

Land-Based Learning Centers: On-Farm Learning About Sustainable Agriculture

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Land-based learning centers (LBLC) offer a model for students to learn from farmers implementing sustainable agricultural practices, providing on-farm, active learning opportunities for them to learn about careers in agriculture. There are seven Intermediate School Districts (ISD) in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, each with a land-based learning project currently in progress. These projects have a high-school teacher, their students, a producer, and a Michigan State University Extension educator working together to make a local farm more sustainable. For example, a sheep producer is working with a high school biology teacher and his environmental science class to improve the soils of hay fields in a regenerative way that is good for the environment and economically viable. The local Extension educator serves as the facilitator between the teacher, students, and the producer. After identifying the farm, students meet with the producer to understand the farm by taking soil samples, interpreting results, and learning about agriculture in their community. Now, students are working collaboratively with the farmer and Extension agent to test multiple interventions to increase soil health on the farm. At each LBLC, student assessments indicate change in areas of general self efficacy and sustainable agriculture career aspirations. Interviews with teachers and farmers describe a positive change in attitudes toward sustainability. This innovative approach positions students to address big picture issues in their communities – such as farm succession and food insecurity – while also involving students in decision making through their working relationship with LBLC farmers to develop feasible solutions to on-farm sustainability issues.