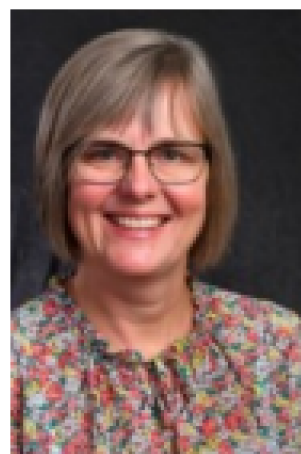


Message from the District Director



Based on MSU Extension annual reporting and evaluation feedback, 2022 proved to be another good year leveraging resources provided by Van Buren 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 Van Buren 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 partnerships in Van Buren County and strengthening the community through quality research based information and educational programs.

Julie Pioch, District Director

Van Buren County Based Staff

Tyler Augst - Gov't & Community Vitality Educator
 Cheyenne Sloan - Small Fruit Educator
 Janice Zerbe - 4-H & CYI Educator
 Krystal Avila - Community Nutrition Instructor
 Chris Imler - Consumer Hort & Vet Liaison Educator
 Melissa Franklin - Secretary

Contact Information

801 Hazen St Suite D
 Paw Paw MI 49079
 269-657-8213
 www.msue.msu.edu
 msue.vanburen@county.msu.edu

Van Buren County
General Fund
Appropriations

2020-21	\$252,788
2021-22	\$266,648
2022-23	\$278,108

★ 412 ★
 EXTENSION PROGRAMS
 INCLUDED VAN BUREN COUNTY
 RESIDENTS

★ 2802 ★
 VAN BUREN COUNTY
 RESIDENTS ATTENDED
 EXTENSION PROGRAMS

★ 461 ★
 DIRECT CONSULTATIONS
 REPORTED

★ 73 ★
 PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY

SOIL TESTS STATS

41 RESIDENTIAL
 91 COMMERCIAL

351 4-H Youth Enrolled

116 Adult Volunteers

15 Community Clubs

1530 Total Youth Reached



"MINDFUL ME" CONTINUES TO BE IN
 DEMAND BY TEACHERS IN LOCAL SCHOOLS

Janice Zerbe, MSU Extension Youth Development Educator continued to expand her impact with youth in the county by working with schools and county partners to provide social emotional educational programming via the Mindful Me and Mindful Mechanics curricula in 2022.

In total, 544 young people, from 27 classrooms in three school districts participated in the program as well as county summer migrant programs for youth. Van Buren County teachers continue to request the training as they see impact on the way their students treat one another and handle stressful situations in the classroom.

Through a variety of hands-on activities and story telling, this program helps young people learn to practice mindful habits that lead to improvements in developing a sense of self, time management, stress management, and emotional regulation.

WEBSITE STATISTICS

11,285
 COUNTY VISITORS

45,315
 PAGE VIEWS

19%
 REGULAR CONSUMERS

2022 Paw Paw Therapy Garden Highlights

Chris Imler, horticulture Extension educator and veterans liaison raised funds, made community connections and had the help of many volunteers in 2022 at the Paw Paw Veterans Garden located on Hazen Street in Paw Paw near several Van Buren County buildings.

On April 23, 2022, the one-acre educational therapeutic garden held its initial work session with a total of 21 volunteers - Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs), general public, and a group of ROTC cadets. For the cadets, Imler held a special on-site environmental science training. This initial group of volunteers spent six hours performing cleanup and land rehabilitation work. During 2022, more than 120 volunteer hours have been spent improving the garden between EMGs, general public, and parolees from the Veterans Court. One of the main garden features, built by Imler, is its 250 foot wheelchair friendly path which provides easier access to all of the individual plantings.

To establish community partnerships, Imler worked with the Van Buren Veterans Service office to create an agreement with the Veterans Court, for parolees to serve time (community service hours) in the garden rather than serve time for other projects. One parolee built the foundation for the greenhouse, built an access ramp going into the barn, and built a privacy fence around the storage area.

Van Buren County Sheriff's office work crew has also helped by building three of the six garden beds and laid the crushed stone foundation for the barn. The work crew also assists with maintaining the lawn area surrounding the garden. Through determination and partnerships, Imler has also acquired \$6,000 valuation in donated, reclaimed materials with the majority provided by residents from Paw Paw, Kalamazoo and Mattawan. A successful crowdfunding event raised an additional \$2220 for plant material and gardening equipment.



Imler successfully competed for a \$10,000 vocational training grant which began in June 2022. The grant has established real-world skill development opportunities for participants who take the MSU Extension Horticulture Boot Camp training. The grant was also used to purchase tools and the greenhouse structure. The next iteration of training will be available this June 2023.

Heroes to Hives is also partnering with the Paw Paw Veterans Garden for a workshop location for hands-on beekeeping training. There are four hives being installed in June 2023. "We agreed to house beehives and Heroes to Hives supplied us with a \$7,000 barn to store equipment, supplies for the garden and for Heroes to Hives, and for educational training," Imler says.

"We have had several veterans and their families come and help," Imler says. "One veteran completed the MSU Extension Horticulture Boot Camp last year and now works part time as a gardener in addition to his full time job. I'm very excited to see how many more will complete the program in 2023!"



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 16 from Van Buren. 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.

VB Lunch & Learn Programs Continue

In partnership with the Van Buren County Wellness Committee, MSU Extension Educators provided a series of "Lunch and Learn" workshops in 2022. The series included lessons on healthy fats, whole grains and fruits and vegetables adapted from the CDC Diabetes Prevention curriculum. The last presentation was on food preservation. Each session was offered twice to accommodate the noon and 1pm lunch hours. Average attendance was 12 employees per session.

Feedback was positive, attendance was consistent and more programs are scheduled for 2023.

Reducing Stress to Improve Mental Health

According to research by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1.3 million adult Michiganders have a mental health condition; 38% of these individuals are not receiving care. Social and emotional health encompasses forming and maintaining satisfying and healthy relationships, taking another's perspective, resolving interpersonal conflict, feeling capable and whole, expressing emotions, and navigating stress. Stress reduction includes anger management programs that help improve mental health and well-being.

MSU Extension Educators offered several *RELAX: Alternatives to Anger for Parents and Caregivers* programs in 2022 to provide information to help support positive youth development, self-control and dealing with strong emotions. Participants learn

Demand for Virtual Programs Continue

Every Thursday during the growing season, farmers and agribusiness professionals can access the most current information available for timely, relevant, in-season crop and weather information by tuning into the MSU Extension field crops team's Virtual Breakfast Series. Following topical presentations, participants interact with MSU specialists and educators in a question-and-answer period. This innovative program provides growers the opportunity to participate in a live webinar via their computer, laptop, cell phone or Facebook. Sessions are closed-captioned and recorded for later viewing on the MSUE website or as a podcast in Spotify, Apple, Audible, and Podvine.

"This series provides much information about current issues and is a great tool for farmers to gain knowledge. It generates discussions between us farmers as well outside of the series airtime. You guys do a GREAT job with this and I thank you for providing this information and discussions."

"Overall, I really enjoyed attending when I was able to! The RUP credits obtained were also an awesome bonus to attending! Thank you for providing this online format for discussion & knowledge! It's super convenient to listen to in the cab of a tractor during the busy seasons, and even at home on the couch during the less hectic times! Being a young farmer, a ton of this information is valuable and especially interesting to share with my parents as we continue to grow throughout the years! I look forward to tuning in for years to come! Thanks again!"

about anger triggers for adults and children and practice ways to calm down. The workshop was offered as a stand alone program and as part of weekly on-line series that included other MSUE health team offerings. Several Van Buren County residents attended. Participant feedback included:

"Something I know but this class put it in perspective is how much stress plays a part in your well being."

"Last week I had a victory and was able to listen to my wife at the height of the conflict. Afterward she thanked me for how I listened and didn't try to solve it. She was super appreciative."

"Taking the time to listen rather than jump in was my focus this week, it is difficult but has been effective."

"More awareness of what triggers my reaction."

Teaching Life Skills for a Life Time

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 Van Buren 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 several were from Van Buren County.

Partnership with Treasury Continues

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 (40%), administrators and appointed officials. Over half had been in their role for less than 2 years, meaning this program provided valuable learning for new leaders in Michigan communities. Six participants were from Van Buren County. Evaluations demonstrated clear gains in learning for all but the real story came through participant comments about value and behavior change:

“The importance of team work and communication to provide transparency within the process. Also to use everyone's input to gain the trust of the staff and public so that everyone feels valued and has a vested interest in the process.”

“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.”