

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

Cheboygan County

Cheboygan County

February 2006

Cheboygan County Extension
870 S. Main, PO Box 70,
Cheboygan, MI 49721-0070

P: 231-627-8815
F: 231-627-8408

E-mail: msue16@msu.edu
Web: www.msue.msu.edu/Cheboygan

2006 Small Farm Conference brings crowds, changes to northern Michigan

The location changed but the outcome was the same. The seventh annual Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference was held at a new location at the Grayling High School this January. The move was made to accommodate more speakers.

Though there were some suggestions for future improvements, the overall evaluation of the conference was very positive. As in the past, one third of the attendees were there for the first time and two thirds had attended a previous NMSFC. Of those that had attended before, many had made significant changes to their operations.

Responses to a question about what changes people are making in their communities after attending the conference include:

- [We are] starting a local farmers' market
- I eat completely different because of [the conferences]
- Thank you! I realized my dream job could be viable and is as I now work for organic vegetable and crop growers.

More than 550 people attended the 2006 conference. They had the chance to see more than 30 vendors from across the state promoting many Michigan-produced goods.

The attendees heard from speakers on holistic decision making, best management practices for weed control and cover cropping and farming to enhance beneficial insects, which can potentially replace some pesticide use.

Two sessions focused on alternative energy at the commercial and farm levels. These programs highlighted existing opportunities, such as wind farms, but also covered solar energy, biomass use, biofuel production and thermal energy and presented opportunities for growth.

The keynote speaker spoke about the controversial topic of genetically modified organisms (GMO) and how they may affect agriculture's future. Percy Schmeiser, a Canadian farmer, told his family's story about how GMO contamination in his crops changed his life forever.

Nearly all (more than 90 percent) of the audience commented that Schmeiser's information was somewhat or very valuable to their own operations. "We need to hear that local actions have international implications and vice versa," one participant said.

-Ben Bartlett, County Extension Director & Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator



Focus Areas for Local Extension Programming

Building strong communities
Strengthening agricultural profitability
Encouraging responsible land and natural resource use
Building healthy families
Helping youth succeed

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION
CHEBOYGAN
COUNTY

Cheboygan Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site

MSU Extension's fourth season is in full swing coordinating volunteers to help prepare income tax returns for low-income families at no charge. Eleven volunteers are working with a new site manager, Gerry Vanderhart, to provide Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA).

MSU Extension staff members make appointments and verify that people who qualify for this free service have the correct information when they arrive at the site. Individuals who take advantage of the service save the cost of preparation fees and the tax preparation volunteers make sure they take full advantage of the earned income tax credit (EITC).

In the last four years, individuals have received an average return of more than \$1,000. These individuals sometimes live paycheck to paycheck and having refunds directly deposited into their bank accounts through e-filing allows them to catch up on bills and begin to making ends meet.

Everyone who schedules a tax preparation appointment also receives information from the MSU Extension Family Nutrition Program, on such topics as weekly meal planning and budgeting. The VITA site is operated in partnership with the Cheboygan chapter of the United Way.

-Patti Spinella, Food and Nutrition Program Educator

Team Nutrition reaching children early

The last few months have been very busy for MSU Extension Team Nutrition/Family Nutrition Program educator Mary Ellen Enos. She has been in local elementary schools and Headstart classes reading to children from The "Pyramid Between the Pages" books.

Pyramid Between the Pages is an MSU Extension program that introduces children to concepts related to nutrition and exercise while it promotes reading.

Children in two Cheboygan Headstart classes especially enjoyed "Clap your Hands." "My Amazing Body" was the book of choice at West Elementary. More than 200 kindergarten and first-grade students heard and discussed this

book with Enos. More recently, nearly 300 second- and third-graders heard about "Carla's Sandwich" and how unusual combinations of foods can be very tasty.

The students don't just sit and listen, they participate in activities like those described in the books. Enos is welcomed at the schools and Headstart centers and the children enjoy sharing in new books that encourage health through exercise and nutritious food. By sharing lessons about healthy eating and exercise as well as building a love of reading at an early age, the Team Nutrition program can affect children for the rest of their lives.

-Patti Spinella,
Food and Nutrition Program Educator

County Issues ID Process Kicks Off

Every county Extension office relies on the input of community stakeholders to make decisions on programming efforts. Through the Issues ID process conducted in January, the Cheboygan MSUE staff gathered input from key leaders from throughout the county.

The input was gathered over a two-meeting time period in which community leaders heard from experts on statewide issues such as Communities and Economy. This broader perspective helped the individuals identify challenges and opportunities facing Cheboygan county in eight important areas.

The group identified important topics to be addressed in areas of health (specifically obesity), families and youth, agriculture and land use, water and natural resources as well as economy and communities.

The next steps in the process will be to match up existing programs with the issues identified at the meetings, combine their issue statements with results of an ongoing online survey about MSUE and MAES, work with the Cheboygan Extension Council to further outline program goals, and develop a plan of work for future Cheboygan County programming.

- Ben Bartlett, County Extension Director