

CHAPTER 11

The Role of Community & Government Engagement for Successful Delivery of Extension Services

Erin Moore, District Director, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

Dru Montri, Director of Government and Stakeholder Relations, MSU Extension, MSU, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

Matthew Shane, District Director, MSU Extension, MSU, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

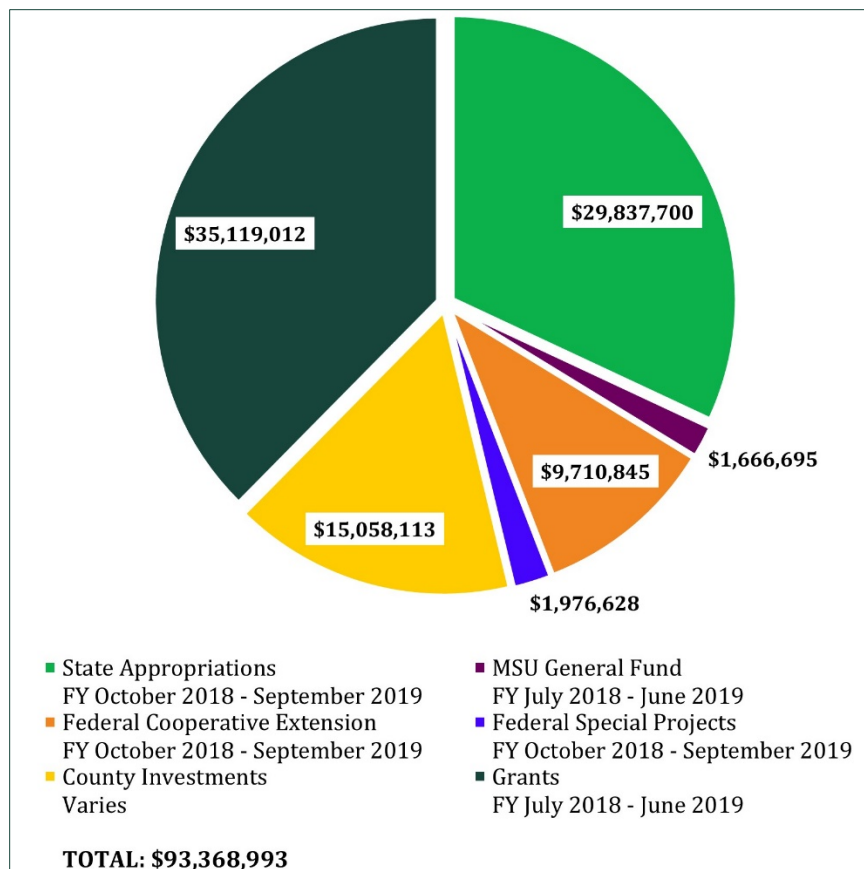
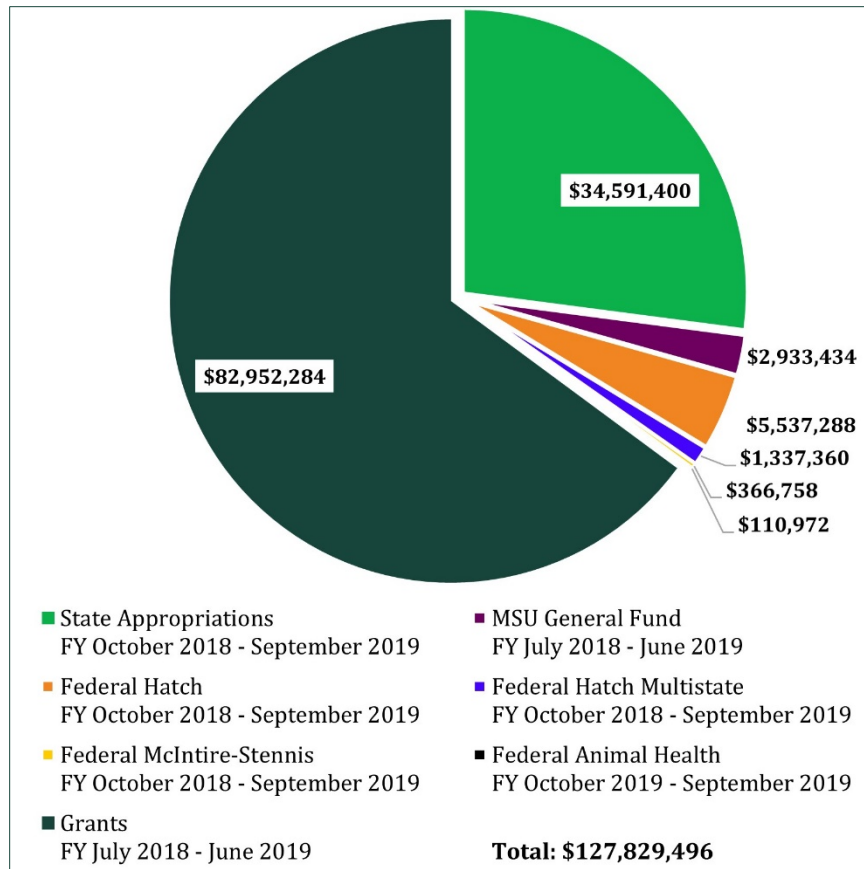
Introduction

Extension systems in the United States have long been touted for their three-legged funding model based on investments made by federal, state, and county governments. Though this model has evolved over the years, with additional emphasis on grant acquisition, philanthropy, and special projects, the foundational core remains the same. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension's program model is successful due in large part to the government engagement strategy with all three of these funding levels and complemented through a multitude of community engagement strategies. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018–2019, MSU Extension's budget was \$93,368,993 and the accompanying AgBioResearch budget amounted to \$127,829,496 (see Figure 11-1).

MSU Extension funding was established first through the Morrill Act of 1862, which put into place the land-grant university system, and then was expanded through the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. This historic funding allowed each of the land-grant universities to receive federal funding to support an educational outreach system. There are 112 land-grant institutions in the U.S., of which 33 are historically black colleges and universities, and 19 are tribal.

Years later in 1919, the state legislature in Michigan passed Michigan Public Act 315, that allowed county governments to raise money through taxation. These historical legislative acts were the roots that allow MSU Extension's current programming model to exist. Today in 71 out of 83 of Michigan counties, MSU Extension was financially supported in 2020 by the local governing body: the county board of commissioners or the county executive. The remaining counties are supported by resident-imposed property taxation called a *millage*. MSU Extension now has established offices in each of the 83 counties in the state of Michigan.

Figure 11-1. FY2018–2019 funding sources for MSU AgBioResearch (top) and MSU Extension (bottom).



At its inception, MSU Extension was created to serve rural areas by educating farmers on agricultural practices. Though MSU Extension continues to have strong roots in agriculture and agribusiness, today's Extension has evolved to meet the diverse needs of all communities in Michigan. MSU Extension is composed of four institutes: Agricultural and Agribusiness; Health and Nutrition; Children and Youth; and Community, Food and Environment. Through these four institutes, MSU Extension delivers over 200 types of programs.

Engaging With the United States Federal Government

The U.S. federal government is primarily funded through income taxes levied on individuals and organizations, predominately businesses and corporations. Congress authorizes federal funding for Extension, through our land-grant institution, every five years through the passage of the Farm Bill. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) oversees national Extension programs through the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA). NIFA provides capacity grants for extension activities on the basis of statutory formulas. There are administrative and fiscal requirements that grantees such as MSU Extension use in managing these funds. Find more detailed information online at <https://bit.ly/36L3cbn>.

In addition to receiving capacity funding, MSU Extension is becoming increasingly successful in securing competitive federal grant funding. One example is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed), which is a federal grant that provides funding to supply nutrition education to low-income individuals and families through evidence-based interventions. In the federal FY18-19, MSU Extension received \$7,073,850 to implement nutrition education throughout Michigan. MSU Extension is a successful implementer of these federal funds because of its ability to engage with local partners in all parts of the state. Additionally, Extension maintains relationships with its federal funding partner, USDA, and specifically, the Food and Nutrition Services branch.

Engaging With the State of Michigan Government

The State of Michigan is funded primarily from income and businesses taxes with some additional funding from sales tax, fees for services, and ordinance and law violations. It is governed by 110 state representatives, 38 state senators, and the governor. The State of Michigan provides funding for MSU Extension through its annual appropriation process. MSU Extension is a line item in the state higher education budget, which includes state aid for Michigan's 15 public universities, financial aid programs, and the Michigan public school employees' retirement system. Annual gross appropriations for higher education total more than \$1 billion.

In addition to the annual appropriation for general operating, MSU Extension also focuses on maintaining strong partnerships with state agencies including the Michigan departments of Agriculture and Rural

Development; Natural Resources; Environment, Great Lakes and Energy; Education; and Health and Human Services. These agencies often administer federal funding or additional state grants.

Each member of the Michigan Legislature votes on the annual appropriations budget. Therefore, it is important for MSU Extension employees to engage with these individuals so that they know and understand the value that MSU Extension provides their constituents. MSU Extension created a set of resources for its staff to use to build their own capacity for engaging with legislators and policymakers at all levels of government. Examples of topics covered are reporting impacts, getting to know policymakers and stakeholders, maintaining support for MSU Extension, and telling the MSU Extension story through public value statements. To explore these resources, visit the Strategic Connections and Communications website: <https://bit.ly/2Iz7ACh>.

Engaging With County Government

Michigan is divided into 83 counties for administrative management. Each of Michigan's 83 counties has a county executive or a governing body called a Board of Commissioners. This governing body is chosen by voters every two years and is composed of five to 35 members depending on the county population size or form of government (Amrhein et al., 2019, p. 2-2). MSU Extension provides services across Michigan with the mission of helping all people in the state improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities, and businesses. This is done by strategically dividing the state's 83 counties into 14 districts.

MSU Extension recognizes the diversity of challenges that different regions of the state face, and as such, has established the position of district director to engage with local stakeholders to better understand local issues and to bring MSU Extension programs out to address them. Of note, Michigan ranks second in the nation for its diversity of agricultural products (Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2019). It is also home to large urban hubs such as Detroit, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, and Lansing, where the population's needs are quite different from the rural areas. One of the district directors' main responsibilities is to establish and maintain relationships with the county executive or County Board of Commissioners, which is one of MSU Extension's most important partners.

Historically established as Cooperative Extension Systems in the Smith-Lever Act, MSU Extension is funded through a county government buy-in, or agreement of services, which in turn allows MSU Extension to draw down state and federal funds to support local initiatives. The role of the district directors is to continually gauge what the needs of the county are, market and promote MSU Extension programs that can ameliorate those needs, or advocate for programming that addresses identified needs. Each county passes an annual operating budget in which it funds MSU Extension services. The district directors ensure consistent engagement with the county leadership and deliver annual progress reports that include MSU Extension's yearly accomplishments. In 2019, partnerships with county governments brought in just over \$15 million to support MSU Extension. This represented

16% of the organization's budget. As these are reoccurring funds, maintaining relationships with county government is vitally important.

County Government Engagement Buy-Ins

As mentioned, county governments fund MSU Extension through an annual agreement of services, with the amount determined by an assessment that includes population size. Each county government may also choose to provide MSU Extension with additional funds, or *buy-ins*, on specific personnel if they feel that their county would benefit from having dedicated services.

One example of this is in Ottawa County (District 7), where the county government funds a half-time small-fruit educator. Michigan ranks third in the country for blueberry production (Kloosterman, 2017), and Ottawa County ranks second in the state (USDA, 2017). Blueberries are a difficult crop to grow with serious weather and pest considerations for successful harvests. As such, a dedicated small-fruit educator can disseminate information to the blueberry growers in the county in a coordinated and timely fashion.

Local Government Training Programs & Support

In addition to working directly with county commissioners and executives to identify needs of the county, and ultimately serve their constituents, MSU Extension has created programs that directly serve county commissioners. One example of this work is the biannual implementation of the New Commissioner School. Every two years, the state holds elections for the Board of Commissioners in all 83 counties. Although many commissioners are re-elected year after year, turnover also occurs throughout the state. New county commissioners have two months from their election to the beginning of the service to become acquainted with their new job duties. MSU Extension, in partnership with the Michigan Association of Counties, hosts a training for new commissioners, which covers governing locally, making policy decisions, and understanding the county finances, as well as understanding the roles and responsibilities of a county commissioner.

MSU Extension offers another successful local government training program, Citizen Planner, a land use educational program for locally appointed and elected planning officials. The program focuses on zoning, an important topic that often comes across the desks of county commissioners, as more development and growth strategies are often at odds with the need to ensure agricultural lands be protected.

Lastly, while MSU Extension does not lobby government agencies on any topic, it does provide nonbiased education on changes in laws and policies. For example, in the renewal of the 2018 Farm Bill, production of industrialized hemp became federally legal for the first time. In the 2018 election, a statewide proposal for legalizing marijuana passed and became statewide law in December 2018. During election years, MSU Extension staff members develop nonpartisan, unbiased white papers on ballot proposals to

educate the electorate on their choices. With the change in both federal and state laws around hemp and marijuana, MSU Extension is working to interpret these changes and educate stakeholders. Hemp production has piqued the interest of the agricultural community in Michigan; however, because prior to 2019 it was illegal to grow, little research existed on production strategies and growing requirements. MSU Extension put together a webinar series for potential growers *Industrial Hemp Production 101* that tackled both business and production considerations.

Engaging With Community Stakeholders to Successfully Address Local Issues

As a publicly funded agency, MSU Extension must augment the work of its stakeholders. Since the list of MSU Extension stakeholders is quite lengthy, only a few best practices are highlighted.

Agriculture commodity groups: Michigan is the second most diverse agricultural producing state in the United States. Over 300 agricultural commodities are produced across the state (Michigan Farm Bureau, n.d.). Many of the major fruit, vegetable, and field crops, as well as livestock commodity producers are represented by organized commodity groups. Examples of these groups include the Michigan Apple Committee, Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee, Michigan Milk Producers Association, and the Michigan Vegetable Council. Some of these organizations are funded from producer assessments on those commodities, also known as *check-off dollars*. These funds are used for administering the organizations, marketing and promoting the industry, funding industry research, and funding Extension positions to support producers of their respective commodities. These research and Extension partnerships enable the producers to stay current with industry trends and receive in-season consultation on production issues, as well as educational workshops in the off-season.

Michigan Farm Bureau: Michigan Farm Bureau's history is intertwined with that of MSU. In 1914, when the Smith-Lever Act established MSU Extension, the caveat was that Extension agents be supported by local "farmer's bureaus" (Michigan Farm Bureau, 2019). Today, both organizations have evolved and grown, but the relationship between the two entities is symbiotic. While MSU Extension continues to contribute to evidence-based research and conducts educational programs for the agriculture industry, Farm Bureau helps to market programs and expand MSU Extension's reach. One specific example of how these two entities work in partnership is with the rollout of workshops on delayed planting around the state. In 2019, heavy rains occurred during the late spring and into the summer. By June, when corn has typically grown over a foot, only 84% of the crop was in the ground. Similarly, only 53% of soybeans were planted by that time. In partnership with Michigan Farm Bureau, MSU Extension took action and hosted 12 workshops that served 650 farmers affected by the delayed planting. MSU Extension provided the facilitation and subject matter experts in areas of soybean production, farm business management, and cover crops and soil health, while the local county farm bureau offices provided space, funding, and event promotion among their constituents.

Local nonprofits: Much of MSU Extension's success comes from its ability to elevate local partners' missions and goals. Local stakeholders such as community foundations, the United Way, and small nonprofits are essential for engaging with specific audiences. Many nonprofits in Michigan offer specific services or target specific demographics. Examples of these partners include women's centers, food banks, area agencies on aging, local libraries, nonprofit health clinics, youth programs, and veteran service agencies. While food banks run daily programs that provide food to individuals and families dealing with food insecurity, MSU Extension conducts nutrition education classes and works with food banks to ensure healthy food options are available. After-school youth programs offer safe spaces for youth while their parents work. MSU Extension, through the 4-H program, offers structured programming in science, engineering, technology, art, and math to support both the youth and the organization with additional resources. MSU Extension engages with community partners to augment the work they do by providing free or low-cost supplemental education.

County health departments: Partnerships with county health departments are a natural fit for MSU Extension. Extension serves both internal and external clients of health departments with a robust offering of various types of health programming. MSU Extension is a leader in providing nutrition education for low-income households. In addition, MSU Extension provides courses in diabetes prevention, food safety, suicide prevention, and social and emotional health. County health departments across Michigan refer their clients to MSU Extension programming to further their education in maintaining healthy lifestyles.

Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) organizations are divisions of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The NRCS provides financial and technical assistance for farmers to implement systems to protect land, water, and air quality. Many of these assistance programs come in the form of cost share grants, where NRCS staff design conservation systems and provide partial to full funding to implement the projects. Examples of these systems include cover cropping, wetland establishment and protection, livestock grazing and manure management, and pollinator protection. The USDA implements the federal Farm Bill. The Farm Bill outlines federally funded programs to financially support agricultural production to help sustain a profitable industry. FSA manages a low-interest loan program to help farmers obtain working capital. It also assesses the impacts of weather-related disasters such as droughts and floods on local crops and requests emergency funding to assist growers in those areas. Both agencies work collaboratively with Extension staff to provide the farmers with relevant and detailed information to help them make informed decisions about their operations.

Soil conservation districts: Soil conservation districts are independent county-based entities that work with local farmers to address conservation concerns. These districts are managed by local boards and primarily self-funded, much like commodity groups. These districts allow farmers to play an active role in the conservation programs and practices that are most relevant in their specific areas. Conservation districts raise local funds and pursue grants to research and implement conservation practices in the areas they represent, often in partnership with Extension staff and university researchers. These data are then used to help farmers implement the most successful and economically viable practices. Often, funding for the

implementation of these practices comes from a combination of conservation districts, NRCS, or FSA programs.

Advisory Councils

While MSU Extension works diligently to understand the needs of local Michigan residents and community stakeholders, this work is supplemented by district advisory councils that are managed and run by the 15 district directors. The District Advisory Council is a group of individuals selected to collectively provide advice, direction, and support to MSU Extension in each of its administrative districts. Council members each have different backgrounds and networks of influence in their districts, which provides the diversity of representation essential to Extension's educational efforts.

The district advisory councils advocate on behalf of MSU Extension with local, state, and federal officials that have influence in their districts. Advisory council members promote MSU Extension programs and raise awareness of Extension in the community to ensure that Extension programs and services stay relevant in the community. Frequently, advisory councils will host events within the district to showcase the work that MSU Extension does and raise awareness about the diversity of programs offered.

Perhaps one of the most important roles that the District Advisory Council plays is identifying community issues and concerns that Extension has the capacity to address. In 2019, an Extension council representative brought forward a state-funded proposal to dredge a river in southwestern Michigan popular for its local fishing and small-boating activities. MSU Extension hosts the Michigan Sea Grant Program, whose mandate is to support coastal communities through research, extension, and education. It was therefore uniquely positioned to pull together a white paper that outlined the benefits and environmental risk factors of the proposed project. The Michigan Sea Grant educator then presented to the County Board of Commissioners and worked with multiple stakeholders to educate the community on the project proposal. This is just one example of how district advisory councils can support the work of MSU Extension.

References

- Amrhein, J., Neumann, B., Schindler, K., Schulz, M., & Walcott, E., (2019). *Guide to Michigan county government*. Michigan State University, MSU Extension.
- Kloosterman, S., (2017). U.S. blueberry growing regions see mixed results. *Fruit Growers News*. <https://bit.ly/35vn4yv>
- Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2019). *Michigan agriculture facts and figures*. (Rev. ed.) <https://bit.ly/3jt9RuN>
- Michigan Farm Bureau. (n.d.). *Celebrating 100 years of achievement: A scroll through MFB history*.
- Michigan Farm Bureau. (2019). *Michigan ag facts*. <https://www.michfb.com/mi/agfacts/>
- United States Department of Agriculture. (2017). *Census of agriculture county profile: Ottawa County Michigan*. <https://bit.ly/3okJhrD>

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. The 4-H name and emblem have special protections from Congress, protected by Title 18 USC 707. Printed on recycled paper. 1P-200/Web-01/2021-AP/Web-PA/RM/LG WCAG 2.0 AA