

## Home Economics



Extension personnel from campus were sent throughout the state to teach classes in home economics. The first mention in Otsego County was in 1923 and was conducted under the local leader plan. This meant that a few residents were trained by an

Extension Specialist then they re-taught the information to the members of the local study groups located around the county. These projects were very popular and brought a complete Extension program into many farm homes which could be reached by no other method.

**1935:** “The interest the leaders took in this project was displayed at the February meeting which was held during one of the worst blizzards. All the roads were blocked and travel was difficult. However, one of the leaders, Mrs. James White, traveled half a mile on snow shoes to get to the road which was open and then had a friend bring her to the meeting. Mrs. Gladys Fox, another leader, traveled  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile on skis and walked the remaining 3 miles in the blizzard to attend the meeting.”

**1936:** The first Home Demonstration Agent assigned to Otsego County was Alice Hertzler in 1936. Programs in the early years included food preparation, human nutrition, hot lunches at rural one-room schools, canning, home furnishings, and sewing.

Part of the  
Otsego County  
Home Economics  
Achievement Day  
Exhibit

May 23, 1935



Extension Study Groups were formed throughout the county as the primary method of delivering the home economics program. They provided an occasion for both educational and social purposes. Study Groups also offered an opportunity to develop leadership skills. Although open to everyone, nearly all of the participants were women.

Study Groups operated through the Michigan Association of Extension Homemakers (MAEH). The association later was renamed Family and Community Education (FCE). Further details can be found on page 26 of this document.

Achievement Day in the spring and the annual Fall Rally brought all the groups together to celebrate their progress and accomplishments.

The Extension worker assigned to this program area went by different titles over the years. These included Home Demonstration Agent, Extension Home Economist, and Family Consumer Science Educator. Some of the Extension Home Economists in Otsego County also served as the 4-H Agent and often served in 2 or more counties.

### Study Topics from the 1960s

International understanding  
Poison proofing the home  
Leadership development  
Stretch the family budget  
Reupholstering older furniture  
Aging the modern way

**1967:** Exhibits at the County Fair “help spread the gospel of their training during the past year”

**1972:** MAEH delegates began attending County Board of Supervisor meetings. It was noted that the tone and temper of the proceedings became more genteel when the women were in the audience.

## Family Nutrition Program (FNP)

The Family Nutrition Program (FNP) began in December 1993. Otsego County was among the first counties in the state to pioneer this innovative approach to assist low income families. FNP provides information and technical assistance to people who are eligible for food stamps. Educational programs are conducted throughout Otsego County to reach people at schools, senior centers, the Friendship Shelter, and 4-H Adventure Quest Day Camp to name a few examples. A home visit to help individuals on a one-on-one basis is another convenient and effective option.



Lori Hunt, FNP Educator, is pictured here with volunteer Joyce Bowers conducting a food demonstration at the 1996 Otsego County Fair.

FNP helps people who receive food stamps make more informed decisions related to buying and preparing food. Typical lesson topics include food safety, meal planning, label reading, and creative ways to enjoy healthy meals. To help the younger generation form good eating habits, a six-week cooking program through 4-H was held at the Vanderbilt Area School during the 1990s.

An example of how Extension program areas “cross pollinate” is Project Fresh. While the main emphasis of Project Fresh is to encourage people to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, it also benefits local growers who sell their produce at the Farmers Market. Project Fresh is administered by WIC (Women, Infants and Children) and distributes a \$20 coupon book to eligible families. A similar program aimed at assisting senior citizens called Senior Project Fresh was added in 2005.

The Demonstration Kitchen located next to the MSU Extension office on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Alpine Center was created in 2005. Several individuals and organizations donated time and materials to renovate the former conference room into the Demonstration Kitchen’s fully equipped two learning labs. Cooking classes for area high school students, senior citizens, 4-H Clubs, and residents of the Transition House keep the facility busy with hands-on educational activities.

St. Mary student, Zack Boerema, in the photo to the right is making cupcakes.



## Parenting Programs



Parenting programs have been provided by MSU Extension for many years in various formats. Several of the annual reports mention Extension Home Economists and Homemaker Study Groups focused on parenting issues.

In more recent times, collaborative programs were administered through the local Extension office. TAPESTRY was operated in conjunction with the Educational School District. Mary Tithof and Michelle Franks conducted one-on-one assistance to area families with young children.

A second program, the Breast Feeding Initiative began in 1994. Its main purpose is to educate and provide support to breastfeeding moms and their babies. It is an interactive parent and tot program. Children learn social skills at an early age. Playgroup - a once a week opportunity at the Community Center – provides time for parents to network with other families. In the photo above, Debby O’Neill, Mother-to-Mother Peer Counselor, is relaxing at the County Fair.