MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

In September we announced that Jeff Dwyer will become interim director of MSU Extension, effective Jan. 1, 2016. Dwyer replaces Ray Hammerschmidt, who will resume his research and teaching roles in the MSU Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences.

We are excited to welcome Dr. Dwyer to this difficult position that has undergone much transition in the last 18 months. Though our leadership will be changing, our long-range plan of working diligently to serve Michigan residents has not. Our staff members continue to follow their work plans that they, along with Extension leadership and their colleagues, have developed to meet the ever-changing needs of District 8 and Montcalm County. MSU Extension staff are committed to serving their communities.

Our overall plan for our leadership team is the same as it has been since Tom Coon resigned in June of 2014 to take a position as vice president and dean at Oklahoma State University. We will have an interim Extension director until a new dean is named for the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources in early 2016. Once that dean has settled in, he or she will have an opportunity to help choose a permanent MSU Extension director whose goals, style and vision complement those of the dean. Until then, we continue to move forward with a strong leadership team.

In this report you will find examples of programs that support youth, encourage better health and nutrition, inspire entrepreneurs, keep farmers up-to-date, protect natural resources, stimulate business, develop communities and help to prepare government leaders. In each of these areas, MSU Extension is committed to utilizing information which is current to research and relevant to communities.

As we transition through these changes, I look forward to our continued partnership in moving Michigan forward.

Don Lehman
District Coordinator, District 8
MEASURING IMPACT

CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS

4-H Youth Members.................................................................................................................. 558
4-H Adult Volunteers.................................................................................................................. 153
Kids Day Participants............................................................................................................... 200
SNAP-ED Participants............................................................................................................... 475
Master Gardener Re-Certification.......................................................................................... 34
IMPACTS.................................................................................................................................... 1,420

DISTRICT 8 DIGITAL REACH

From July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015, 118,744 visitors from our 7-county district viewed more than 349,343 pages of rich, science-based content on the MSU Extension website (msue.msu.edu).

Search engine rankings make msue.msu.edu one of the most visited Cooperative Extension Systems education sites in the country.

Based on data from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.
DEVELOPING YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

When you support MSU Extension 4-H programs, you are helping youth participants acquire life skills that are necessary for success in today’s competitive economy. One way Extension works to accomplish this is by helping children develop early literacy skills that support school readiness. Children who participate are also learning leadership and decision-making skills that increase their likelihood of becoming civically active. Active 4-H participation has also been associated with a reduced risk for negative behaviors such as drug use. This helps ensure that more of our young people succeed in school, attend college and contribute to their communities. Successful young people in communities results in greater tax revenues, consumer spending and increases the likelihood that they will stay in, or return to, their home communities.

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 for school reading curriculum.

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 from low-income households.

» To date, 250,000 books have been distributed to more than 2,500 children, including youth in Montcalm County, through programs sponsored by MSU Extension and its partnership with the Molina Foundation.

» 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.

MSU Extension provides resources aligned with Michigan science education standards to teach confidence, leadership and responsibility related to STEM.
Youth programming, camps and workshops

The future of Michigan lies, in part, in the hands of its students’ abilities to excel in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Science literacy among school-aged youth in Michigan is below the national average, directly impacting college readiness. In the U.S. today, many job openings for STEM related positions go unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants.

MSU Extension is doing it’s part to provide resources aligned with Michigan science education standards to teach confidence, leadership and responsibility related to STEM. Michigan 4-H encourages youth to participate in programming during the summer to continue to develop skills in unique, out-of-school settings.

One such opportunity in Montcalm County was a 4-H Companion Animals camp held at Camp Tuhsmeheta in Greenville. 27 youth attended along with 13 adult volunteers. The participants at this camp were encouraged to bring their personal pets and work to make them fair ready! Animals of all sorts were welcome including dogs, cats, birds and even turtles. Educators also provided an opportunity to learn about raising a puppy to become a Leader Dog or a special friend and companion for someone with a disability.

MSU Extension offers numerous camps, opportunities and special events throughout the state that touch on various areas and topics. A few of these include:

- 4-H Animal & Veterinary Science camp
- 4-H Great Lakes & Natural Resources camp
- The Great Lakes Education Program
- 4-H Renewable Energy camp
- The Michigan 4-H Youth Conservation Council (M4-HYCC)
- The 4-H Teen Leadership and Community Change Conference

Life skills are a basic foundation that prepare youth for success in life. The goal of Michigan 4-H Youth Development is that every youth possess the necessary life skills to be successful.

MSU Extension programs such as the Michigan 4-H Youth Conservation Council (M4-HYCC) allow Michigan’s youth to get involved and become community leaders, but also shows them how to be engaged in the legislative process.
ENSURING SAFE, SECURE AND ACCESSABLE FOOD

When you support MSU Extension, you are also supporting our food safety programs. Our food safety educators are working to ensure that all have access to an adequate supply of safe, affordable food. Programming focuses on food safety measures in the field from planting to harvest. Participants also have the opportunity to learn proper food preparation and food preservation techniques. MSU Extension offers a variety of programs that bring community partners together to enhance access to healthy food supplies, leading to more viable and healthy communities with lower health care costs.

Teaching residents about food safety

From the field to the table, food safety is an important issue. Foodborne illness affects all socioeconomic categories and 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.

MSU Extension Cottage Food Law workshops supply Michigan residents with up-to-date, scientifically backed information on food safety. In 2013, nearly 4,000 Michigan residents learned about preserving and preparing food safely for public consumption. Participants who successfully complete the training are given an MSU Extension food safety certificate. This increases consumer confidence when buying locally grown and produced food products.

Another program offered in Montcalm County is the ServSafe course offered through MSU Extension. This is a national certification program for food service workers, taught by certified Extension educators. ServSafe topics include:

» Providing safe food
» Forms of contamination
» The safe food handler
» The flow of food
» Food safety management systems
» Safe facilities, cleaning and sanitizing

Participants who complete the course, will earn their ServSafe Certificate.

When doing home based food preservation, it’s important to not use just any recipe. MSU Extension can provide you with research based recipes for delicious and safe food!
Ensuring Safe and Secure Food, continued

Joyce McGarry and Lisa Treiber, both Food Safety & Preservation Educator’s for MSU Extension, worked together in collaboration with the Montcalm Great Start Collaborative Agency to hold two separate programs in Montcalm county. Thirty-four people attended the two demonstration style workshops to learn about food preservation methods including freezing, dehydrating, canning with boiling water bath canner or a pressure canner. The sessions follow research based recipes and the participants assemble them together in class.

Community Food Pantries

Many families in our community are dealing with hunger. As many as 65% of those seeking food assistance are working, but yet they still struggle to provide the most basic necessities for their families. Many people in this situation will turn to food pantries to help with additional food. Food pantries in Montcalm county work daily to make sure that no family goes hungry.

Most pantries rely on donations from individuals and corporations and are run by volunteers. It is important that pantries follow certain guidelines to ensure that the food they are stocking on their shelves is safe. With limited time and changing volunteers, it can be difficult for pantries and organizations to provide proper training.

Twenty-two adult volunteers attended the training, “Food Safety for Community Pantries”, in Greenville in March, 2015. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about how food safety that can impact their operation regardless of size. Specific topics included:

» Food handling
» Keeping work areas clean
» Knowing when to discard food
» Knowing what to accept and what to reject
» The FIFO method (First In First Out inventory method)
» Food storage

When families are food insecure, the greatest impact can be on the children. Hunger can affect their mental and physical health, their academic success and their future financial security. MSU Extension is working with food pantries across the state to make sure that they are keeping their food donations safe and properly stored.

Fresh produce is often welcomed by pantries. Individuals who may want to donate or “grow a row” for the hungry, can contact the MSU Extension office for a list of local pantries.
ENSURING STRONG COMMUNITIES

When you support MSU Extension, you are helping to implement best practices in good governance that keep communities solvent, productive and engaged; learn effective conflict management skills; help leaders and residents work collaboratively on complex issues; and engage youth leaders in decision-making. In the personal finance area, MSU Extension helps both youth and adults 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, lead to personal and community stability and create strong and safe communities.

Helping Michigan make smart health insurance decisions

In 2013, many Michigan residents and businesses were facing important health insurance decisions they had never had to consider before. The passage of the Affordable Care Act not only opened up the health insurance market to hundreds of thousands of additional people and many small businesses, but also changed the insurance landscape for the previously insured.

These changes along with the launch of the Health Insurance Marketplace in Michigan, caused confusion regarding the new health insurance laws and requirements. MSU Extension conducted targeted outreach to both uninsured and underinsured residents as well as small businesses including farm owners to increase knowledge, understanding and confidence in the ability to purchase health insurance.

MSU Extension educated through weekly webinars, social media and other online outreach.

From November 2013 to April 2014, MSU Extension:

» Presented 59 direct education sessions reaching 987 consumers.
» Made 328 one-on-one contacts via email and phone to answer questions.
» Provided 14,467 indirect educational outreach activities via social media, website page views, educational news articles, email newsletters and other media.
» Made 854 referrals to local health insurance enrollment counselors.

As Michigan looks to rebound from recent fiscal difficulties and become stronger and more fiscally sound, MSU Extension has been a valuable partner in educating the public, as well as legislators, on fiscal health and responsibility.
Ensuring Strong Communities, continued

Helping residents save their homes from foreclosure

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 the counseling of 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.

From January 2010 to December 2015, the MSUE client counseling staff was able to bring in a staggering $192,332 in back taxes for the Montcalm County Treasurer through the Step Forward program. The program was set up to assist property homeowners with delinquent taxes including the application process and the follow-through, until a funding decision was reached. The funds that the MSUE counseling staff helped to secure, brought 238 Montcalm homeowners current on their property taxes and paid nearly $1.5 million dollars in back mortgage payments, allowing them to keep their homes. Funds brought in by the Step Forward program will help to contribute to long term outcomes to keep families and communities stable.

As a result of all financial and homeownership education and programming by MSU Extension:

» 84% of participants pay their mortgage on time.

» 80% of participants now save money for home maintenance costs.

Help is also available to those who have gone through the foreclosure process. MSU Extensions University-backed, unbiased *Starting Over After Foreclosure Toolkit* offers research-based tools and resources to those who have experienced foreclosure. Accessible and easy to read, this toolkit helps Michigan residents understand their situation both emotionally and financially and is offered online for free at [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/mimoneyhealth/startingover](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/mimoneyhealth/startingover).

Sustainable homeownership strengthens individuals and communities. As a HUD- and MSHDA-certified counseling agency, MSU Extension helps potential homeowners understand the complex home-buying process and learn the true costs of homeownership.
KEEPPING BUSINESSES STRONG

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.

Providing valuable work experience to young professionals

MSU Extension encourages Michigan’s young people to envision a future career path that can help them positively impact their communities and build valuable professional skills. A new internship program creates a link between campus life and future career success. Started in 2013 with seven interns, the program has been expanded in 2014 to 13 interns because of its initial success.

The internship program has been popular with communities, MSU Extension educators and, most importantly, with the students, who have shown growing interest. In 2013, the program was piloted in regions in Michigan with a focus on agriculture. It provided students with a valuable networking opportunity with farms and within the agriculture industry, and allowed them to gain important skills in vital areas of agriculture.

In the internship program’s first year, interns worked on:

» Improvement of air quality around swine production facilities through an investigation of various plant species for use as vegetative environmental buffers.
» Basic equine health and body condition as well as safe handling of horses.
» Pork quality assurance and site assessment.
» Forage management for sheep and goat production.

A new MSU Extension internship program provided students with a valuable networking opportunity with farms and within the agriculture industry, and allowed them to gain important skills in vital areas of agriculture.
KEEPING PEOPLE HEALTHY

When you support MSU Extension, you are helping participants to increase their physical activity and improve the quality of their diets. Extension also provides programs that work to decrease incidents of violence, bullying and to improve the social and emotional health of Michigan residents. Encouraging these healthy behaviors helps reduce health care costs by helping prevent chronic health conditions and providing safe environments throughout a person’s life span.

**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.

Extension programs work to equip participants with 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. 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.

**Teaching valuable healthy-eating skills**

More than 1.7 million Michigan residents receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

MSU Extension’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) programs including Cooking Matters for Adults, Project Fresh, Healthy Harvest and MSU Extension reached more than 87,000 adults and young people across the state through programming. Nearly one-third of youth increased their level of physical activity and more than two-thirds of adults increased time spent being physically active, including three-quarters of older adults.
Show Me Nutrition teaches adults how to make the most of their food dollars, by developing skills such as menu planning, understanding recipes and keeping food safe. Participants learn about the nutrition and health benefits of foods to feed their families in healthy ways.

Between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014, 483 adults and 203 youth in Montcalm County received nutrition education through MSU Extension Nutrition Programs. These programs are offered to groups who are made up of at least 50% SNAP eligible members at no cost. Senior Citizens in Ionia and Montcalm counties and Motcalm County WIC participants received information on how to use the Project and Market Fresh benefits at Michigan Farmers Markets via presentations. Program participants learned strategies for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, and how to select and store fresh fruits and vegetables. Child Care providers received information on the nutrition programs provided by MSU Extension and tips on how to incorporate physical activity and healthy eating into their pre-school programs at the annual Early Childhood Conference and Great Start Collaborative meetings.

Across the state MSU Extension nutrition education programs have:

» Reached 80,366 SNAP-Ed participants from 82 of Michigan’s 83 counties in 2013.

» Targeted program recipients will receive more than 72,000 nutrition education reinforcement items, including measuring cups, cutting boards, strainers and more.

» Items are expected to have a direct and indirect impact on more than 12,000 individuals and families in Michigan.

» Reached 2,400 residents in the Disease Prevention and Management classes in 2013.

Through the National Diabetes Prevention Program, MSU Extension helps participants to learn ways to change their lifestyles and improve their health.
When you support MSU Extension’s natural resources education programs, you are helping 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. Our programs can lead to increased income for families that retain their natural resource assets, help landowners become better stewards of their land, and protect land management opportunities for future generations. Better land stewardship benefits communities by protecting and enhancing Michigan’s natural resource assets.

**Helping Michigan residents become better stewards of our inland lakes**

Michigan has more than 11,000 inland lakes, which are among our most beautiful and precious resources. To marshal all of the passion and energy so many people and organizations have regarding Michigan’s lakes, MSU Extension helped organize the first Michigan Inland Lakes Convention. The convention hosted 372 lake enthusiasts, professionals, government officials and others for an intensive three-day convention.

The convention helped participants learn how to become better stewards and to better protect Michigan’s inland lakes. It boasted more than 25 educational opportunities, including sessions regarding youth and volunteer education, aquatic invasive species, plant identification, algae blooms and water quality.

The convention was a partnership between MSU Extension, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, the Michigan Lake and Stream Associations, the Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership, the MSU Institute of Water Research and the Michigan Chapter of the North American Lake Management Society.

- 372 people attended the Michigan Inland Lakes Convention.
- More than 66% represented nonprofit agencies or were riparian landowners.
- More than 75% reported increased leadership, confidence and stewardship.
- More than 90% reported gaining information that will assist them as professionals or volunteers.

To marshal all of the passion and energy so many people and organizations have regarding Michigan’s lakes, MSU Extension helped organize the first Michigan Inland Lakes Convention.
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.

**Bridging the gap between farm to fork**

Breakfast on the Farm (BOTF) bridges the gap between Michigan’s farmers and consumers who often have little idea where the food on their plates comes from. BOTF invites the public to enjoy a delicious farm-fresh breakfast on a working farm and educates them on the farm-to-fork process. BOTF is an open door for the community to learn about modern food production and build trust with and appreciation for local farmers. An online survey showed that 88 percent of participants told others they should attend a BOTF event.

In 2015, five BOTF events took place and hosted a total of 13,481 people! Wheeler Dairy located in District 8 was the home of one of the events and welcomed nearly 2,500.

**Supporting new farmers**

Several MSU Extension Educators housed in Montcalm county and surrounding areas, worked together with a small Montcalm county organic fruit and vegetable farm. The client currently farms under glass, field crops and in hoophouses, and offer’s CSA-like food boxes. Educators were able to offer assistance and referrals to the farm in areas related to:

» Profitability

Breakfast on the Farm (BOTF) bridges the gap between Michigan’s farmers and consumers who often have little idea where the food on their plates comes from.
Preparing contract documents for farm to institution transactions

Greenhouse management

Effective record-keeping systems

Because of its current success and the expected future agricultural contributions, the farm has been recommended to become a client of the MSU Extension Product Center for enhancement and support in direct-to-consumer sales.

Fighting back against emerging pests

The spotted wing drosophila and the brown marmorated stink bug are two invasive pests that pose the biggest threats to Michigan’s fruit production. Michigan growers will likely have to implement new management programs to control these pests from harming their fruit crop.

The spotted wing drosophila has an optimal developing temperature of 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit, normal conditions during a Michigan growing season. This makes early detection information vital to activate pest management programs that prevent rapid population increases and potential infestations.

MSU Extension partners with farmers and statewide agencies to monitor these pests. Working together to eliminate these invasive species will be essential to lessen the loss of the Michigan tree fruit crops in the future.

Growers need to monitor for both the spotted wing drosophila and the brown marmorated stink bug.

What’s new with Poo

On August 18, 2015, Michigan Innovations in Agriculture 2015 Tour was held. MSU Extension and several other agencies partnered to bring the event to the community. What’s new with Poo, was designed to provide information on several manure management practices. In the morning, Amber Radatz, co-director of Wisconsin Discovery Farms, spoke and assisted farmers with issues related to manure management, water quality and nitrogen use efficiency. In the afternoon, four farms in the Montcalm, Gratiot and Clinton county areas were visited to view manure separation, manure treatment and handling, harvestable buffers and cover crops as feed. Approximately 175 people attended this educational event sponsored by several agricultural agencies.

Invasive plant and animal species pose an enormous threat to Michigan’s biodiversity and economic wellbeing. Emerald ash borer, garlic mustard and zebra mussels are also notable examples of species that harm our state’s land and water resources. MSU Extension provides educational resources to identify, assess and control invasive species throughout the state.
## Extension Educators Serving Montcalm County

### Staff Located in Montcalm County Office:

<table>
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