



Thank you for another great programming year! We couldn't do our work for the residents of Berrien County without your continued partnership!

--- Julie Pioch, District 13 Director

Berrien County Based Staff

- Jamie Styburski, Office Manager
- Deb Barrett, CYI Senior Educator
- Kelly Stelter, CYI 4-H Program Coordinator
- Zelda Felix-Mottley, HNI Health Educator
- Yolanda Thrash, HNI Program Instructor
- Beth Ferry, AABI Swine Educator
- Ashley Wentworth, Community Nutrition Instructor
- Christian Haack, Community Nutrition Instructor
- Micheal Reinke, Viticulture Specialist
- Ben Phillips, Vegetable Specialist
- William Shane, Tree Fruit Specialist

Contact Information

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383 4-H Youth Enrolled
129 Adult Volunteers
25 Community Clubs
4204 Total Youth Reached

473
EXTENSION PROGRAMS INCLUDED
BERRIEN COUNTY RESIDENTS

6617
COUNTY RESIDENTS ATTENDED
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

176
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY

383
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS REPORTED



"In 2022, I watched countless buckets of perfectly good zucchini, pickles, and peppers go into a compost pile after data was collected. So in 2023, I connected with our Berrien HNI and CYI staff to see if they could use the produce for cooking classes. They connected me to Bob Herbert, of Cultivate Food Rescue in South Bend. He offered to send trucks up to the station once or twice a week to pick up any produce we would otherwise compost. We could keep our own bins, and they would transfer everything to their containers.

"True to his word, trucks arrived on time as I started coordinating with their drivers to pick up cauliflower, tomatoes, cucumbers and pickles. They would bring the appropriate container size and quantity based on what I told them about the harvests. Once the vegetable trials were finished, Bill Shane took over coordinating for pickups of peaches and apples. In the end, we donated 23,522 pounds of produce serving 130 pantries in the greater Michiana area and are looking forward to doing this again in 2024.

"With this outlet in mind, we bought a harvest lug and bucket washer to ensure our fruits and vegetables are safe and ready for consumers."

--- Ben Phillips, Vegetable Specialist at SWMREC

**Berrien County
General Fund Appropriations**

2021 \$307, 667
2022 \$309,784
2023 \$318,698

**BERRIEN COUNTY
MSU EXTENSION WEBSITE**

14,108 PAGE VIEWS
6,742 VISITORS
19% REGULAR CONSUMERS

**265 Youth Reached via
SNAP Nutrition Education**

56 Residential Soil Tests
22 Commercial Soil Tests

**8 Berrien Extension
Master Gardeners**

80 "ASK EXTENSION" Questions

Health Programming Reaches Nearly 300 in Southwest Michigan

“It’s so easy to feel stuck and tired with chronic illness. You have helped me to improve my life.”
--- Chronic Pain PATH Participant

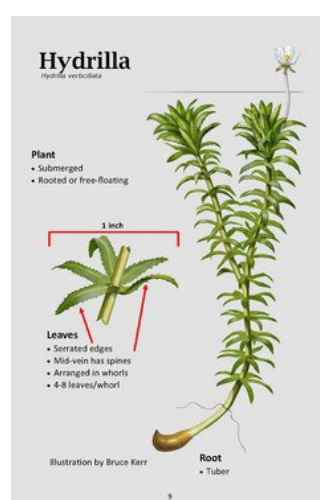
Being healthy means tending to our unique physical health needs, however that takes shape. Whether practicing tai chi in a sunny park or ensuring our immunizations are up to date, we can improve our physical health by managing chronic conditions, preventing injury and illness, and embracing joyful movement to the best of our individual abilities.

Social-emotional and mental health is also key. We can care for this part of our health in a multitude of ways, from practicing mindfulness to learning how to support someone in a mental health crisis. This allows us to cope with negative situations and feelings, foster strong and healthy relationships with others and ourselves, and live with purpose and meaning.

Good sleep, access to healthy foods, supportive relationships — what it means to be healthy is different to us all. That’s why MSU Extension is here to support all the ways we can live healthier lives and build healthier communities, by bringing the vast knowledge and resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses.

In 2023, nearly 300 residents from Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties participated in health and food safety programming including Stress Less with Mindfulness, Personal Action Toward Health (PATH), RELAX: Alternatives to Anger, Home Food Preservation, Safe Food = Healthy Kids, the Michigan Vaccine Project, A Matter of Balance, and Sleep Education for Everyone (SLEEP) just to name a few.

MI Paddle Stewards Earns Credit for Helping Partner Find Invasive Species



MSU Extension Natural Resources and Michigan Sea Grant staff taught a MI Paddle Stewards training in 2023. Months later, participant Alex Florian, the SW x SW CISMA Coordinator, discovered Hydrilla, an aquatic invasive species, in small ponds in Berrien Springs. Alex credited the program with helping him identify the plant. This was the first discovery of Hydrilla in Michigan, and exactly the type of plant that is important to find quickly because it is so invasive. This discovery confirmed that the MSU Extension train-the-trainer approach is successful, and that people who participate in the training are getting the information they need to identify and report invasive species.



2023 Great Lakes Expo

“I cannot say enough good things about this conference. The presence of University information and education (understandable for growers) combined with the industry resources is unmatched for the horticulture industry anywhere else.”
--- GLEXPO Participant

The Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO, Michigan Greenhouse Growers EXPO (GLEXPO) and Lavender Conference is an annual event that draws thousands of farmers from Michigan and beyond to the DeVos Place Convention Center in Grand Rapids each December.

Attendees included fruit growers, vegetable growers, fruit and vegetable growers, and greenhouse growers with 109 attendees from Berrien County. In 2023, the multi-day event had nearly 3,200 attendees in more than 90 educational sessions and workshops with sessions on specialty crops, greenhouses and farm marketing.

MSU Extension’s team of vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, and community food system educators and specialists organized 77 out of 96 recorded educational activities offered. The 2023 show offered 54 Michigan Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) credits, 47.5 Ohio RUP credits, and 100.5 Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) continuing education credits.

Organizers also put together two separate bus tours in conjunction with GLEXPO. The Farm Market Bus had 152 participants on three buses visiting six farm market and agritourism operations to the east and northeast of Grand Rapids. The Greenhouse Biological Control Essentials: Setting Yourself Up for Success Workshop and Bus Tour visited Walters Gardens in Zeeland.

Citizen Planners Make an Impact in Berrien Local Government Planning

In spring 2023, MSU Extension partnered with Lake Charter Township to provide training to 50 land use decision makers in Southwest Michigan through the Citizen Planner Program, a six week course that focuses on what planning commissioners and zoning board of appeals members need to successfully and confidently fulfill their roles. Of those who completed an evaluation for the Citizen Planner Lake Charter Township program, 92% reported that their understanding of planning best practices had increased compared to before the program. One such best practice is the importance of using the master plan to guide land use and other important community decision.

After learning about the important, and oft forgotten, role of the master plan, a couple of Citizen Planner participants took it upon themselves to share this information with other local government leaders in the county. These individuals were part of the Best Practices Committee of the Berrien County Strategic Leadership Council. This committee meets regularly "to share insights and support one another with common agenda items all while working in the spirit of 'a win for one community is a win for Berrien County'." The Citizen Planner participants shared lessons, readings, and other materials with the group as part of a discussion on best practices with master plans.

Participants in the Citizen Planner program are asked to complete an evaluation at the end of the series.

Respondents answered questions about how confident they were in different areas compared to before taking Citizen Planner. The percentage of respondents who reported being "More" or "Much more" confident in a particular area are as follows:

- Speak up during meetings by asking questions and making comments: 85%
- Rely on my knowledge rather than depending on planning staff: 85%
- Read and understand the information in my packet before the meeting: 88%
- Answer questions from other members on my board or commission based on my planning and zoning knowledge: 92%
- Successfully complete my current term as an appointed or elected official: 88%
- Refer to and find information in my zoning ordinance or master plan: 85%
- Suggest new or improved operating procedures or processes for my board or commission: 77%
- Use my knowledge and skills to be a more effective planning official: 96%

Of the 50 individuals who registered for Citizen Planner in Lake Charter Township, 36 completed all six sessions and earned their certificate of competition.

How will respondents use the information they learned?

- "I want to become much more informed about the master plan, zoning ordinance, I might attend other planning commission meetings."
- "If I have questions, I know where to look now."
- "We are starting the process to review our Master Plan."

In July, John Humphrey, Mayor of New Buffalo and Citizen Planner participant, gave a presentation on the importance of the community's master plan to a joint meeting of the New Buffalo City Council and Planning Commission. The City was reviewing their plan to decide if updates were needed. To help the city council and planning commission with this task, the mayor presented on the purpose of the master plan, statutory requirements, and the plan's connection to zoning. These theoretical concepts were presented alongside examples from the city's plan and recent development projects.

The presentation served as a great example of a Citizen Planner participant taking the knowledge gained from the program and using it to educate others, inform local decisions, and improve their community. Additionally, his presentation was completed as part of the process of becoming a Master Citizen Planner (MCP).

MCPs are individuals who have completed the Citizen Planner Program and shown a commitment to continued education on land use issues. MCPs have been shown to have increased satisfaction serving on their public bodies, increased length of time served and improved working relationships and citizen involvement. To be an MCP, one must complete the Citizen Planner program, pass an exam, and give a capstone presentation based on what they learned in the course. MCPs must complete six hours of continuing education each year to maintain MCP status.



150 Berrien County Seniors Benefit from Senior Project FRESH/Market FRESH

Senior Project FRESH/Market FRESH (SPF), part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill, is a program aimed at older adults, helping them incorporate more fresh fruit and vegetables into their diets. Senior Project Fresh was created to benefit the restricted income senior and as a secondary benefit to the Michigan farmer.

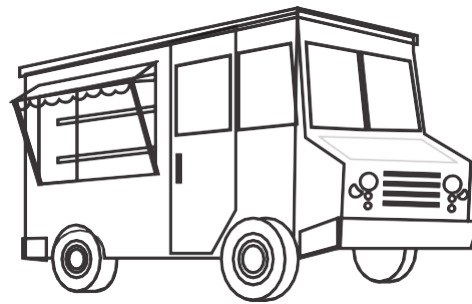
The program provides participants with free nutrition education and \$25 in coupons that can be exchanged for fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods sold at local farmers' markets and roadside stands. Residents aged 60 or older with a total household income of \$26,973 or less for an individual, or \$36,482 for a couple, are eligible to apply for the program.

In 2023, at the Benton Harbor farmers market, as well as at the Greater Niles Senior Center, MSU Extension community nutrition instructors Christian Haack, Jane Toll and Krystal Avila provided educational presentations and Senior Project FRESH produce vouchers to 150 Berrien County seniors.

"I had reports from the local farmers market that due to the influx of Senior Project FRESH coupons, the local stands were moving produce at an accelerated rate. This was great to hear as it meant that the coupons were getting used and bringing more Michigan-grown produce into the diets of local senior citizens," Christian Haack, community nutrition instructor for MSU Extension Berrien County says.

Nutrition Education at HOPE Resources

MSU Extension Community Nutrition Instructor Christian Haack established a new partnership with Hope Resources in Coloma in 2023 and has had real success in educating the participants on nutrition and wellness. The audience for his Cooking for One series is mostly seniors. The director had been wanting to get cooking classes into the pantry for almost a decade but for some reason or another, it hadn't happened. Being able to be a part of bringing cooking classes into the pantry and allowing those who had an interest in learning how to make their cooking lives both easier and more nutritious has been well worth the effort. We have been having a lot of fun with taste testing and trying new foods. For a handful in the group, this has also meant the first time trying certain foods. For example, on smoothie day, there was a gentleman who especially exclaimed his disinterest in mushy foods. We first made a smoothie with mixed Michigan fruits and vanilla yogurt. For one woman, it was the first smoothie she had tried in her life and she loved it. Most seemed to enjoy the lesson and the gentleman who had previously shown disinterest, tried it and admitted he liked it. We then made a banana and spinach smoothie which faced a bit more skepticism but upon trying, the group was once again pleased, including the gentleman who was unsure if he would be willing to taste the mushy mixture.



How to Start a Food Truck Business – Southwest Michigan Entrepreneurs Want to Know

In 2023, the How to Start a Food Business online course was designed for entrepreneurs considering starting a food truck or mobile food business in Michigan.

Each module walks through the process of developing a business plan based on the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) business plan template, developing a menu, selecting a food truck, trailer, or cart, writing a marketing plan and identifying your target customers and competitors as well as Michigan's Mobile Unit and Special Transitory Food Unit (STFU) licensing processes.

This free, self-paced course was developed by Michigan State University (MSU) Extension and the MSU Product Center in partnership with the Grand Rapids Food Truck Association, GROW, Prep Space and the Kent County Health Department.

To earn a certificate of completion, participants must earn a 100% score on all nine quizzes.

Of the 246 participants who attended throughout the state, 18 attended from Berrien, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties.

