

## **Proposed funding cuts would eliminate horticulture division**

As a life-long resident of St. Clair County, I am very concerned about the proposed county budget cuts to the local Michigan State University Extension office that would eliminate its horticulture department.

This department aids commercial growers and residential gardeners and educates children and adults about our environment. At a time when the county's ash trees are threatened by the emerald ash borer, we need to continue to educate people to help stop the spread of this devastating pest.

The Asian long-horned beetle also has been found as close as Chicago and poses a serious threat to maple trees. Can you imagine how our air quality and landscape would be changed for generations if we lose our maple trees?

There are other exotic pests in and outside of Michigan that are set to destroy the hemlocks, oaks, beech and spruce trees. Now is not the time to cut funding to the department that is our trees' only line of defense.

The horticulture department also is responsible for the master gardener program, which trains and educates residents who become part of a countywide volunteer system. These volunteers provide thousands of hours of work each year to educate, maintain and beautify our county. It also provides volunteers for other county programs. This valuable program will end if the proposed budget cuts are enacted.

If you are concerned about the loss of this valuable program, please contact the board of commissioners and county Administrator Shaun Groden.

CYNTHIA SHAFER

St. Clair, Oct. 7