



**BOWERS
SCHOOL
FARM**

1219
E SQUARE LAKE RD
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI
48304
248-341-6475
bowersfarm@bloomfield.org



**JOHNSON
NATURE
CENTER**

3325
FRANKLIN ROAD
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI
48302
248-341-6485
johnsonnaturecenter@bloomfield.org



BOWERS SCHOOL FARM & JOHNSON NATURE CENTER

**2022-2023
COMMUNITY REPORT**

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Supporters,

Welcome to Bowers School Farm and Johnson Nature Center! We have experienced a wonderful year, full of exciting new activities and expanded offerings. As you read through our Community Report, I hope you will become inspired by the unique events and authentic learning that happens each day at the Farm and Nature Center. We are so fortunate to have the support of stakeholders like you.

These special places bring together a community of stewards with a passion for agriculture, food, and the environment. Each visitor embarks on a journey to explore our fields, forests, barns, and open spaces. Whether that's a group of students discovering their local history in the Barton Farmhouse or a class of high schoolers finding solutions to real-world challenges, our guests explore purpose in their quest for knowledge.

We have much to celebrate. The partnerships with our non-profit Friends groups support engaged research and bring together resources to grow our reach in the local community. Our comprehensive strategic planning project kicked off last year. Complementing the strategy is an updated site plan that will bring much needed clarity to our infrastructure opportunities.

Thank you for being a part of our family as we grow our reach through impactful programs and events. I encourage you to continue to support us on this journey as we foster a passion for exploration, form a connection to conservation, and build an understanding of the environment that will last a lifetime.



Alan Jaros
Director

OUR MISSION

WE WELCOME EVERY LEARNER TO DISCOVER AND WONDER IN THE WORLD AROUND THEM. WE ENCOURAGE A LIFETIME OF INFORMED CHOICES IN THE FOOD AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEM, PROVIDING AUTHENTIC, LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT CONCEPTUAL IDEAS TO THE REAL-WORLD.



COMMUNITY ACCESS

* TRAILS OPEN DAWN
TO DUSK.

JOHNSON NATURE CENTER:

VISITOR CENTER & TRAIL HOURS

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the “need for nature” grew within our communities and an increased number of hikers visited Johnson Nature Center. To support this community need, we worked to expand our trail hours, increased our social media presence, created a monthly newsletter, and funded a permanent StoryWalk with support from Bloomfield Township Public Library and the Woman’s National Farm & Garden Association - Bloomfield Hills Branch. We also were able to purchase a new microscope, called MicroEye, thanks to support from the Jerry Cohen Foundation. This video microscope is available for community members to use within our interpretive area and is quickly becoming a favorite tool to support close observation of nature by area students. Our interpretive area obtained a new tank, currently home of our red-eared slider turtle. Each month as the scenery and stories shift, we continue to find new ways to connect the community.

Our current and future donors allow us to expand our outreach and offerings to encourage renewed experiences with the natural environment.



BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

OPEN BARN

In 2020, Bowers School Farm opened the barns on a weekly basis to allow the community to enjoy an agricultural experience creating the Open Barn program. During Open Barn, guests enjoy a new experience with each visit including wagon rides, animal visits, garden exploration, farmer interactions, and themed hands-on activities are some of our most popular experiences. The Open Barn experience connects the community to local agriculture. During the 2022-2023 year, over 12,000 visitors experienced Open Barn.

*** FARM MEMBERSHIP HAS INCREASED EACH YEAR WITH ALMOST 4,000 NAMED MEMBERS.**

The Farm Membership program evolved with the Open Barns to create a community of regular members in support of the farm's mission. Farm Membership provides benefits of free access to Open Barn and early registration for select programs. Farm Membership is in its third year and continues to grow.



BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

BOWERS FARM KITCHEN & STORE

* **MORE THAN 3,000
POUNDS OF PRODUCE
WAS HARVESTED AND
SOLD.**

The Farm Kitchen & Store opened in 2020 to offer a variety of prepared foods along with farm-made and farm-grown products. These products change with the growing season and reflect the many ethnicities in our community. We also partnered with edibleWOW Magazine offering chef demonstrations and published recipes.

The Farm's production gardens have expanded and continue to offer fresh produce at the Farm Store. Selling fresh produce directly on the farm is important for connecting with the community in several ways:

- ❖ Provide access to local, fresh food
- ❖ Experience the farm-to-table process
- ❖ Build relationships with our farmers
- ❖ Support local agriculture and foods
- ❖ Provide a community gathering space

These connections help create a more resilient, sustainable, and vibrant community.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

FALL FESTIVAL

Fall Festival offers visitors pumpkin picking, live entertainment, animal education and experiences, and much more. The event runs during a single weekend in October each year and is open to the public on Saturday and Sunday. Families of all ages are attracted to this event to take a wagon ride to the pumpkin patch and experience selecting and picking their own pumpkin for purchase. Attendees also enjoy farm fresh food, bounce houses, pumpkin painting, straw tower, games, and farm-made donuts and local cider.

In 2022, more than 3,000 people attended which raised more than \$50,000. This money is used to support and expand all community events and programs at the Farm.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

WINTER PARK

Winter Park was launched in 2019 with access to our sledding hill and concessions. In recent years, we expanded the experience with colorful, lighted tubing lanes and ice skating. The Farm Kitchen & Store provides additional food and drink offerings. Typically, tubing hill tickets have sold out within weeks. Many guests came from long distances and shared that Winter Park brought joy and outdoor activity while bringing community together in the winter season.

In 2023, we sold more than 26,000 tubing tickets and the number of total visitors significantly increased from the previous years.

Winter recreation has been important to improve health and wellness in our surrounding communities. Winter Park fulfills this need for outside activity and a gathering space.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

JOHNSON NATURE CENTER:

MAPLE SUGARING

Each year, Johnson Nature Center invites students and the community to participate in the joys of the maple sugaring season. Our newer open-house model delivered learning experiences at various stations led by engaging naturalists and volunteers. Attendees explore the history of sugaring, identify and tap a sugar maple tree, and take part in turning the clear sap into mineral-rich, sweet maple syrup. Afterwards, fresh donuts with maple glaze from the Bowers Farm Kitchen & Store were enjoyed. Over 2000 gallons of sap was collected to produce more than 35 gallons of syrup, all from the sap off 97 tapped maple trees.

Did you know that it takes about 40 gallons of sap to make 1 gallon of syrup?

*** 35 GALLONS
OF MAPLE SYRUP
WAS MADE IN
2023 -A RECORD
FOR JOHNSON
NATURE CENTER!**



JOHNSON NATURE CENTER:

OAKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP

The Oakland Owlets Families and Friends participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count in February. The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a four-day community science project now in its 26th year and is one of the largest global birding events. The GBBC encourages people to observe and report birds locally. For the sixth year, Johnson Nature Center hosted the Young Birders Club in partnership with Oakland Audubon Society. Our GBBC identified 80 birds along the trail including 29 species.

* JOHNSON NATURE CENTER HAS BEEN CATALOGING BIRDS SINCE 1946.

We continue the long-time conservation efforts to provide migratory birds with a thriving stopover site. This effort involves the removal and management of invasive species, prescribed burns to maintain prairie habitat, pond management, and more. Key bird species supported through conservation work include Blackburnian Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Golden-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Purple Martin. Conservation not only supports these key species, but also supports student learning through a number of classes and programs provided for area students and community members.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

JOHNSON NATURE CENTER:

FOREST TO TABLE

Friends of Johnson Nature Center hosted its first Forest to Table fundraiser event featuring local Chef Gadulka from Sylvan Table who prepared a strolling dinner throughout the trails. The chef intertwined Michigan native and invasive species of flora and fauna throughout multiple stations. Attendees were able to connect with the natural environment and engage their senses in a unique way as they strolled the trails listening to live music while enjoying the Chef's creations. Naturalists on site provided education and community awareness around ecological conservation. The evening concluded with sweet endings, photo opportunities, and performing artists.

Thanks to generous sponsors, the first Forest to Table raised \$40,000. These funds have provided native plantings, invasive remediation in designated areas of JNC, and initiated the first phase of our interpretive signage project.



EDUCATION

JOHNSON NATURE CENTER:

TREESCHOOL

Every child deserves a “happy place” to gain independence, make friends, develop unique skills and interests, and learn to contribute to a community. In February 2023, Johnson Nature Center founded TreeSchool, a nature-based program for preschool-age children. TreeSchool was born out of a community and societal need to provide nature-based learning experiences as a core foundational component of all young children’s development. The Michigan Department of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs (LARA) licensed the site allowing us to expand the reach of the program. In the spring, children participated in the first-ever season of TreeSchool from February through May.

With 40 acres of forest, pond, and prairie to explore, children develop lifelong skills through meaningful play- and project-based learning experiences. The program follows an emergent, child-led curriculum focused on discovering the joys and curiosities of the ever-changing seasons. Children engage in investigations inspired by their interests and the natural phenomena surrounding them to build the foundation they need to thrive.



EDUCATION

* IN TOTAL, ABOUT 100 EGGS HATCHED AND 330 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED.

BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

HATCHING CHICKS

First grade classrooms across the Bloomfield Hills Schools incubated and hatched chicken eggs. This was the second year of a larger cohesive effort to hatch chicks for the mobile coop at Bowers School Farm. The mobile coop is utilized not only for educational purposes, but to also house the chickens that produce the eggs we sell in our Farm Kitchen & Store. Students designed and created their very own bird and nest using found, natural objects; weighed eggs and chicks; and engaged in a wild birding expedition. Students also explored life cycles and early genetics as they observed the variation in traits among offspring, developed early mathematical and literacy skills and a concern and care for animals.

Chick hatching is part of a larger effort to more fully integrate place-based experiences into a curriculum that connects students to the broader community and its resources, empowering learners to take responsible action within their community.



BOWERS SCHOOL FARM AND JOHNSON NATURE CENTER:

NATURE-INSPIRED VISUAL ARTS

We partnered with visual arts teachers to guide students in creating farm- and nature-inspired art. Projects have included egg and bird nest collages, plant-inspired prints, weavings designed with invasive plants, and farm-focused photography. These artistic works have been displayed in the Visitor Centers and along the trails for public enjoyment.

Beyond the classroom, the Detroit Institute of Arts installed ten high-quality art reproductions across Johnson Nature Center as part of its Inside | Out program to bring art closer to the community. These installations invite visitors to explore the trails to discover art in a beautiful, natural setting.

The combination of art and nature invites people to explore the natural world more closely, building human-environment connections and supporting overall health and well-being.





EDUCATION

BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

BOWERS ACADEMY

Bowers Academy is located on Bowers School Farm where students and staff have the unique opportunity to engage in rigorous experiential learning in an innovative setting. With a focus on social-emotional health and community involvement, Bowers Academy supports learners who seek a nontraditional environment as they earn their Bloomfield Hills High School Diploma.

Celebrations from the 2022-2023 school year include an exemplary graduation rate, noteworthy attendance, Official Green School accreditation, No Place for Hate partnership, countless service hours, and more. In the spring of 2023, Bowers Academy celebrated 15 graduates.

The Academy has a criteria-based school of choice application, accepting applications from qualifying students throughout Oakland County. As the program continues to grow, we look forward to expanding our reach in order to support learners seeking a nontraditional environment.



EDUCATION

BOWERS SCHOOL FARM:

AGRICULTURE, FOOD & NATURAL RESOURCES

The Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) Pathway is a series of classes offered at Bloomfield Hills High School that prepares students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources systems. With the classes located at Bowers School Farm and Johnson Nature Center, this pathway offers immersive, experiential learning opportunities. By partnering with postsecondary and industry professionals, students are ready to pursue the next steps of their professional development, and earn 6 credits to Michigan State University as a program completer.

These students comprise the Bloomfield Hills FFA chapter, an intra-curricular student organization impacting the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. The AFNR Pathway comprised 80 students (sophomores to seniors) for the 2022 - 2023 school year across its Science of Agriculture, Animal & Veterinary Science, and Zoology courses. The program awarded 11 FFA chapter degrees to seniors and 12 FFA Greenhand degrees to sophomores and juniors.

BOWERS SCHOOL FARM SUMMER CAMP

* BOWERS SCHOOL FARM ENGAGED OVER 690 UNIQUE CAMPERS.

At Bowers School Farm Summer Camp, students engage in a series of activities that showcase their role, responsibility, and relationship to food systems. While the scale and grit of activities are adjusted for age and developmental level, all campers have the opportunity to meaningfully engage with the Farm. Summer 2022 was Bowers Farm's largest camp season. With 1,090 camp spots available, we reached 90 percent capacity on the first day of registration. Throughout nine weeks of summer and 14 camp themes, campers were welcomed ranging in age from 3 to 14.

In addition, summer 2022 was the inaugural year of the summer camp financial aid program. Through a partnership with Friends of Bowers Farm, five awards ranging from 50 - 90 percent of camp tuition were allotted to camp families. Reducing barriers to participate in camp continues to be an important initiative.





CAMPS

JOHNSON NATURE CENTER SUMMER CAMP



Camp programs at the Johnson Nature Center expanded and sold out in 2022. With 192 camp spots available, we reached 60 percent capacity the day registration opened. In total, the Nature Center welcomed 147 unique campers, supported by nine dedicated volunteers and six staff members.

Summer 2022 also served as the inaugural year of the camp financial aid program. Through a partnership with Friends of Johnson Nature Center, a financial aid committee provided community members with reduced barriers to participate in camp. Three awards ranging from 50 - 90 percent of camp tuition were allotted to camp families.

*** JOHNSON
NATURE
CENTER
ENGAGED
147
CAMPERS.**



VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEERS

Talented groups of volunteers support Bowers School Farm each year. The Master Gardener Society of Oakland County plant and maintain our ornamental gardens. 4-H youth members and their families helped care for animals and supported community events and Open Barn, and included one of the largest groups with over 100 members. 4-H is a youth program to develop responsibility, leadership and life skills of youth through experiential learning. The FFA focused on supporting animal care and engaged visitors in their experience. Many other volunteers shared their time, contributing meaningfully throughout the year. During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, volunteer time totaled more than 2,500 hours at Bowers School Farm.

Volunteers at Johnson Nature Center came out regularly to help with site maintenance and educational programs, planning and guidance, along with the annual volunteer day. More than 400 hours of volunteer time has supported Johnson Nature Center.



FARM & NATURE CENTER STRATEGIC & MASTER PLAN

The Farm and Nature Center embarked on a master planning process in the fall of 2022. Focusing on our guiding pillars of “education, community, and environment,” we have seen substantial growth beyond the scope of the 2018 strategic plan. Collectively, the Farm and Nature Center serve more than 90,000 visitors annually. Gathering stakeholder feedback was a top priority by hosting focus groups, surveys, and a number of listening sessions dedicated to asking the question, “What do we look like in 2027?” Land and physical infrastructure remain the top opportunity for improvement at both sites along with building greater awareness and expanded public programs. By providing a strategic road-map and framework, the master plan will guide the Farm and Nature Center’s growth and expansion, align resources, further engage the community, foster environmental stewardship, and position the centers as leading destinations to visit in the region.

Our capital campaign will be key to implementing the 2027 vision.

