Tollgate Farm and Education Center
YOUTH PROGRAMS GUIDE

MSU Extension Tollgate Farm and Education Center
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Welcome to MSU Tollgate!

Welcome to the Michigan State University Tollgate Farm. We are looking forward to leading your school or community organization through an unforgettable educational experience.

Michigan State University Extension helps people to improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs, and opportunities. The MSU Tollgate Farm promotes food system awareness through exploring the sustainable, nutritional, and cultural aspects of agriculture. MSU Tollgate is committed to educating the community about food production while encouraging ethical food producers.

We are a 160-acre educational farm on rolling pastures. Thanks in part to the generous support of the Americana Foundation, the facility supports:

- Farm Animals
- Orchard and apple press
- Wildlife pond
- Forest and sugarbush
- Pastures and crops
- Hoop house, community gardens, and CSA
- Themed gardens including heritage and xeriscape
- Conference and indoor activity centers

Our educational programs are designed with a background of experiential and inquiry-based learning. Hands-on, interactive, and engaging lessons are intertwined with real-life applications.

We create experiences that complement classroom learning and design our programs to be relevant and enriching. As such, we align our lessons with state and national educational standards, and research-based methods.

Contact our office today to schedule a program and MSU Tollgate will be your living laboratory! Programs fill quickly, so don’t delay! Scholarships are available to help tackle obstacles.

Please contact us with questions or concerns.

See you at the farm,

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Early Childhood Programs
Educational adventures for toddlers and the very young!

Farm Sprouts Preschool
Fall and Spring Sessions
Young children have an innate sense of wonder and curiosity towards the natural world and the animals living within it. The Farm Sprouts program will provide 3-5 year olds opportunities to explore the farm and surrounding natural environment. Group sizes are kept at a low teacher to child ratio to meet the needs of the child in accordance with the program’s objectives. Experiential learning and seasonally-based investigations are integrated into the program to assist children in reaching developmentally appropriate cognitive learning goals related to science, literacy, mathematics, engineering, social studies, and Spanish as a foreign language. Preschoolers will develop social, emotional, and physical skills as participants in the farm community through shared discoveries and cooperative experiences, all while building a life-long connection to nature.

MSU Tollgate Children’s Garden Story Hour
Bi-Weekly in Summer
Toddlers and preschoolers, ages 2-5 years old, will share in the reading of a story about a featured farm animal and participate in engaging activities, such as process-based art, moving to music, or a game. Who has a built-in comb? Who lives in a burrow? Who can sleep standing up? Children will have the opportunity to visit and observe the animals in their farm habitat to seek the answers to their many questions.

Maple Sugaring
February - April
Bundle up and join us in the sugarbush during this hands-on program that investigates a natural sweet treat. From tapping to tools to tasting, discover one of Michigan’s best treasures! Tour the sugar shack, take a wagon ride, tap a maple tree, and taste maple syrup.

Sheep to Sweater
April - June
Do “ewe” know how sheep stay cool in the summer with wool coats on? What happens when sheep get caught in a rainstorm? Get woolly with spinning, carding, and meeting our resident sheep friends!

Spring into Farming
April - June

Baby Animals - For pre-K to grade 1, this program explores the farm through tactile investigations of the different farm animals here at MSU Tollgate.

Nutrient Trail - This ecological program for grades 2-5 follows the “nutrient trail” around the farm. Choose from hands-on activities at the pond, compost pile, animal barn, hoop house, and educational gardens.

Heredity - Jeans aren’t so uncommon on a farm, but what about genes? Experience the science of Mendel and Punnett. This program is geared for middle to high school students.

Orienteering and Map Skills
Spring and Fall
Students will sharpen map and compass skills as they navigate courses to lead to the great Tollgate Orienteering Course! This is a hands-on introduction to baseplate compass work, topography maps, and the world of orienteering. Groups of students will practice their teamwork as they journey together.

Harvest Farm Ecology
September - November
Fall is a fascinating time to visit the farm. Enjoy the fall colors on your wagon ride to the pumpkin patch, learn about the life-cycles of pumpkins, apples, and our fall farm animals, pick apples, press apple cider, and enjoy an apt fall snack of doughnuts and cider. Everyone takes home a pumpkin for carving, pie, or roasting seeds!
Traveling Library Programs
Available Year-Round and to Interested Organizations

Can’t make it to the farm? We work to secure funding for school scholarships and community groups that cannot otherwise visit the farm. Please contact us for more information.

There is no substitute to visiting the farm, but below are available travelling programs. We strive to connect to literacy and learning, so customization is available.

Vermi-Composting
Eisenia fetida are one of the most important creatures on the farm. What are they? Worms, of course! Learn the basics of composting with—no, not vermicelli pasta—worms. Start your own class or club worm composter and maintain it all year.

The Efficient Goat
Where would humanity be without goats? Probably cheese-less! Meet the dairy goats and learn how goats can be a great sustainability tool.

Egg Ethics
Do you know where your food comes from? Why not meet it? Chickens will invade your classroom, along with egg investigation and an interactive game to start thinking about food production.

Sheep to Sweater
In this hands-on program, students will unravel the mysteries of wool yarn by stepping into the process: sheep, card, and drop spindle!

Community
Come participate in annual events!

Home school, church, and scout groups are welcome to register for our listed programs and we are happy to customize experiences for your youth group or community organization. We encourage groups from all walks of life to experience the farm and we create special yearly events for families and the community.

Maple Tapping and Pancake Celebration
March
During March weekends, join us for a local and delicious event. First, enjoy an hour of robust pancake meal, music, and self-guided, maple-themed games and learning opportunities. Then, join us for our engaging and hands-on 2-hour field trip! Bundle up and join us in the sugar bush during this hands-on program that investigates one of nature's sweetest treats. From tapping to tools to tasting, discover one of Michigan's best treasures. This is one of our most popular programs. Wagon ride and tasting included!

Pumpkinfoest
October
On weekends in October, enjoy the beautiful fall colors as the backdrop to a warm and welcoming family event. Wagon rides to the pumpkin patch, live music, corn hole and other games, cider and doughnuts, u-pick pumpkins, straw maze, pumpkin-themed food, farm animals, and bonfires are mainstays for this fall-tastic event every year!

Personal Farm Tour
Year-round
For families and community organizations especially, we offer a personal farm tour for groups of five or more. Take a hayride, meet the farm animals, and engage in a special, season-specific activity!