



Van Buren County 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

BY THE NUMBERS



42 Great Lakes anglers attended the annual fishery update in South Haven



2,907 youth participated in 4-H youth development programs



102 soil samples were processed by MSU's Soil and Plant Nutrient Laboratory



36 food suppliers and buyers attended a network event in Bangor to increase local food purchases



37 TelFarm clients received business analysis to assess the health of their farm operation



18 fruit growers learned about soil health and cover crops at an on-farm demonstration in Paw Paw



90 fifth graders from Bangor learned the importance of pollinators and their habitat at Joe's Blues in Bangor



15 Latino fruit farmers attended an accounting workshop

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



I am delighted to share a snapshot of results from another successful year of partnership between Van Buren County and Michigan State University (MSU) Extension. Because of your continued support, we've been able to make a difference in the lives of youth, families, businesses and communities.

This year has been an especially difficult one for our local farmers and the continued support the county provides to our local educators, all state leaders in their areas of expertise, has enabled them to be responsive to the needs of growers with research and programs to help them make critical business decisions.

MSU Extension offers a broad range of research-based educational services to county residents. Over this past year, we've empowered families and individuals to live healthier lives and created opportunities for youth leadership development, helped farmers with business management and mental health, and provided technical training to community leaders. We have renewed partnerships with the Van Buren County Courts, the Great Start Collaborative, local libraries, and the Conservation District to name a few. Our staff live and work alongside county residents, are rooted in community relationships and are responsive to community needs.

On behalf of the team serving Van Buren County, thank you for another great year. We look forward to your continued support and hope you'll be able to join us during one of our upcoming programs.

Julie Pisch, District Director

CONTACT

Van Buren County MSU Extension



269-657-8213



801 Hazen St

Paw Paw MI 49079



www.msue.msu.edu

msue.vanburen@county.msu.edu

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities.

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Program Highlights



Youth attend 4-H Science blast booths staffed by local teen volunteers



Youth participate in STEM based summer programs in 2019



4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

MSU Extension is proud to highlight that it is reaching 19% of the youth population in Van Buren County through 4-H youth development programs. In total, 2907 total youth participated. Breaking it down into program areas: 489 were registered in year long community clubs, 1746 in short term interest groups and 987 in school enrichment programs.

Van Buren community club 4-H youth were well represented at local and state educational programs such as state animal shows, MSU Extension's pre-college program 4-H Exploration Days and civic engagement programs such as Capital Experience and Citizen Washington Focus, where they learned skills to enrich their project experience as well as leadership and other life-long skills.

Volunteers are the heart of 4-H. There are 116 adult volunteers who teach and mentor the 4-H youth in Van Buren County. The 4-H Leaders' Council is a made up of community club leaders who volunteer to provide educational program, promotional and policy support to Extension's 4-H youth programs. In 2019 the Council held fundraisers to support Van Buren 4-H youth scholarships.

Bloomington, Decatur, Covert, Lawrence, South Haven and Bangor libraries hosted summer 4-H Youth programming for 66 youth from the county. Programs focused on science and technology by having the youth design a rocket using a piece of card stock and various sizes of pre-cut triangles and squares. The goal was not how far they could launch their rocket but if they could hit the target which required the youth to focus on design over power. The program was enjoyed by both younger and teenage youth.

4-H partnered with Pfizer to offer the 4-H Science Blast at the Van Buren Youth Fair in 2019. Eight science stations were led by 25 teen volunteers and two stations were brought in by Pfizer. 274 youth completed at least 8 of the 10 stations an increase over last year's turnout.

Van Buren youth participated in the 2019 4-H Ag Innovators Experience the "Native Bee Challenge". This program is intended to be teen led and engage in the exploration of science, especially as it relates to career options connected with agriculture. The "Native Bee Challenge" included learning the importance of native bee species in the pollination of food, experiencing pollination simulation using models of plants, building a nest for native bees, and using mapping to communicate where and why native bee habitat should be added to communities. The program connects agriculture career opportunities and feeding a growing world population, while building skills in critical thinking, communication, and leadership.

4-H educators partnered with the Van Buren ISD to bring plant science educational programming to 88 students attending the Migrant Summer School Program in July 2019.

TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR ZONING ADMINISTRATORS AND PLANNERS

Zoning administration is a key community development function. If not done properly, the position can open a community up to significant legal and financial risk. Done properly, zoning administration contributes to community prosperity. Most zoning administrators have had no formal training. They learned on the job and may not have uniform skills, but courts expect them to know the rudiments of law as it relates to zoning administration. In response, MSU Extension developed an intensive 16-hour training delivered over two days. In 2018-2019, MSUE offered the program in Grayling and Barry Counties and trained 71 zoning administrators (including one from Van Buren County).

Citizen Planner Online is a completely online, self-paced version of the MSU Extension signature program designed for individuals who can't fit a six-week course into their schedule or who prefer this style of learning. It takes approximately 15 hours or so to complete, and can be accessed 24/7 so that individuals can do as much or as little at one time as fits their schedule. Citizen Planner Online was completely redesigned in 2018 and is now more engaging than ever. Six local officials from Van Buren county completed the program in 2018.

PROGRAMS TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY LAKES & ECOSYSTEMS

MSU Extension water quality experts were active in 2018-2019 delivering educational programs for inland lake property owners and recreational users in Van Buren county. Water recreation and lake living is important to the tax base of Van Buren county. Keeping invasive species out of the lakes is important to maintaining the health and enjoyment of this precious natural resource. MSU Extension worked with partners to train volunteers and boaters to inspect and wash their recreational craft to reduce the spread of invasive species.

The Liberty Hyde Bailey Conference in South Haven was the location for a natural shorelines workshop for homeowners. Landscaping strategies to protect water quality and habitat was provided to 16 Van Buren homeowners.

The Michigan Conservation Stewards Program is a leadership training program for volunteers to gain the expertise necessary to help restore and sustain healthy ecosystems throughout Michigan. Field-based, classroom, and online sessions offer hands on learning opportunities focused on ecological foundations, natural resources decision-making, forests, grasslands, wetlands, lakes, and streams. Professional level instruction on how to make land management choices was provided by Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Natural Features Inventory, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Seven 3-hour weekly and two all-day intensive field sessions were held in Kalamazoo & Barry Counties. Fourteen participants graduated from the program in October 2018, including one from Van Buren County.

Program Highlights



Van Buren elected and appointed officials participated in training programs designed to equip local assessors, zoning administrators and planners with critical technical skills.



Volunteers learn how to staff boater inspections held in conjunction with boat wash demonstrations.



Conservation stewards students learn the importance of wetlands to the health of the ecosystem.

Van Buren Agriculture Program Highlights

GROWER EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Agriculture is a key economic driver in the county. Van Buren farmers were well represented at MSU Extension educational programs offered in 2018-19. Relevant and timely information was provided to Van Buren growers through on-farm research and demonstration projects, on-line workshops such as the beginning farmer series and interactive meetings for field crops farmers struggling with planting decisions from 2019 spring weather conditions. Wine grape growers were the target audience for a face to face winery injury workshop held this spring to help growers resolve problems resulting from the January 2019 polar vortex. MSU educators reach out to growers via videos, electronic newsletters and timely articles published in print and on the Internet to keep growers up-to-date on the latest research, as well as best practices and weather conditions that will impact their crops. With the multitude of issues faced by today's farmers, including a declining farm economy and unpredictable weather patterns, farm stress and farmer suicide are serious emerging issues being focused on in 2019 by a multi-disciplinary MSU team. Resources are continuously being updated to help support farmers and those who work with farmers.



Research results are presented at on-farm demonstration sites.

HELPING GROWERS WITH FSMA

The Produce Safety Rule (PSR) is part of the Federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) that was enacted in 2011. This is the first ever mandatory rule for produce farmers that grow, harvest and sell fresh produce which is typically eaten raw. As part of the PSR, the use of biological soil amendments of animal origin are now regulated on produce farms to minimize pathogen risks. To assist farmers, a workshop was developed in partnership



Composting best practices demonstrated in Grand Junction.

with soil amendment and compost experts from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and MSU Extension. The curriculum included information designed especially for produce and soil amendment safety, provided hands on assistance to farmers to develop Standard Operating Procedures for handling soil amendments as well as an on site component at a compost production site. "Safe Use of Animal Based Soil Amendment" was held at 4 locations around the

state reaching 45 produce growers from a variety of different kinds of farms. One program held in Van Buren County was attended predominately by blueberry growers. After the workshops, four videos were produced based on

key takeaways and have been posted to the Agri-food Safety website and on YouTube.

Seven "On-Farm Readiness Review" on-farm consultations were held in the county to help vegetable and fruit growers evaluate their farm's compliance with FSMA, and 55 Van Buren producers attended Product Safety Rule trainings offered in the area in 2018-2019.

GREENHOUSE GROWER EDUCATION

MSU Extension hosted a Greenhouse Field Day in January 2019 to showcase practices that save labor, save energy, and improve efficiency for commercial greenhouses. A total of 68 people representing 18 million square feet of production attended from 13 Michigan counties including Van Buren. Evaluations

revealed that all respondents would make changes to their growing or labor management practices as a result of the meeting. The information was reportedly worth up to \$221,492 to the participants. The floriculture industry is an important economic component of West Michigan. This educational program along with rigorous scouting and consultations are examples of how MSU Extension supports this industry.



Greenhouse growers listen to experts in pest control

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