

MICHIGAN STATE STUDENT ORGANIC FARM



2020 ANNUAL
REPORT



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THANK YOU!

Staff:

Katie Brandt, Educational Programs Manager

Sarah Geurkink, Farm Manager

Daniel Seggebruch, Assistant Production Manager

Teresa Zbiciak, Fall CSA Manager



2020 Undergraduate Crew:

Abby Kuplicki

Breanna Craig

Lexi Dalecke

Jaime Davidson

Reilly Ford

April Hoard

Lauren House

Freedom Shelley

Eryn Lippet

Righteous Tipton

Anna McGuffie

Erin Rau

Nevaeh Marshal

Alyssa Guadagni

Kate Kelly

Livia Kelly

Lauren Shaffner

Lydia Mehlhose

Ethan Zerger

Abbie Faber

Brad Kalinowski

Amanda Cullin

Allison Nash

Shayla French

Conor Crennell

THANK YOU!

2020 OFTP (FBPA) Participants:

Cathy Cook
Loretta Crum
Kristen Neal
Daniel Schneider
Shari Smith
Neil Taylor
Angela Van Order
Teresa Zbiciak

In Kind:

Szendrei Lab
Brainard Lab
MSU Sustainability
Phil Tocco
Eric Hanson
Green Wagon Farm

Donations:

Michael Adsit
Cynthia Allen
Carolyn Baird
William Baird
Britany Benson Wujcik
Daniel Brainard
David Closs
Noel Closs
Carl Davidson
Natalie Davidson
Jeffrey Delaney
Robin Delaney
Jessica Edwards
Naim Edwards
Mary Emmett
Shelagh Ferguson-Miller

Donations Cont. :

James Geiger
Kathleen Geiger
David Giodan
Vennie Gore
Michael Hamm
Lisa Hamm
Heather Hart
Steven Heldt
Jeri Johnson
Leelyn Johnson
Pauline Jones
Margaret Kelly
Shane Kelly
Cynthia Lounsbery
Lindsay Mensch
Robert Miller
Mary Mitchell
Sherry Ochsner
Terry Place
Julia Popenoe
Richard Rising
Susan Rising
Debra Rusz
Richard Rusz
Sandra Seaton
Kathryn Severin
Blaine Severin
Janice Simpson
William Simpson
Nancy Stark
Heather Swain
Anne Swan
Dennis Swan
Steven Villanueva
Benjamin Wells
Lynn Wolff
Nicholas Wujcik
Laure Young

LETTER FROM THE MANAGERS

2020 was marked with many challenges at the Student Organic Farm, but ultimately the year was a story of successful adaptations and a strengthened relationship with our customers and community.

The crew was preparing produce for our final winter CSA distribution on March 11 when we received the announcement that in-person instruction at MSU was canceled. In the weeks that followed, we had no crew, limited knowledge about the novel coronavirus, and very little idea of what the season would look like. Would we be allowed to farm, would we be able to hire students, and could we come up with a safe and socially distanced CSA pick-up? In the next month, our greenhouse heater would break on a cold night, our campus wholesale account would close most of its locations for the year, and our farm stand would be canceled indefinitely.

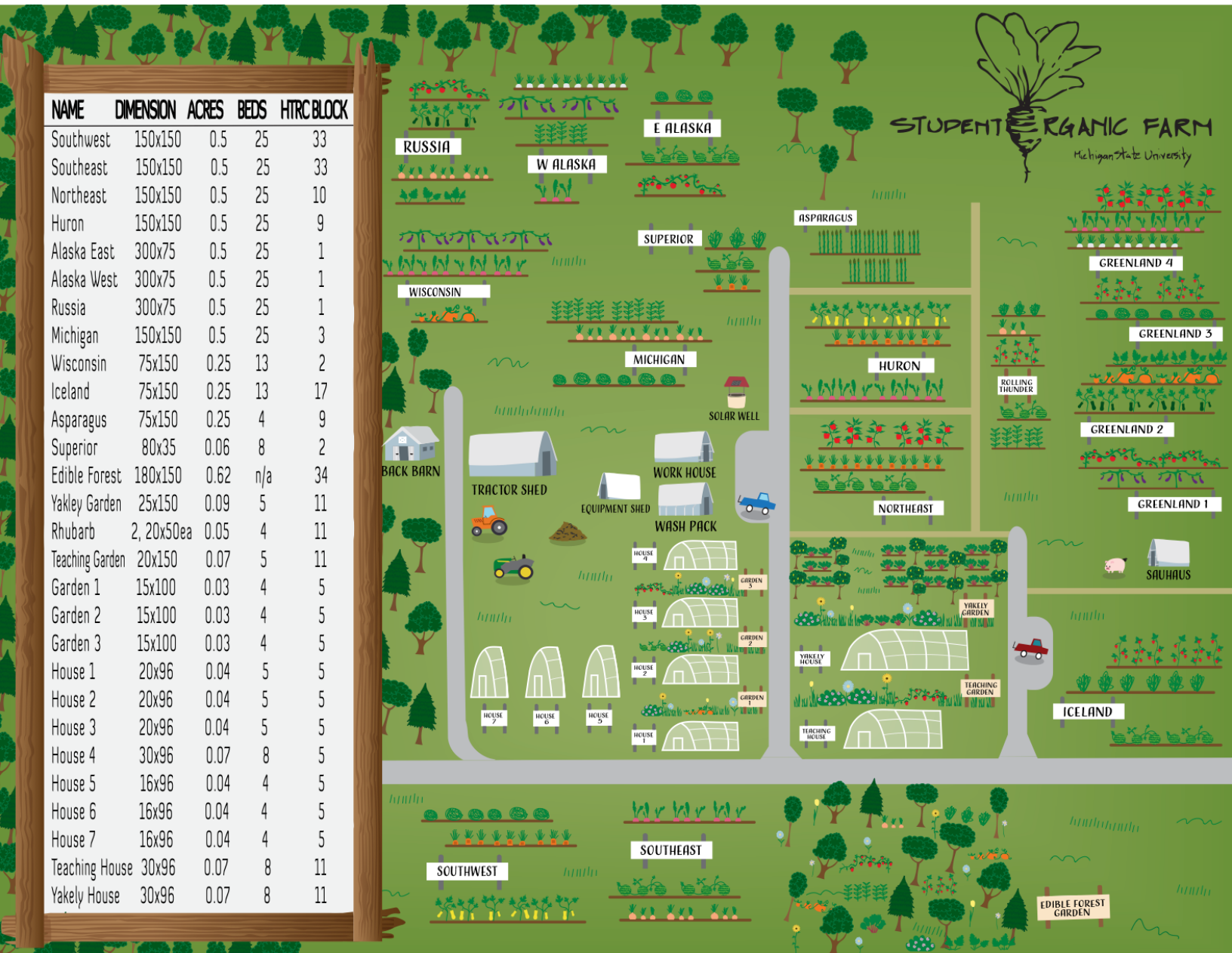
Despite it all, with tremendous support from our CSA members, a bit of innovation, and the hard work of our staff and crew (who were able to return two weeks before summer CSA began), the season came together just in time. Our online store was created, our smaller wholesale accounts grew, and we wrapped up the summer with over 200 CSA members—more than we have had in years. Our assistant production manager, Daniel Seggebruch, shouldered extra responsibility throughout the season and we were lucky to convince seasoned farmer Teresa Zbiciak to take on some management responsibilities while our Farm Manager was on parental leave.

The pandemic reignited enthusiasm for local food—as supply chains faltered, restaurants shut down, and consumers suddenly found themselves with more time to cook at home, local farms like SOF saw a significant increase in demand. Consumers were able to get a very clear picture of how important local food systems are: they are resilient to supply chain disruptions, allow for meaningful human connections within a community, support local economies, and cut down on environmental costs such as packaging and transportation (not to mention the food tastes better!).

On the education front, we had just a week to pivot from intensive hands-on instruction of the Organic Farmer Training Program to the new 100% online Farm Business Plan Accelerator in March due to COVID-19. SOF Educational Programs Manager Katie Brandt began teaching HRT 251, Organic Farming Principles and Practices to undergraduates in Spring Semester of 2020 which also switched to online instruction. We also created a Student Organic Farm project on iNaturalist! Join us at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/msu-student-organic-farm> to post photos and identify the diversity of beneficial & pest insects, crops & weeds at the farm.

More than ever, in 2020, the support of our community—customers, students, and crew—was a vital force for the Student Organic Farm."

Map of Student Organic Farm



Map designed by Diego Cruz Fernandez, Undergraduate CCEL Volunteer Spring Semester 2021

2020 BY THE NUMBERS



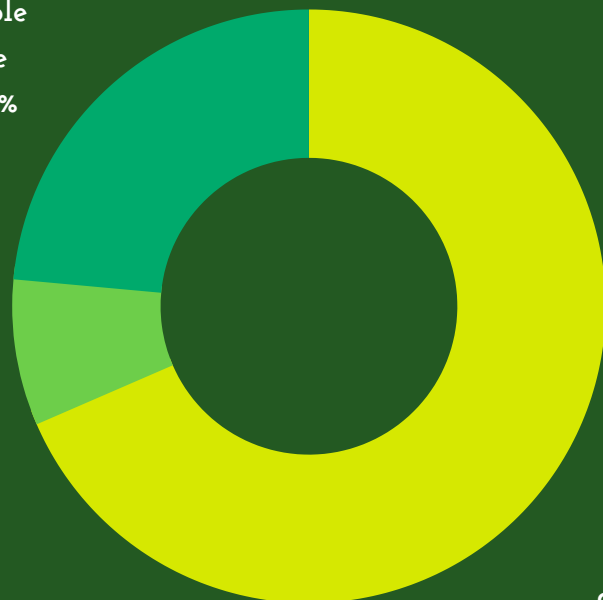
- 23 Undergraduate Student Members
- \$220,405 total sales
- 308 CSA memberships and 8 FBPA graduates
- 1,291 Hours of Learning Time
- Over 200 Unique Plant Varieties Grown
- Thousands of pounds of food donated to our campus food bank



Income Broken Down By Market

Whole
Sale
23.6%
\$51,910

Market Share Money + Online Store Sales in
2020
8%
\$17,545



CSA
Shares
68.5%
\$150,950

CSA

In 2003, the Student Organic Farm became the first Michigan farm to provide year-round CSA shares. Since then, we have continued to grow our membership, especially within the MSU community.

At the beginning of each season, our CSA members pay in advance for a weekly share of vegetables from the farm. This model benefits the farm's cash-flow and allows us to purchase the supplies needed to produce our crops in some of the tightest months of the year. Members receive a variety of produce each week, which exposes them to new vegetables they may not otherwise experience. We are able to curate shares based on what is abundant any given week. We keep records to ensure our members receive the value of what they paid for at the start of the season.

This year, we successfully adapted our buffet-style CSA distribution to a socially distanced, drive-through pick-up that was a huge success. Between winter, summer, and fall, we sold over 300 shares in 2020. We're humbled and grateful for this tremendous support and trust from our community.

There is no better way to eat seasonally and locally at MSU than through the Student Organic Farm's CSA!



CSA Member Testimonials

Dear Student Organic Farm community,

Many years ago, in the sixties, when I was beginning to raise our four children, I turned to Adele Davis and her books, including Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit, as a resource for feeding our family. It was important to use as many organic and pesticide free things as possible. In those days, you were considered a curiosity if you talked about "organics." A number of years ago, I discovered your Student Organic Farm. It was a dream come true. Your delicious freshly picked veggies have been staples since then. I don't know how I would have gotten through this pandemic year without you.



As a writer, I always think about ways to include nature and food in my writing. I grew up in a small Southern town, Columbia, Tennessee, as a part of an extended African American family. The vegetable garden in our big backyard was rich and varied. Your impressive array of veggies recalls those days.

Take care and thanks,
Sandra Seaton



I'm a graduate student in the Department of Horticulture and my research focuses on weed control on organic farms. This is how I first learned about the Student Organic Farm and the great staff and crew that run it. The SOF is great to have on-campus for teaching, research, and access to quality produce.

I'm an avid gardener in the summer, but in cold months I miss eating fresh produce. The Fall and Winter CSA shares are great options for me since the student organic farm has the infrastructure to keep producing well past when I can be gardening. I especially like trying new winter squash varieties from the CSA for soups and roasting!

- Daniel Priddy

Wholesale

MSU Culinary Services

Coronavirus significantly limited our sales to Culinary Services—our biggest wholesale customer in the last several years—due to closure or significant downsizing of dining halls in 2020. Still, Kurt Kwiatkowski and Brian Latz worked with us to create standing orders so that we could provide food to the students who remained on campus throughout the year. We continue to be grateful for the partnership we have with MSU Culinary Services, especially their willingness to pivot and make a new plan despite the unprecedented events of this year.

Allen Neighborhood Center (ANC)

For the last several years, the MSU Student Organic Farm has been a participating farm in the Allen Neighborhood Center's Veggie Box program, an aggregated CSA that provides a convenient way for its members to subscribe to fresh, high quality, and local produce from Mid-Michigan farms.

This year, we were especially grateful to be participating in the Veggie Box program. The major disruptions caused by COVID-19 betrayed the vulnerabilities of our food system, and the ANC provides a great avenue for families and individuals to turn to and support local food systems that are rooted in equity and sustainability.

Online Store

Due to Coronavirus, our campus farm stand was never open in 2020, but we were able to launch our first ever Online Store. Customers can now create an account and order produce weekly for pick-up at the farm's socially-distant drive through distribution each Thursday. The online store also offers more opportunities for CSA members to purchase extra items while picking up their shares.



Undergraduate Engagement

In 2020, we were able to offer an immersive, hands-on farming experience to 25 undergraduate crew members. These student-farmers grew food for more than 150 families in the greater Lansing area through our weekly Community Supported Agriculture distribution (masked and physically distanced, of course). For many of those students, being able to safely work and learn “offline” while serving the important purpose of helping to feed their community was the highlight of a very difficult year.

We also partnered with the MSU Center for Community Engaged Learning to host thirty student volunteers from HRT251. Unfortunately, this opportunity was cancelled due to COVID-19.

MSU Student Organic Farm crew positions are now listed in the My Spartan Story system, allowing undergraduate crew members to include their work at the farm on their official transcript.



Crew Highlights

Breanna Craig:

Sophomore, Landscape and Nursery Management

Video: MSU IAT student Breanna Craig and the Student Organic Farm

"I love the farm because I feel very productive and accomplished, and continuously learn every day. It keeps my mind sharp and helps me obtain info that I will continue to use in my career."

(Pictured right)



Lauren House:

Third-year undergraduate, Arts and Humanities, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems (minor)

Lauren House is studying to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Arts and Humanities and a minor in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems. Lauren is an undergraduate crew lead at the farm and plans on working in the nonprofit sector after graduation, helping to provide communities with better access to healthy food systems. She is incredibly passionate about sustainable farming practices and feels empowered at the farm to see those practices in action. The MSU Student Organic Farm has been monumental in helping shape her idea of what farming and food systems can look like, and she is excited to continue learning about sustainable practices as she continues her studies at MSU.

(Pictured left)



Organic Farm Training Program & Farm Business Plan Accelerator

The COVID-19 pandemic cancelled MSU classes just a week before the 2020 Organic Farmer Training was set to start on March 16, 2020. We quickly pivoted to an online Farm Business Plan Accelerator course which started on March 23. This course had no hands-on activities and instead focused on interactive online collaboration between participants to define the goals, site plans, marketing and financial plans for their farms and to chart a course by writing a Farm Business Plan.

Participant Profiles

Daniel Schneider

Founder of Detroit Peppers, which powers Sylhet Farms and Banglatown Farmers Market
Banglatown Neighborhood in Detroit, MI

I started Detroit Peppers in 2013 to support a small community garden project. Seven years later, in 2020, we have helped grow and distribute over 12,500 lbs of food to poor community residents with volunteers who put in over 86,000 service hours. In 2020 we helped Sylhet Farms build out an additional acre of property that will be used to double our total production from the last seven years in 2021, so we are planning to grow over 12,000 lbs of food in 2021. The FBPA was essential in thinking through this growth and our big next step, securing funds to hire a full-time farm manager to focus on production.



Participant Profiles



Teresa Zbiciak

Field Manager - Raindance Organic Farm, Ann Arbor, MI
Former Farm Co-Manager - MSU Student Organic Farm, Holt, MI

"With all the changed plans and upheaval that the Covid-19 pandemic wrought, I am so grateful for the pivot that created the Farm Business Plan Accelerator and its pioneering cohort. Committing to the course - even as my goals and location(!) changed - provided me with an incredible community and a wealth of resources that I frequently return to with fresh eyes. My connection to the MSU Student Organic Farm was pivotal to re-aligning me with my passion and my purpose. I am so excited to be able to share what I've learned (and continue to learn) with the next generation of sustainable growers."

Neil Taylor

Farmer (Also "Senior Atlassian Engineer" @ Coyote Creek Consulting), Blissfield, MI

Small row crop farm completing transition of 350 acres to Certified Organic in 2021. Currently growing corn, soybeans, wheat, and barley. MAEAP verified in Farmstead and Cropping Systems and committed to healthy conservation practices. The Farm Business Plan Accelerator program has helped shape some new ideas and see a broader scope of organic practices in agriculture. The mix of specialties among classmates was helpful to see a larger picture of what possibilities lie in organic agriculture and help shape plans for the future. Starting into organic plans can be intimidating with all the necessary paperwork and planning, but the FBP program helped guide to many excellent resources that I will continue to use and build upon.



Where Are They Now?

Carole Caplan-Sosin, The Farm on Jennings Owner and CEO (Chief Experimenting Officer!), E-RYT-500 Yoga and Meditation Instructor, and accredited Yoga School, Ann Arbor, MI

The Farm on Jennings evolved from a need to be nourished and nourish others in body, mind and spirit. Informed by permaculture and motivated by organic principles, the farm is committed to supporting health and regenerativity of people and place. A food forest and restored prairie grow alongside cut flowers, medicinal and culinary herbs and seasonal vegetables. Post-COVID rentals are available to share the magic of the farm with others, and classes are offered to help everyone grow.

Coming new to farming in my late 50's was a daunting task. I credit the invaluable experience of the MSU OFTP for giving me both the knowledge and courage to make this dream a reality. The hands-on learning made it possible for me to farm alongside the MSU farm on a week-by-week basis, the extensive materials provided were-and continue to be-a fabulous resource, and the farm tours helped me to imagine what might be possible. I am ever grateful to MSU and the staff of this incredible program for the opportunity!



Matthew Romans, Giving Tree Farm Manager (Lansing MI)

Giving Tree Farm provides vocational training for cognitively impaired persons by creating a beautiful rehabilitative environment, while also growing a large selection of produce for local and online sales. "The OFTP gave me bearings amidst a confusing agricultural landscape, and without it I would not have been prepared or qualified to manage a farm. Farming is life-long learning, and I am glad I received a strong foundation at MSU."



Credit Bearing Courses

HRT251: Organic Farming Principles and Practices, taught by Katie Brandt



Tours

All farm tours were cancelled from March 11 until the end of 2020 due to the pandemic. Before that and virtually thereafter, we were able to host the following groups:

- January 22, 2020, Julie Weisbrod – Vista Grand Villa Senior Living Facility
- June 5, 2020, Virtual hoophouse tour for Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College
- June 9, 2020 Virtual Tour of the Farm to MSU Work Life Office

Research Collaboration, Involvement, and Support

Grants that include collaboration with SOF

Appropriate-Scale Mechanization for Sustainable Intensification (ASMC) at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Srivastava, Ajit. 2015-2020. Grant funded by the USAID Sustainable Intensification Innovation Lab (SIIL) at Kansas State University.

Michigan Sustainable Farm Mentors. Brandt, K. 2021 – 2022. USDA-SARE Partnership. \$39,999.

Integrated management strategies to reduce asparagus beetles during harvest Szendrei, Z., Werling, B. 2019-2021. MSU- Project GREEN. \$80,000.

Improving IPM in cole crops in Michigan Szendrei, Z., Werling, B., Phillips, B., Schuh, M. Integrated Pest Information Platform for Extension and Education (iPIPE), Crop-Pest Program, Cooperative Agricultural Project (CAP). \$39,401 (1st year funding), \$38,872 (2nd year funding), 2018-2020.

"Evaluation of integrated bacterial disease management options for organic onion production in southeastern and northcentral United States" USDA-NIFA-ORT grant Award Number: 2019-03518.

Reports, Presentations, Publications, News

Ann Arbor Observer – [Scaling Up: Everyone says they love local food. So why is it so hard to find?](#) (by Trilby MacDonald)

Ann Arbor Observer - [Farming 2.0: Idealistic young farmers face the challenge of making a living from the land](#) (by Trilby MacDonald)

Research Collaboration, Involvement, and Support

Reports, Presentations, Publications, News

Organic Grower magazine - Grower column: Growing new farmers at Michigan State University (By Katie Brandt)

MSU CANR Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: MSU student helps create inclusive space for her peers (by Beth Bonsall)

OUR IMPACT MSU Advancement Newsletter (by Devon Barrett) - On MSU Careers, Art and Organic Farming

MSU Extension: MSU Organic Farmer Training Program accepting 2020 applicants (by Katie Brandt)

MSU Extension: MSU Student Organic Farm 2019 Annual Report (By Abigail Harper)

MSU Extension: In-person, on-farm learning for beginning farmers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (by Katie Brandt)

The State News: MSU Student Organic Farm Summer 2020 (by Annie Barker)

MSU Today: Down on the Farm - Student Organic Farm celebrates National CSA Day (by Sarah Geurkink)

MSU Extension: Asparagus beetles: Where are they overwintering? (by Jennifer Zavalnitskaya and Zsafia Szendrei)

MSU Today: Student Organic Farm offers veggie pick up during the winter semester (by Teresa Zbiciak)



Research Collaboration, Involvement, and Support

Graduate Students with SOF Collaboration

Natalie Constancio (Vegetable Entomology Lab): MS project that includes helping onion growers transition from conventional to organic growing practices. SOF participated in a large-scale survey across Michigan to learn which pathogens, pests, and natural enemies are present in organic and conventional fields.

Jen Zavalnitskaya (Vegetable Entomology Lab): Scouting for asparagus beetles at SOF.

Other Collaborations

Allen Neighborhood Center

The SOF is a participant grower in the Allen Neighborhood Center's Veggie box, an aggregated CSA program.

USDA-SARE State Plan and Community Sustainability Department

Michigan Department of Corrections / Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility

SOF Staff were invited to guest speak at Vocational Horticulture, an innovative horticulture training program at the only women's prison in Michigan. Participants have a farmers' market for prison staff in the summer and also grow year-round in a greenhouse and hoophouse.

University of California Santa Cruz - Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS)

SOF participated in a strategic planning listening session for CASFS as they work to expand their outreach and inclusion of underserved communities with their farmer training programs.

University of Wisconsin Seed to Kitchen Collaborative

The Student Organic Farm grew out several lettuce varieties in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin Seed to Kitchen Collaborative, a program that connects plant breeders focused on organic systems to Midwest farmers and chefs, to create delicious, well-adapted vegetable varieties for local organic production. This collaboration presents a unique opportunity to focus on vegetable variety characteristics important to local food systems, such as flavor, fresh-market quality and agronomic performance on smaller-scale diversified farms.



Photo Credit: Annie Barker

Research Collaboration, Involvement, and Support

Other Collaborations

USDA-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education

Katie Brandt served on the USDA-SARE Youth Educator Grant Review Committee for the twelve state North Central SARE region and has taken on a 0.25 FTE role with the SARE State Plan in Michigan to work on beginning farmer projects.

GLEXP

Katie Brandt organized two Organic Opportunities sessions for the Great Lakes Fruit & Vegetable Expo. Speakers included Heather Anderson and Rebecca Henderson discussing socially distant direct marketing including REKO Markets and Customizable CSAs. Imani Foster described the Grown in Detroit cooperative farm marketing model developed through her work with Keep Growing Detroit. Katie also assisted Vicki Morrone in organizing the Introduction to Organics session where Susan Sharp of Open Sky Organic Farm, Mikayla Rowden and Carol Caplan of The Farm on Jennings discussed their decisions to certify as Organic, as Certified Naturally Grown.

Ingham County Health Department

The SOF grew CSA shares for the Capital Area Prescription for Health Program funded by the 2020 Michigan Nutrition & Healthy Lifestyles Grant. The CSA shares are distributed to families who have children over the 80th percentile for BMI while they access health care from Care Free Medical and other clinics in Lansing.

RISE

In 2020, SOF continued to host a pick-up site for our CSA at the Bailey Greenhouse and Urban Farm. Looking ahead, RISE will be hosting a course on pig rearing at the Student Organic Farm, co-taught by Dr. Dale Rozeboom (Animal Science), Jorhie Beadle (RISE Assistant Director), Kevin Turner (MSU Swine Farm Manager) and Dr. Seven Mattes (Center for Integrated Studies/Anthropology). The course was selected by the MSU Hub for Innovation in Teaching and Learning as a "studio course". RISE has been working with the Hub and their team of pedagogy consultants over the past year on the course. One of the many objectives of a studio course is to create an interdisciplinary team of faculty (both junior and senior) to mentor this type of highly experiential instruction at MSU. We continue to see value in sustaining our collaboration between SOF and RISE and our students. RISE director Laurie Thorp worked on a committee with SOF and MSU Extension that looked at the possibility of making the SOF CSA share a HR benefit to MSU employees.

Research Collaboration, Involvement, and Support

Other Collaborations

MSU Food Bank

The MSU Student Food Bank serves MSU students experiencing food insecurity by providing free food and related items. In 2020, the Student Organic Farm donated thousands of pounds of produce that went directly to Spartans in need.

Staff Outreach

Season Extension and Winter CSA (January 2020). Presented by Sarah Geurkink at Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility, Ypsilanti, MI

Growing Ginger in Zone 5b (January 2020). Presented by Daniel Seggebruch at Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference, Acme, MI

Crop Rotations for Vegetable Farms (January 2020). Presented by Katie Brandt at Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference, Acme, MI

Stretching the Growing Season (February 2020). Presented by Sarah Geurkink at Meridian Garden Club, Okemos, MI

Crop Rotations for Vegetable Farms (January 2020). Presented by Katie Brandt at Michigan Family Farms Conference, Kalamazoo, MI

Farm Labor (March 2020). Presented by Katie Brandt for the MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar Series, online

Gardening 101 (June 2020). Presented virtually by Sarah Geurkink at MSU Work Life Office, East Lansing, MI

PBS Tastemakers: Blom Meadworks (July 2020). Interview of Daniel Seggebruch

MSU Sustainability - Spartans in Action Pledge: MSU Student Organic Farm (August 2020) Presented virtually by Katie Brandt for all incoming MSU freshman as part of orientation in a video compiled by the MSU Sustainability Office

Meeting Michigan's Beginning Farmers' Needs - Where to Start? (September) Presented virtually by Katie Brandt for the MSU Fall Extension Convergence

How to Support Beginning Farmers: Brainstorming solutions (November 2020) Presented by Katie Brandt for the Michigan Good Food Summit, online



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