management of Type 2 diabetes. Along with their health care team, PATH is here to support their diabetic health. Disease Prevention & Management partnered with Big Rapids Housing Commission & Area Agency on Aging of Mecosta County to offer Diabetes PATH. The program was offered free of charge at Parkview Village, Big Rapids.

Key Partner Award

Michigan State University’s Key Partner 2015 winner was from Mecosta County. Chef Don Zimmer won the MSU Extension Key Partner Award for his work with Extension in Mecosta County.
Youth Nutrition

**Show Me Nutrition** — This evidence-based curriculum of six to eight sessions provides youth in grades prekindergarten to 8 with age-appropriate literacy-based education in areas of nutrition, food safety, physical activity, body image and media influence on health choices. In Mecosta County this curriculum was taught in 5 Head Start Preschool classrooms in Big Rapids, 2 in Mecosta, 2 in Barryton, 1 at Morley Stanwood Middle School and 4 Kindergarten classrooms at Morley Stanwood Elementary.

**Cooking Matters for Teens** — Local chefs work with participants in this hands-on, seven-part series teaching the basics of selecting nutritious, budget friendly ingredients and preparing healthy meals. This was taught at Big Rapids New Vision School.

Adult Nutrition

**Eat Healthy- Be Active**- Healthy food can be delicious and physical activity can be fun. This evidence-based curriculum is an opportunity for adults to learn the skills needed to make healthy eating and regular physical activity part of their lifestyle. This was taught at Higher Ground in Stanwood, and Our Brother’s Keeper (homeless shelter) in Big Rapids.

**Cooking Matters for Adults**- Cooking Matters hands-on courses empower families with the skills to be self-sufficient in the kitchen. This seven-part series is team taught with a volunteer chef that teaches the basics of selecting nutritious, budget friendly ingredients and preparing healthy meals. This curriculum was taught at the Mecosta County Services building.

**Project FRESH and Market FRESH for Seniors** - MSU Extension provides the nutrition education portion for Market FRESH for Seniors and WIC Project FRESH. This series provides information 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. The coupon books were redeemed for fresh local produce.

Something new with Project FRESH this year, all WIC Project FRESH presentations were done at the Downtown Farmer’s Market in Big Rapids. This doubled the amount of coupons redeemed!

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Keeping People Healthy, continued
SUPPORTING FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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 continues to increase. MSU Extension helps 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. These measures strengthen Michigan’s economy while connecting farmers to local food opportunities and global markets. MSU Extension encourages growth in a sustainable and prosperous Michigan food and agriculture system.

Farm Bill Education

The 2014 Farm Bill introduced major changes in risk management programs for corn, wheat, soybean, fruit, vegetable and dairy producers in Michigan. These new programs, combined with an anticipated decrease in commodity prices, created major risk management decisions that will affect the financial success of Michigan producers until 2018 (the life of the Farm Bill). Because the bill required a one-time irrevocable decision by producers, programing in this area required the combined farm management, financial analysis, and marketing subject matters of MSU Ag Educators. This irrevocable decision, combined with the complexity of these new programs and the uncertainty of the long-term commodity price outlook, created an urgency for programming on this topic. This program was provided in Remus.

Agriculture Programming

In 2015, Mecosta County farmers and agriculture producers took part in the following educational opportunities through MSU Extension:

- Field Crops
- Cattle Feeding and Marketing
- Pesticide Applicator Review
- Farm Business Management
- Income Tax Planning
- Beef Soundness Clinic
- Nutrient Management
- Upland Vegetables
- Potatoes
- Hops
- Food systems, food hubs, local food systems

Consumer Horticulture and Gardening

In 2015, 12 Mecosta County Master Gardeners were re-certified, and several residents participated in Smart Gardening, floriculture, and nursery plants education.
Fighting back against emerging pests

In 2015, the Small Fruit program provided assistance to the Amish Community of Mecosta County with major problems affecting their small fruit crops. A large portion of Amish growers’ annual income derives from sales of small fruits; blueberries, strawberries and raspberries.

Since 2012, growers have seen a substantial portion of their income affected by the loss of fruit at harvest time due to the presence of a new invasive inset pest, the Spotted Wing Drosophila (SDW). In 2013, most growers lost 50% of their raspberry and strawberry crops and they had to abandon to crop after unable to control the SWD infestations.

Due to the particular characteristics of the Amish culture, the traditional technical assistance delivered by MSU Extension has proven to be ineffective in transferring the knowledge and skills growers need to manage this pest. Therefore, a more personalized approach has been needed to assist this community to deal with this pest problem.

Following this approach, in 2015 the Small Fruit program provided insect pest monitoring and personalized technical assistance through a series of weekly farm visits to selected farms that requested direct technical assistance. At four farms we installed SWD monitoring traps that were serviced on a weekly base from June to September 2015. During farm visits, growers were invited to observe the presence of the insect pest on traps and fruits. They were advised to check the traps daily for the presence of SWD, indicating for them to start inspecting their crop for the presence of SWD larvae. In total we provided 60 farm visits from June to September 2015 and during those visit, depending on the SWD population density detected on the crop, growers were advised to program insecticide applications or carefully discard fruit that was suspected of SWD infestation to maintain the productivity of their crop. In addition, the information collected and recommendation delivered helped other growers in the community to manage the pest on their own farms. Growers participating in the SWD monitoring program have extensive family networks that allows information and assistance provided to spread through the community.

Resources to provide assistance with SWD management were provided by the MSU Project GREEEN and MSU Extension Small Fruit funds.
In addition to the Extension staff with an office in Mecosta County (listed on page 2), the following MSU Extension staff and faculty provided programming and assistance to Mecosta County residents in 2015:

- Erin Lizotte (IPM)
- Fred Springborn (Field Crops)
- Gerald May (Mixed Livestock)
- James DeDecker (Potatoes)
- Jerry Lindquist (Grazing)
- Jill O’Donnell (Christmas Trees)
- John Amrhein (Gov & Public Policy)
- Kara Lynch (Food Safety)
- Katherine Ockert (PQA)
- Kathy Lee (Dairy)
- Kay Cummings (Product Center)
- Kendra Wills (Community Food Systems)
- Kevin Gould (Beef)
- Kylie Rymanowicz (Early Childhood)
- Paul Gross (Cover Crops)
- Phillip Tocco (Farm to Retail Food Safety)
- Rebecca Finneran (Consumer Horticulture)
- Ron Goldy (Vegetables)
- Shannon Lindquist (Social-Emotional Health)
- Shelby Burlew (Nutrient Management)
- Teagen Lefere (Finance & Homeownership)
- Thomas Dudek (Nursery Plants)
- Tina Conklin (Entrepreneurial Communities)
- Tracy Trautner (Early Childhood)

Online resources for MSU Extension Information

MSU Extension News is an online resource that contains the most recent and relevant information from MSU throughout the state. It is available both in a traditional format and in a mobile format. MSU Extension News is updated daily to provide the most up-to-date, relevant information available. You can find it at http://msue.anr.msu.edu/

A useful feature is the option to request an email notification of articles that recently appeared on the MSU Extension News website. The MSU Extension Digests will be emailed to you about every 2 weeks, listing new articles that have appeared. Digests are available by topic or category.