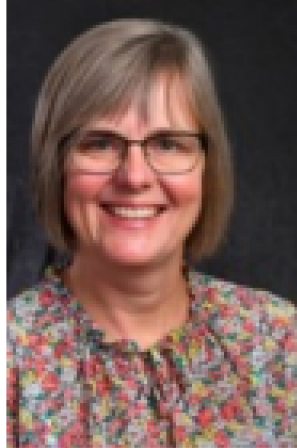


**Message from the District Director**



Based on MSU Extension annual reporting and evaluation feedback, 2022 proved to be another good year leveraging resources provided by Berrien County to help us do our work in the community. Staff reports revealed working with schools, service organizations, local government, residents and youth to provide educational programs, and one-on-one consultation in Berrien County. Indirect work was also strong in the county with outreach through newsletters, social and print media, educational articles for farmers and businesses and fact sheets on nutrition, immunizations, early childhood education, youth development and other important topics to help people make decisions and improve quality of life. In 2022, District 13 educators worked together with MSU researchers, federal and state agencies and non-profits to bring in nearly \$1 million in grant funding to expand their research and outreach efforts. This report provides a few statistics and sample stories as evidence of our work. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Berrien County and strengthening the community through quality research based information and educational programs.

**Julie Pioch, District Director**

**Berrien County Based Staff**

- Debra Barrett - Senior CYI Educator
- Beth Ferry - AABI Educator
- Christian Haack - Community Nutrition Instructor
- Clara Jungermann - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Zelda Felix-Mottley - HNI Educator
- Kelly Stelter - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Jamie Styburski - Secretary
- Yolanda Thrash - MVP Program Instructor
- Ashley Wentworth - Community Nutrition Instructor

**Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center Extension Specialists**

- Ben Phillips - Vegetables
- Mike Reinke - Viticulture
- Bill Shane - Tree Fruit

**Contact Information**

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**Berrien County  
General Fund  
Appropriations**

2020	\$308,966
2021	\$308,082
2022	\$311,019

**SOIL TESTS STATS**

**65 RESIDENTIAL  
80 COMMERCIAL**

**84 "ASK AN EXPERT"  
QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

**189 SENIORS CONNECTED  
WITH PROJECT FRESH  
COUPONS**

**321 4-H Youth Enrolled**

**113 Adult Volunteers**

**31 Community Clubs**

**3207 Total Youth Reached**

**LET'S GO FOR A BIKE RIDE!**

**BY CLARA JUNGEMAN, 4-H PC**

Learning to ride a bike is a right of passage for many children, giving them the freedom to explore and go on adventures with friends. However, for some children a bike is yet another reminder of the challenges they face in everyday life. When planning the Cycle re Cycle SPIN club as an extension of the after school 4-H Program in Benton Harbor our volunteers wanted to integrate STEM curriculum by giving the youth a chance to learn the mechanics of a bicycle so they would have the skills to maintain their own bike. For two of the youth in the club learning how to work on the gears, brakes and tires was fun but it did them no good as they had not had the opportunity to learn how to ride a bike. When volunteers learned this they quickly pivoted the lesson plans to get the youth on bikes learning basic riding skills. For one youth with a disability this meant modifying a larger youth bike into a balance bike to accommodate his need to learn the basic balance skill. Throughout the program he was able to improve his skills and ride in the parking lot with minor assistance and was excited to keep practicing to show his siblings and cousins he could ride like them now! The other youth had never had access to a bike or a safe place to learn how to ride. With the help of the volunteers he was able to learn how to make minor repairs to a bike, basic riding skills and how to safely ride in residential areas. He was also able earn credit towards the ownership of his own bike from Cycle re Cycle's sale floor.

**424**  
EXTENSION PROGRAMS  
INCLUDED BERRIEN COUNTY  
RESIDENTS

**4284**  
BERRIEN COUNTY  
RESIDENTS ATTENDED  
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

**325**  
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS  
REPORTED

**85**  
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY

**WEBSITE STATISTICS**

**12,672  
COUNTY VISITORS  
42,278  
PAGE VIEWS  
19%  
REGULAR CONSUMERS**



**Cabin Fever Conversations  
Gathers Gardeners Online**

Cabin Fever Conversations (CFC) is a free virtual program that provides a space to replicate the lighthearted and educational conversations that happen naturally in the garden. After two successful seasons of the program in 2020 and 2021, the program returned in 2022. Three episodes held in late winter focused on houseplants, plant names and highlighted the work of "Edible Flint." Each episode included ASL interpretation and recordings were posted on the CFC website. Participants were asked how many episodes they watched (57% watched all three, 29% watched two and 14% watched one) and if they watched live or the recording, or some of both (69% watched live, 6% watched the recordings, and 25% watched some of both. Based on evaluations, 94% would recommend this program to others. Several Berrien County residents have participated in the program over the three years. Comments from participants included:

***"Too bad it was only once a month. The sessions are always so enjoyable. Please consider holding these sessions again next year!"***

***"I loved the series. I feel it was well thought out and delivered with so much heart. They helped me expand my knowledge of horticulture. I learned a lot about better care of my houseplants and what plant names mean and how to decipher them. I would recommend Cabin Fever very highly."***

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**Introducing Coding to Tigers**

The Benton Harbor Area Schools "Tigers Back to School Bash" invited MSU Extension and other community partners such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club to provide activities for students and families at the event. MSU Extension 4-H and community nutrition staff were there and engaged students with "Hopscotch Coding" which introduced youth to the basics of computer coding while also getting them moving through exercise! Youth had to code a hopscotch path by laying out hoops and connecting the direction of the next move with arrows. They coded the "action" of each hoop using pictures of activities such as jumping jacks, squats and dancing. Parents and guardians also learned tips on activities to get the whole family moving together.

**Community Leaders Praise Lakes Program**

***"I really loved the whole experience; I was looking to better educate myself to speak knowingly about watershed conservation at township meetings and thanks to this class I will be able to do just that. I now know how to be a better steward of the lakes and feel the support of so many organizations that you have made me aware of, thanks! "***

***"All of the information was clear, actionable and came with useful resource links."***

***"I feel like I learned a lot and have the tools to apply this knowledge when working with others in my area."***

Introduction to Lakes is a six-week course designed for lake users, lakefront property owners, and lake managers. In 2022, there was a cohort of 524 participants, the largest since the program began. Participants were spread out over 69 counties with seven from Berrien County. Of the 524 participants, 86% of them completed all six units and received a Certificate of Completion. The high completion rate is attributed to the level of interaction with participants. Unlike many online courses, Introduction to Lakes is a cohort based and taught on a week-by-week basis, allowing for online communication between classmates and instructors through topical discussion forums. There were 2,255 discussion forum posts and replies on the course website.

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**Berrien is Wild About Conservation**

Human activities in yards and neighborhoods affect local wildlife and the quality of water in our soil, land, lakes, and rivers. No matter the size, our yards can serve as a refuge for unique plants and animals. From landscaping with native trees and shrubs to adding water features, even the smallest of things that we do can help. The Wild About Conservation webinar series features experts from MSU Extension discussing conservation practices anyone can implement on their property. Participants registered in either one or all eight of the Wild About Conservation webinars for free from the comfort of their homes and more than eight Berrien residents enjoyed the webinars in 2022. Webinars took place on Tuesdays twice a month and addressed unique topics related to conservation including bumble bee conservation, landscaping over septic fields, bird conservation and research, planning and planting a native plant pollinator garden, and much more. The popular series will continue in 2023.

## Educating Community Leaders

The MSU Extension Zoning Administrator Certificate Program provides training to zoning administration officials in order to reduce legal risks to the zoning administrators and communities. It is the only program of its kind in the state.

The program has been offered at various locations around the state since 2009, attracting more than 350 participants to date. In 2022, two zoning administrators from Berrien County successfully completed the multi-day course and exam.

Zoning administrators make up the majority of participants but the program also attracts private consultants and county planners who consult with local zoning administrators, local elected officials and state agency staff. This is an especially helpful course to those in small communities who have taken on the responsibility of the zoning administrator without any prior training or knowledge.

MSU Extension provided Berrien County appointed officials and staff a 90-minute training on Michigan's Open Meetings Act, rules for public participation, and tips for managing public participation at meetings. Two sessions were offered in early 2022 for 15 individuals. Evaluations revealed positive comments about the training and that the training improved knowledge and skills and emphasized the importance of an open and transparent government.

Over 1,000 local government elected officials and staff participated in the 2022 Fiscally Ready Communities program, a partnership between MSU Extension and the Michigan Department of Treasury. The series included seven webinars on important financial management and sustainability topics for local government. Program participants included elected officials, administrators and appointed officials. Over half had been in their role for less than two years, meaning this program provided valuable learning for new leaders in Michigan communities. Nine participants were from Berrien County. Evaluations demonstrated clear gains in learning for all but the real story came through participant comments about value and behavior change:

**"It was a very good review of requirements and implementation of financial controls. I wish I had had this training when I first became a Treasurer."**

**"I get caught up in the day-to-day issues and duties but don't take the time to review and update policies. This was a good reminder of the importance of performing this task."**

**"I plan to type out exactly what our little office does to ensure internal controls are utilized and deliver the final product to the council members in this month's council meeting packet."**

## Helping Expand the Cut Flower Industry

It is not uncommon to hear stories of passionate and idealistic individuals dropping everything to start a small farm (with or without previous agricultural experience). The specialty cut flower industry is particularly susceptible to this phenomenon, due in no small part to the eye-catching beauty of flowers and the way they're marketed. Public interest in specialty cut flower production has increased dramatically over the last five years and experience has shown us that many new cut flower farmers have no agricultural background and little or no horticultural training.

To address a clear need for beginning-level agricultural education, MSU Extension provided a seminar on floriculture diseases and basic diagnostic principles for commercial cut flower production. The weather in 2021 created highly favorable environmental conditions for plant diseases to establish themselves in cut flower fields. Many novice growers were left bewildered and struggling to manage widespread disease breakouts. Diagnosing diseases, however, can be tricky, especially when the symptoms look similar to nutrient deficiencies and other physiological maladies. MSU experts discussed the most common floriculture diseases, their usual symptoms, and the environmental conditions that can lead to an outbreak. A total of 69 participants attended the live broadcast including several from Berrien County. Post-session surveys were received from growers and green industry professionals representing 856,000 square feet of managed production space.

- As a result of the attending these seminars, 86% intend to implement changes at their business.
  - 67% of those respondents will make the changes within 3 months, while
  - 33% will make changes in 4-6 months
- 65% of respondents indicated that the knowledge gained from this session will help them differentiate between symptoms caused by pathogens and those caused by abiotic factors.
- More than 50% of participants reported an increase in their understanding of
  - Environmental conditions that favor plant diseases (55%)
  - Cultural practices that can help reduce disease pressure (60%)
  - Best practices for managing disease outbreaks (55%)
- 90% of participants indicated that the seminar improved their understanding of common diseases in floriculture crops.

## Teaching Life Skills for a Lifetime

MSU Extension educators have developed a series of workshops designed to provide life skills education to assist young people in transitioning to adulthood. Under the title of Adulthood 101, the series includes lessons in workforce preparation, financial literacy, communication, civics, and healthy living. Sixteen Adulthood 101 sessions were offered for free virtually in 2022, reaching a total of 830 participants across the state, including many young people from Berrien County. Comments from young people following workshops on workplace professionalism included:

*“I learned that if you have the right attitude you can be more successful and to say no when you need to.”*

*“I learned that having good manners and being well dressed may help your employer to know that you are serious about your job.”*

*“Do research before you believe everything coworkers say.”*

*“I learned how time management is important and that dressing is big too.”*

To meet financial literacy goals, a program titled "Avoiding Money Mishaps" was offered to increase awareness and provide practical tips for youth to prevent identity theft, predatory lending, scams and fraud. After the class, 95% felt more confident in protecting their identity and in their ability to avoid scams and fraud. Comments from youth included:

*“This class will help me avoid suspicious and unsafe scammers and people who steal identities.”*

*“I will start shredding my mail and expired forms of identification before throwing them away.”*

*“Thank you, this helps me very much. I can’t wait for the next classes.”*

Based on feedback from participants, Adulthood 101 will continue monthly throughout 2023 and several new topics have been added such as Medical Insurance 101, Cracking the Code to College, How to Buy a Car, Eating Healthy on a Budget, and Sew What! Clothing Care saves Cash.

In addition, the team has partnered with the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI), whose goal is to ensure that young people in foster care have successful outcomes in housing, education, employment and community engagement. There are approximately 11,000 children in foster care in Michigan. Youth living in foster care are often subject to adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s).

Providing programs where youth feel welcome, have a sense of belonging, their voices are heard and their

contributions matter is particularly important for these youth. MSU Extension instructors serve as positive and supportive adult role models for youth. The team has specifically targeted their programs to young people who are aging out of the foster care system with the hopes that the information will help them be successful. Some of the session titles include Goal Setting, Informed Renter, Household tasks, Art of Time Management, Rockin’ Resumes, Career Connections Through Volunteerism, and Changing the World with a Single Vote. In 2022, 61 sessions were provided to youth involved with MYOI, with a total of 1545 participants with several from Berrien County.

## Farm Business Management Program

The Beginning Farmer DEMaND series offers a fresh look at farm business management for new and beginning farmers.

The series is designed to help the next generation of farm operators learn about financial and business management strategies that can help them develop into managers and decision-makers on the farm. Whether the producer represents the transition of generations, an employee to owner, or a new entrant to the business, the DEMaND series can offer assistance through articles, bulletins, webinars, and more. Five beginning farmers from Berrien County participated in the online series in 2022.

For the 2022 production year, farmers once again had options to select which Farm Bill program would work best for their farms. With each program, there were several options and different decision making factors. Making the decision even more complex for producers was the importance of considering crop insurance options that tie-in to these Farm Bill programs. In order to make sense of the programs and options, MSU Extension partnered with colleagues from the USDA Farm Services Agency, and private insurance experts to offer a series of programs entitled “2022 Farm Bill Program & Crop Insurance Decisions – What Fits Your Farm?”

At the information meetings, producers heard highlights from outcomes from the 2021 decisions and how those decisions played out across the state, got a refresher on the current program options, learned about the current and new crop insurance options available and worked through case examples using the “updated” MSU Extension Farm Bill Calculator to help producers make better decisions about the programs. A total of 151 producers attended the workshops with seven from Berrien County.