

Michigan State University Extension in Montcalm County: Solving Problems & Increasing Opportunities for Today & Tomorrow

In 2018, Montcalm County residents voted to maintain the research-proven education provided by Michigan State University (MSU) Extension in local communities!

On August 2, 2022, Montcalm County residents again will be asked to decide to continue investment that helps families, businesses and professionals gain the knowledge they need to be healthy and safe, to do their jobs better, to build strong communities, protect local environments and help young people gain the confidence and skills needed to be successful.

Montcalm County residents receive up to \$5 in return value for every \$1 the county invests in MSU Extension programs.

Delivering Education Despite the Pandemic

While stay-at-home orders hindered access to many opportunities during the pandemic, Montcalm County residents logged 582 registrations for MSU Extension online educational programs during 2020 and 2021. County residents accessed 256 online programs designed to support sound government management, improve farm management practices and provide engaging virtual youth educational programs among the many online MSU Extension educational offerings.

- Montcalm County physicians and health service providers recorded 45 registrations for the 2020 and 2021 online Pediatric and Adult Influenza webinars and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Fall Immunization conferences hosted by MSU Extension to stay up to date on current public health trends and research to prepare for the immunization seasons.
- In addition to accessing online webinars, 9,400 Montcalm County residents accessed online educational information in 2020-21 from MSU Extension websites logging 16,800 visits to view more than 43,000 pages of content.

Empowering & Equipping Youth Success

Fifty-eight percent of Montcalm County 4-H seniors graduating between 2012 and 2017 enrolled in college after high school compared to 46.5% of area youth aged 18 to 24. 4-H participation has proven to help youth build the skills needed for future success.

- In 2020, Montcalm County MSU Extension 4-H programs engaged 526 Montcalm County youth aged 5 to 19 in 4-H special interest, short-term and club virtual learning opportunities that helped youth develop new skills and interests across a myriad of topics. During the 2020-2021 pandemic shut-down, 399 Montcalm County youth registered in virtual 4-H Clubs led by 114 community-based adult volunteers.

Educating for Greater Farm Profitability

Montcalm County producers managed 25,500 heads of cattle including 11,200 dairy cows and Montcalm County farms planted 107,800 acres of field crops that produced 11.87 million bushels of corn, soybeans, wheat and oats in 2021. Montcalm County, the top producer of potatoes in the state, also grew nearly 2.2 million pounds of potatoes in 2021 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, County Estimates, 2021).

- Access to evidence-based information is critical when business decisions depend on it. MSU Extension is a leader in discovering knowledge and helping farmers apply tested solutions that benefit their farms, their families and their communities. Montcalm County MSU Extension educators provided access to articles, webinars and timely social media posts designed to help producers manage the challenges of coronavirus disruptions to agriculture, prepare for tax season and manage the ongoing financial and business planning needed for farming.
- MSU Extension livestock and dairy experts provide Montcalm County livestock producers with current research and knowledge on animal handling, antibiotic use and animal nutrition. Dairy educators consult to help farmers check milking protocols, assess feeding systems, and provide financial assessment and advice related to dairy farm management practices. Livestock educators provide breeding soundness clinics and bull evaluation to support herd management and care and enhance livestock marketing opportunities.
- MSU and MSU Extension staff collaborate with the Michigan potato industry for an annual potato field day, providing the latest research and information to Montcalm County potato growers.

Educating for Safe Hunting

In 2020, Michigan hunters harvested 380,770 deer during the Lower Peninsula hunting season.* MSU Extension zoonotic disease educators work to provide important information to ensure the safety of those who hunt and consume venison throughout the state.

- Given the prevalence of chronic wasting disease in Michigan, Montcalm County educators led charrette planning meetings, educated Michigan legislative staff and delivered youth education to help manage disease testing and surveillance, and support hunter harvest safety.

*Michigan Department of Natural Resources. (2021, September). *Michigan deer harvest survey report 2020 seasons* (Wildlife Report No. 3697). p. 45.

Building Strong Financial Capability

Montcalm County MSU Extension educational programs help people manage their personal and household finances effectively to improve their financial health and well-being and prepare for homeownership.

- Montcalm County staff members provide one-on-one and group education for residents seeking support in preparing for homeownership, managing risk of and avoiding foreclosure, handling credit card debt, managing household finances effectively and investing for their future and the future of their children.

Mastering Gardens for Home & Community

MSU launched the Master Gardener Program in 1978 and has trained more than 40,000 Michigan residents from 80 Michigan counties in horticulture principles using environmentally sound growing practices. These residents often go on to serve local communities as garden hotline volunteers providing research-driven gardening practice for home and community space gardening.

- In 2020 and 2021, MSU Extension recertified 50 Montcalm County Master Gardener volunteers who are trained to complete 40 hours of community service either in enhancing community garden projects or answering garden hotline questions.
- In addition to Master Gardener recertification courses, Montcalm County residents participated in online educational programs featuring topics such as food safety for home and community gardens, the Smart Gardening series, fruit gardening, the master composter course and garden weeds recognition.

MSU Extension is eager to continue serving Montcalm County residents in strong partnership with the County Board of Commissioners. By working together, MSU Extension can continue to help people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, families, businesses and communities.