

ALLEGAN COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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- Janis Brinn, Senior Educator, Global & Cultural Programming



Message from the District Director



In 2025, MSU Extension in Allegan County continued to strengthen community connections through research-based programming, youth development, and community outreach. Staff advanced efforts in 4-H, health and nutrition, agriculture, and community education, while deepening partnerships with libraries, schools, agencies, and local organizations. These efforts reflect the dedication of our staff and the trust of our community partners. We are grateful to Allegan County stakeholders for their collaboration and continued support!

Sincerely, Kai Gritter.

Impact



15 community coalitions within the county with MSU Extension employees



439 programs (across the state) attended by county residents



1,651 participants from the county attending programs



174 volunteers serving the county



13 community partnerships within the county



83 answered 'Ask Extension' questions

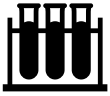
Local and Statewide Impact



37 programs hosted in the county



78 residents participated in Child & Family Development virtual programming



63 soil test samples processed for Allegan County



206 client consultations



552 participants attending programs hosted in the county



476 virtual programs related to Financial Education, Food Systems, Water and Environmental Quality, Government and Businesses



39,667 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



72,517 participants in community, food, and environment programs from across Michigan

The MSU Product Center

The Michigan State University (MSU) Product Center is a statewide program of MSU Extension that supports the growth and success of Michigan's food, agriculture, and natural resource businesses. Through one-on-one counseling, educational programming, and technical assistance, the MSU Product Center helps entrepreneurs navigate business planning, product development, regulatory requirements, and market access. Serving startups and established businesses alike, the MSU Product Center connects clients with industry expertise, research-based resources, and strategic partners to foster innovation, increase economic impact, and strengthen local and regional food systems across Michigan.



The following are a sample of the many online courses offered by the MSU Product Center:

- Free Instructional Video on Writing Standard Operating Procedures
- Free Course on How to Start a Food Truck Business available in both English and Spanish
- Meat Processing Online Course
- Sanitation for Small Food Establishments
- Free Course on Grant Writing for Food and Farming Businesses
- And many more at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/productcenter/> (Click the "Classes" button)

Youth Programming



23 active 4-H clubs



120 total 4-H volunteers



519 total youth participants



301 youth enrolled in 4-H



Allegan County 4-H Awarded Grant!

Allegan County 4-H was awarded a **Teens Aiding Growth (TAG)** grant from the Allegan County Community Foundation Youth Endowment Fund. The grant was approved by the TAG Team, a youth advisory council composed of local high school students who help direct funding to programs benefiting Allegan County youth.

The funding will support non-traditional 4-H programming beyond traditional club activities, creating new opportunities for youth to develop life skills, improve physical and mental well-being, explore environmental stewardship, strengthen community connections, and increase accessibility. This partnership demonstrates a shared commitment to providing Allegan County youth with high-quality learning experiences that foster leadership, personal growth, and lifelong learning.

2025 Dairy Days

The 2025 Michigan 4-H Dairy Days event showcased the knowledge, talent and hard work of dairy youth enthusiasts. These youth competed in several educational events that included dairy showmanship, dairy quiz bowl, dairy management and dairy judging; many youth competed in all four contests.

Seven Allegan County 4-H members attended the conference and were happy to compete in the MI 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl!



**Beyond
Ready**

2025 Spring Horse Clinic

The 2025 Spring Horse Clinic was held at Twin Pines farms and was attended by **10 Allegan County 4-H youth**. Participants learned about how to groom a horse for showing, groundwork and lunging techniques, as well as showmanship basics. It was another successful clinic with participants increasing their knowledge and skills.



4-H Making a Difference

Each year, Allegan County 4-H creates new opportunities for youth to learn, grow, and build connections within their community. Parents often share how much their children gain from the hands-on learning and mentorship that 4-H provides. One new family recently reflected on their first year of involvement:

"2025 was my daughter Anna's first year in 4-H. It was absolutely amazing. It was fun watching my daughter learn and grow doing something she's never done before. She has learned how to care for her animals and does her research to give them the best care possible. She showed rabbits this year and caught on quick. Our rabbit leader's Tricia and Ryan Shelton were awesome. They answered questions we had and asked questions to our kids about their projects. Checked in on them in between meetings. It was nice to feel welcomed by everyone. We are so thankful for the opportunity, support and friendships we have made. We are so excited to see what the future holds."

Joining 4-H has provided Anna with a positive and encouraging way to connect with other youth who share her interests. Through her 4-H experiences, she's developed confidence, belonging, and a sense of community that extends far beyond her project work.

Stories like Anna's remind us what 4-H is all about: creating a welcoming environment where youth can develop new skills, connect with caring mentors, and discover their potential. The growth we see in our members each year reflects the dedication of our volunteers, the support of families, and the strength of our community.

2025 Cloverbud Camp

Cloverbuds is all about joyful discovery, hands-on learning, and building friendships! The focus is on participation, teamwork, and personal growth, rather than competition. MSU Extension utilizes 4-H Cloverbud Camps as a developmentally appropriate experience that targets youth ages 5-7 years old. In June, **50 Allegan County 4-H Cloverbuds** attended the Cloverbud Camp, where they explored different areas of 4-H while having fun making dirt babies, edible soil, bleach dyed t-shirts and wheat playdough!



The goal of the 4-H Youth Development model is for 4-H to "provide kids with community, mentors, and learning opportunities to develop the skills they need to create positive change in their lives." You need to look no further than the amazing staff, youth, and families in the Allegan County 4-H program!

Allegan County 2025

Crafts Around the World

A group of women who meet once a month at a local church contacted MSU Extension's Janis Brinn about doing simple crafts as community service projects. Jan introduced the "Crafts Around the World" series which consisted of 3 dates with different crafts.

The first completed was Fabric Origami making "Boo Boo Bunnys" and "Wash Cloth Bears," which along with other items, were given to the community for "Mother's Day" gifts. Fifty Washcloth Bears were created!



The second completed were "Norwegian Gnomes," which along with other items were given to the community for "Father's Day" gifts or saved for future community service events, where the Gnomes would be redressed.



The third completed was "Guatemalan Worry Dolls." The dolls were given to the children at 'Sylvia's Place' in Allegan County.



Dig In! 2025 Series

The Dig In is an online educational series of 10 classes for Extension Master Gardeners (EMG). This is provided so that all EMGs can complete their 10-hour continuing education requirement without cost, from wherever they are located. **1,591 people participated in this series in 2025, 12 of them were from Allegan County.**

Foundations of Gardening



In 2025, our MSU Extension Consumer Horticulture Team had 792 participants total (**13 from Allegan County**) in two (Fall and Winter) ten-week sessions of the MSU Extension Foundations of Gardening Course. This course was open to both the public and those wanting to later apply to the MSU Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Program to volunteer. The MSU Consumer Horticulture Team held ten "MSU EMG Program Onboarding" sessions statewide, training participants to become MSU EMGs, with both in-person and online volunteer training sessions.

SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS



87 participants in county ag programs



25 residents who participated in Beekeeping or Pollinator programs



41 residents attended the Pesticide Applicator Core Manual Review & Exam

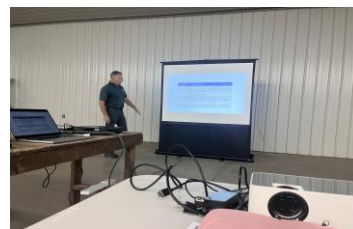
Allegan Nursery Hosts Michigan Seedling Grower Association

The Michigan Seedling Grower Association is a coalition of small farms across Michigan that produce tree seedlings for Christmas tree farms, conservation efforts, and forestry initiatives. On September 10, the association held its annual grower meeting at Engel's Nursery in Allegan County, with **approximately 25 attendees**, representing a total of 1,330 acres of seedling productions. Growers reported increased knowledge in several key areas as a result of the meeting:

- **Transplant Management** – 78%
- **Irrigation Management** – 78%
- **Issues** with TriEst fumigation services ceasing – 89%
- **Industry Size & Scope** – 78%
- **Updated New York Guidance** – 78%



Notably, 55% of surveyed attendees reported plans to implement changes on their farms within the next year based on insights gained from the event. These moments highlight the true value of our statewide partnerships with local farmers creating opportunities to learn, adapt, and refine practices to drive improvement and success.



Dairy Education & The Dairy Dinner

The West Michigan Dairy Education Dinner had 23 attendees (**6 from Allegan County**) representing dairy farmers, veterinarians, and agricultural consultants. Farmers from five counties in West Michigan directly impacting 92,542 lactating cows and 53,740 replacement animals (heifers and calves).

Additionally, attending consultants provide services to 15 additional herds, which indirectly impacts an estimated 5,000 animals. The focus of the dinner was on optimizing your milking parlor, with presentations on dairy reproduction strategies, milk quality, and services provided by MSU Extension. All participants surveyed stated they **increased their knowledge and planned on implementing changes based on what they learned**.

Enhancing Manure Management Practices in Michigan



The Michigan Manure Management Summit, hosted by MSU Extension and the MI Farm Bureau, is an annual educational event focused on manure management science, regulations, and best practices. It is designed for those who haul and apply manure and offers required CEUs for certified individuals in the Michigan Manure Hauler certification Program. The 2025 summit took place on January 22 and attracted 92 attendees (**19 from Allegan County**).

Participants were generally familiar with many topics, reflecting repeated coverage over recent years and demonstrating *strong knowledge retention*. Attendees continue to express interest in additional safety and spill response training.

AgrAbility Field Day Hosted at Allegan County Farm

As Michigan's farming population ages, AgrAbility helps farmers overcome physical challenges through education, direct assistance, and assistive technology. On June 24, 2025, 36 people attended an AgrAbility field day at the **Allegan County farm of Doug VerHoeven**, a longtime AgrAbility client who has successfully farmed 90 acres of corn and soybeans from a wheelchair for nearly 50 years. VerHoeven and AgrAbility engineer Ned Stoller demonstrated equipment adaptations, ergonomic tools, low-vision technology, exoskeletons, and other assistive devices that support safe and productive farming.

Attendees included healthcare, rehabilitation, Extension, Farm Bureau, and congressional staff, as well as families of young people with mobility challenges interested in agriculture. The event highlighted practical accommodations that enable farmers to remain active despite mobility limitations.

Evaluation results showed **100% of respondents increased their knowledge of operator health and well-being, with 73% reporting a moderate or great deal of improvement.**



Soybean On-Farm Research

This year marked the 15th season of the Michigan Soybean On-Farm Research Program, a partnership between MSU Extension and the Michigan Soybean Committee funded through soybean checkoff investments. In 2025, 38 producers conducted 51 on-farm research trials across 12 projects, addressing key production challenges identified by farmers through winter regional meetings.

Two Allegan farms participated in these trials and 3 others showed interest.

The program relies on strong collaboration among MSU Extension educators, farmer cooperators, and agribusiness partners to generate practical, research-based recommendations for Michigan soybean producers. Several trials were conducted in southwest Michigan, including Allegan County, helping ensure research results are relevant to local growing conditions and producer needs.

Trials focused on:

- Spring tillage
- Pre-plant sulfur broadcast application
- Planting rates
- Planting date/soybean maturity group selection
- In-furrow starter fertilizer
- In-furrow plant growth products
- Soybean seed inoculation
- Residual herbicide application
- Planter box seed treatment
- Foliar micronutrient application
- Cobra herbicide application for white mold control
- Delaro Complete application for plant health benefit

Afterwards, a regional meeting was held at Blaauw Farms near Shelbyville to present findings from the 2025 growing season. There were 33 attendees, 26 of whom were from Allegan.

In a post-meeting survey:

- 81% indicated an increase in knowledge as a result of the presentations
- 15 farmers planned to make changes to their operations
- This was estimated to impact 8,849 acres and result in \$46,794 in increased profitability!

Explore our Soybeans Page at canr.msu.edu/soybeans for

- Event listings
- List of Experts
- News articles
- Resources, and more!



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Soybean Educator

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[Integrating High-Oleic Soybeans into Farm Systems](#)



475 county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs



4 policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes with those PSE sites



1 Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy System and Environmental sites received PSE education within the county



2,377 residents positively impacted by the policy, systems and environmental changes

A sample of SNAP-Ed successes

In the third year of partnering with The Arc of Allegan County, our Community Nutrition Instructor delivered the **Healthy Choices for Every Body** curriculum. Michael, a returning participant discovered that healthy cooking could extend far beyond the classroom. After learning to make spinach quiche, he proudly recreated the recipe at home for his family. His mother sent a message saying it was a "big hit!" Michael's newfound confidence transformed one lesson into lasting independence, reinforcing that practical nutrition education builds skills, healthier habits, and meaningful ripple effects for entire families together.



Michael was especially excited about this recipe because he loves vegetables and these quiches had mushrooms and spinach.

SNAP-Ed funding cut in 2025



For 30 years, SNAP-Ed helped people build healthy eating habits and be more active on a limited budget. Following a federal decision to end funding, the program was discontinued after July 4, 2025.

Through practical, hands-on education and local partnerships, the Allegan County-based Community Nutrition Instructor helped people with limited resources build lifelong skills around nutrition, cooking, physical activity, and budgeting for healthy meals.

Food Safety

In 2025, **185 Allegan County residents** took classes and accessed resources from MSU Extension's Food Safety Team. These classes covered a variety of topics that helped residents gain the knowledge and training to prevent food borne illnesses. Some examples of the classes attended are:

- Michigan Cottage Food Law
- Selling MI Honey & Maple Syrup
- Preserving MI Harvest – Various Topics
- Safe Food = Healthy Kids
- Pantry Food Safety – It's Your Job
- Serving up Food Safety – Various Topics
- Moving Beyond Cottage Food Law
- Safe Food Handling for Food Donations
- Food Safety for Food Service Workers
- ServSafe



MSU Extension Food Safety Hotline

Have a question? Not sure if the food in your fridge is safe after a power outage?
Do you have questions about safely preserving food at home?
Whatever your question, MSU Extension's food safety experts can help!
Call our Food Safety Hotline at 1-877-643-9882, Monday-Friday from 9AM to 5PM.

Health & Mindfulness

In a continued effort to manage our physical and mental health in 2025, MSU Extension's Health team educators reached **282 Allegan County residents** by offering numerous session opportunities. These sessions explored mindfulness basics such as breathing, moving, eating, walking, thought surfing, taming your busy mind and more. Research has shown that people who are more mindful are generally happier and report less anxiety, symptoms of depression, anger and worries. Some of the session topics were:

- RELAX, Alternatives to Anger
- Sleep Education
- Brief Practices in Mindfulness
- Building Resilience to Avoid Burnout
- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Mindfulness for Better Sleep
- Mindful Monday
- Mindfulness for Children
- Maintaining Health in Challenging Times
- Calming Down & Destressing
- Community Practice & Play
- Be Kind to Your Mind
- Keep Moving to Stay Healthy
- Stress Less With Mindfulness
- Tai Chi for Arthritis and Diabetes
- Tai Chi for Better Sleep
- Diabetes Simplified
- Mental Health First Aid

Partnerships

- Renaissance Alternate High School
- Christian Neighbors
- Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church
- Michigan 4-H Children's Art Exchange – China
- Grand Ravine Senior Living
- Ransom Public Library
- SMILES (Share, Michigan, India, Learn, Exchange, Stories)
- ARC of Allegan
- Allegan Great Start Readiness Program
- Soil Beneath Our Feet
- Otsego Public Schools
- Community Action of Allegan County
- Fennville High School
- Gun Lake Tribe
- Starr Elementary School

Coalitions

- Great Start Allegan County
- CHIP Food Work Group
- Allegan Multi-Agency Collaborative Council
- Books, Balls & Blocks 2025
- Community Information Exchange Committee
- Allegan 4-H Livestock Leaders
- Allegan 4-H Youth Advisory Council
- Family Fun Fridays at Gun Lake
- Allegan Youth Livestock Leaders
- The Big Read Lakeshore
- District 7 Horse Show Committee
- Allegan County 4-H Creative & Education Committee
- 5 Day Horse Clinic Committee

AgBio Research Center

The primary objective of the 156-acre Trevor Nichols Research Center in Allegan County is to find the best ways to keep fruit pest-free in Michigan while preserving the environment and ensuring economic viability for the state's fruit growers. **For more, explore**

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/research/centers>



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Programs

4-H & Youth

- 4-H Clubs
- 4-H Spin Clubs
- 4-H Capitol Experience
- Leadership Education
- 4-H Exploration Days
- 4-H Shooting Sports
- International Exchanges
- Adulting 101
- Career Preparation/Exploration/Development
- Cash Composition Contest & 4-H Money Smart Contests
- Skillathon
- Wild Spartans
- Summer Garden Programs
- World Food Prize
- Cloverbud Camps
- National 4-H Congress

Food & Health

- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Cottage Food Law
- Food Preservation
- Food Safety Hotline
- Mindfulness Sessions
- Selling MI Honey & Maple Syrup
- Person Action Toward Health (PATH)
- Powerful Tools for Caregivers
- ServSafe
- Sleep Education
- Tai Chi, Matter of Balance for Arthritis & Falls Prevention
- Walk With Ease
- Keys to Embracing Aging
- Wits Workouts
- Safe Food = Healthy Kids
- Mental Health First Aid (Adult, Teen, Youth)
- Michigan Substance Use, Prevention, Education and Recovery (MiSUPER)

Family

- Homeownership Education
- Money Management
- Parenting Education
- RELAX: Alternatives to Anger
- Social & Emotional Health of Young Children
- Foreclosure Education & Counseling

Agriculture Related

- TelFarm
- Agritourism Education
- Beginning Farmer
- Beekeeping Programs & Education
- Cropland & Building Leasing
- Cultivating Local Farm Economics
- Estate & Farm Succession Planning
- Farm Business Organization & Structure
- Farm Financial Performance
- Farm Stress Management
- Field Crop Webinar Series
- Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market Expo
- Heroes to Hives
- Integrated Crop & Pest Management
- Grain Bin & Manure Pit Safety
- MI Ag Ideas to Grow With Conference
- Michigan CSA Network
- Michigan Manure Summit
- On-Farm Educator Visits
- Renewable Energy & Energy Conservation Education
- Virtual Breakfasts
- Christmas Tree Production Education
- Breakfast on the Farm
- Farm to Institution
- Virtual Coffee Break Podcast

Business & Community

- MSU Extension Product Center
- MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program
- New Commissioner Training
- Fiscally Ready Communities

Lawn & Garden

- Ask Extension
- Lawn & Garden Hotline
- Foundations of Gardening/MSU Extension Master Gardener Program
- Smart Gardening Soil Testing

Natural Resources

- Clean Boats, Clean Waters
- Introduction to Lakes Online
- Michigan Birding
- Algae 101
- Michigan Master Naturalist
- Michigan Paddle Stewards
- Wild About: Conservation Webinar Series
- Michigan Conservation Stewards
- Septic System Program
- Natural Shoreline Education