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## Project RED reaches thousands

Many children (and adults) don't know how food is produced or how farmers protect natural resources. They also don't know that there is an agricultural industry in Washtenaw County, that agri-food sector comprises the second-largest segment of Michigan's economy or that there are numerous careers related to food production in urban, suburban and rural areas.

To help meet this need, Washtenaw County MSU Extension, the Washtenaw County Farm Bureau and the Washtenaw Farm Council sponsor Project RED (Rural Education Days). The purpose of this annual program is to educate youth and adults about local agriculture and natural resources. Participants learn about Michigan agriculture, where food and fiber comes from and they have the opportunity to learn about animals and how water quality is protected.

Washtenaw County was the first to develop Project RED 20 years ago and it has been a model for similar programs throughout the state as a way to educate youth about agriculture and celebrate the contributions of local farmers and agriculture related industries to Michigan.

The program is made possible with help from more than 300 volunteers and with support from 30 organizations and local farms. In the past 20 years, Washtenaw County Project RED has reached more than 43,000 students, teachers and chaperones.

In evaluations that are conducted following the event each year, 85 percent of the participants say they have increased their understanding of agriculture and where their food comes from.

More than 2,600 third grade students and teachers from around the county have registered for the 2010 Washtenaw County Project RED, which will be held April 27-29. There will also be a public Project RED program on April 28. All of these educational programs take place at the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds in Ann Arbor.

A special Project RED 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration will be held in conjunction with the evening program.  
*Nancy Thelen, 734-222-3825*

## New Extension educator joins Washtenaw County staff

Frank Gublo has joined the Washtenaw County MSU Extension staff as an agriculture educator with an entrepreneurship development capacity. Previous to coming to Washtenaw County, Gublo served as the Huron County Extension director and as an MSU Product Center counselor.

Gublo is working with local producers and entrepreneurs in the food industry.

"I am very impressed with the creativity and the work ethic of the people in Washtenaw County," he said.

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## Gublo joins Washtenaw MSUE—continued

As an MSU Product Center counselor, Gublo assists food entrepreneurs in determining whether their new product ideas have potential in the open market. He has worked with one entrepreneur who is working to develop an edible mushroom product and several individuals who are starting new farming ventures in the fruit and vegetable industry.

Gublo brings years of agriculture and business experience to Washtenaw County. Prior to joining MSU Extension, he worked for Wells Fargo and Company, assisting farmers and growers on the national level. He also operated a successful hoof trimming business.

“I look forward to meeting and working with food and farming entrepreneurs in Washtenaw County because the folks here are creatively looking to the future,” Gublo said.

### **Program educates decision makers about agriculture zoning**

The changing face of agriculture, including more urban agriculture has affected Michigan’s Right-to-Farm Act and how it relates to local zoning control.

To help local officials and planning commissioners increase their understanding in this area, Washtenaw County MSU Extension sponsored an educational program on “Right-to-Farm and Zoning for Agriculture” on Feb. 3.

Participants represented several municipalities. MSU Extension southeast regional land use educator Glenn Pape presented the program and focused on eligibility for nuisance protection under the Right-to-Farm Act, the extent to which local zoning retains control over agricultural land uses and how the Right-to-Farm Act provides protection for the environment and minimizes negative impacts on surrounding land use.

An evaluation after the program showed that all of the participants gained new knowledge about the Right-to-Farm Act. All of them plan to review the new Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs) and will review their planning ordinances. Nearly all (90 percent) expected they

would make changes in their planning ordinances based on what they learned in the program.

*Nancy Thelen, 734-222-3825*

### **Nutrition education goes to Milan**

MSU Extension Food, Nutrition, and Health staff members recognized the need to reach county residents with nutrition education. They joined with Aid in Milan, a local nonprofit organization that assists low-income families and individuals, to offer a six-week nutrition education series to the Milan community.

The series focused on involved healthy cooking discussions and demonstrations, up-to-date nutrition information, creative ways to implement healthy eating on a budget, and breaking down the healthy food preparation process to increase convenience.

A major focus of the series was to educate parents and to also involve children in meal planning. This approach allowed families to learn different ways to include all family members in trying new foods. An added benefit of this programming was to teach parents new ways to “sneak” healthy foods into old recipes by using innovative ideas for recipe modification. Cooking and recipe demonstrations included: green smoothies, quinoa vegetable stir-fry and vegetable frittatas.

Survey results demonstrated a very positive response to this programming and a desire to learn more. A vast majority of the participants (90 percent) said that they had increased their vegetable and fruit consumption as a result of what they learned in the program, they showed a 100 percent increase in whole grains consumption, an increased desire to try new foods, and more awareness regarding healthy choices. Participants also learned about safe food handling practices and increased their desire to incorporate local and fresh produce into weekly diet choices.

*Georgia Richardson Melody, 734-222-3885*