

BERRIEN COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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269-927-5674 | <https://www.canr.msu.edu/berrien>



Message from the Interim District Director

Thank you for another great year of partnership and community impact! We appreciate your support in helping MSU Extension serve the residents of Berrien County. Sincerely, Kai Gritter

Impact in Berrien County



5,146 participants from the county attended programs



Residents participated in **486** programs (across the state) and **157** programs (hosted in county)



399, 4-H Enrolled Youth



220 MSU Extension volunteers



297 client consultations



531 participants in county agriculture programs



96 answered Ask Extension questions



124 county partnerships

Agriculture & Agribusiness



Hosting the Great Lakes Expo (GLEXPO) each year enables MSU Extension to address many challenges producers face by equipping stakeholders with the latest research, innovations and techniques. Farmer and grower livelihoods depend on maintaining productive and profitable operations and GLEXPO offers producers continuous learning so that farms can compete in an increasingly global market. In December 2024, **89 participants from Berrien County** attended GLEXPO in Grand Rapids. According to one attendee, it is "*Great to have a mix of industry leaders and academic community insight as it provides a more robust and holistic perspective on emerging tech.*"

In 2024, MSU Extension strengthened emergency preparedness in Berrien County through two key efforts:

- Providing the Emergency Response to Accidents Involving Livestock (**ERAIL**) program which provides training to first responder agencies.
- Sharing appropriate response protocols for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (**HPAI**) with the Berrien County Youth Fair Board and partnering with the Berrien County Health Department to create a response plan to protect both animal and human health.



Berrien County received a new ERAIL trailer

Trailer Ribbon Cutting during National Farm Safety Week (Sept. 15-21)



Berrien County is home to the **Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center** (SWM-REC), a 350-acre site dedicated to growing and conducting variety evaluations of numerous fruits and vegetables.

In 2024, SWM-REC partnered with **AgrAbility** to provide accessible technology for a staff member (pictured left) to complete their duties (mowing, sorting vegetables, pruning plants) effectively. This shows how innovation, teamwork, and adaptive tools can expand career opportunities in agriculture for workers of all ability levels.

In 2024, SWM-REC hosted the **Southwest Michigan Horticulture Days** and **Michigan Viticulture Field Day**, bringing together hundreds of specialty crop and grape growers for education, innovation, networking and community building. The events featured sessions on fruit and vegetable production, marketing strategies and cutting-edge MSU research—sharing best practices, fresh insights, and meaningful local connections to drive sustainable growth.



[AgBio centers' locations.](#)

Community, Food & Environment



In 2024, Berrien County was part of a four-county cohort of the Michigan Conservation Stewards Program (CSP) - an 8-week, hybrid educational program for adults who are enthusiastic about learning science-based ecosystem management principles and sharing this knowledge with others to help improve their local communities.

The **19** Berrien County residents who completed the program learned essential strategies to understand and help restore and conserve ecosystems in Michigan communities, including the Sarett Nature Center, Berrien County Parks, Chikaming Open Lands, Fernwood Nature Center, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi and many others.

MSU Extension and The Pokagon Fund hosted *Building a Foundation to Attainable Housing* in Three Oaks, bringing together **32** local leaders to explore Michigan's housing challenges. Through expert insights and hands-on activities, participants gained tools and confidence to support local housing solutions. One participant shared, "Utilize the various resources provided for more valuable information. I was not aware of many of these resources."

Evaluation results showed 93% increased their knowledge, and 100% found the training valuable for their roles—demonstrating the power of collaboration and education in addressing critical community needs.

Each year the Michigan State University Product Center recognizes a client business for eliminating barriers to entrepreneurial success at the local, regional, or state level. The 2024 award went to Berrien County's **Aiye Akhigbe** (pictured right). She is the owner of **Sticky Spoons Jam, LLC** which specializes in jams, jellies, and preserves made in small batches from local, Michigan fruit farms.



With guidance from the Product Center, this small business expanded from cottage food production to a licensed commercial kitchen. This move led to a **fourfold increase in sales!** Sticky Spoons' growth highlights how expert support, strategic planning, and determination can transform an inspired homegrown idea into a thriving food business.



MSU Extension's Product Center helps food and agriculture entrepreneurs grow their businesses with one-on-one support, offering guidance from idea to launch plus services like labeling, packaging, and nutrition analysis. For more, explore: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/productcenter>

Health & Nutrition



The Senior Project Fresh program in Berrien County is aimed at helping older adults eat healthier as they age. The program provides participants free nutrition education and \$25 in benefits that can be exchanged for fresh fruits, vegetables, and honey sold at local farmers markets and roadside stands.

Community Nutrition Instructor Christian Haack spoke with a Project Fresh recipient who returned for a second year of Senior Project Fresh at the Niles Senior Center and was very excited to receive \$25 in coupons

“She told me a story about how last year she took advantage of a sale (less than a dollar for a pint of blueberries) and loaded up her freezer to have a steady supply of fruit in her diet.” More than **2,000** Berrien County residents participated in **137** programs aimed at improving their health and nutrition in 2024.

MSU Extension collaborated with a diverse range of partners to deliver impactful nutrition and physical activity programs and resources across Berrien County. Programming was conducted at schools, senior centers, food pantries, child-care centers, farmers markets, and community organizations. These efforts strengthened community partnerships, increased access to fresh foods, and demonstrated meaningful impact across youth, adult, and senior audiences.

2,020 Berrien County residents participated in 137 MSU Extension's health and nutrition programs in 2024!



Staff teaching *Show Me Nutrition* at Eau Claire Public Schools (top) and tabling at an event serving migrant residents (left).

In 2024, Happy Trails Daycare LLC, partnered with MSU Extension's Growing Healthy Eaters Policy, Systems, and Environmental (**PSE**) program. Through this initiative, the childcare center received fresh, nutritious local produce from a produce box provider, which was incorporated into meals. This well-received program supported healthier eating habits for the children in their care.

"I just want to say thank you so much for partnering me with Flatwater Farms LLC. Not only was the produce beautiful but the people were so nice to work with! I can't wait to share these with the children next week"

Berrien County staff attended numerous community fairs, events and coalition meetings, promoting health programs and sharing resources e.g., Michigan Vaccine Project (MVP) materials. For more about MSU Extension's food and health programs and resources, explore https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_health or scan the QR code:



Ready to Lead Ready to Conquer

4-H COUNTYWIDE PROJECTS

Berrien County 4-H countywide projects and kits to go! programs continue to expand into new project areas. The program strives to provide experiential learning opportunities for youth to learn new skills in project areas outside of their local community club.

Both programs provided supplies to participants creating a low-cost workshop for families.

Workshop and kit topics included:

- Birdhouse
- Leathercrafting
- Cakepops
- Cake Decorating
- STEM
- Charcuterie
- Hydro Dipping
- Floriculture
- Chocolate
- Global Cultural Arts
- and More!

In 2024, the programs provided engagement to over 200 youth.

THANKS 4 GIVING

For the sixth year, in collaboration with the Berrien County Farm Bureau, Berrien County 4-H leaders and members put their hands to larger service to provide food baskets to individuals in need throughout the county. Clubs participated in collection, assembly and distribution throughout the program.

This year, 150 baskets were assembled and distributed to families. Each bushel basket was overflowing with at least 35 pounds of food. This equated to over 5,200 pounds of food provided being distributed. The Thanks 4 Giving community service project gave local 4-H youth the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills to become agents of change for their community, while building a commitment to civic service as well as cultivating a capacity to become local leaders.

4-H EXPLORATION DAYS

The 4-H Exploration Days is a MSU precollege program that welcomes youth between the ages of 12-19 to explore their future, try new things and experience college life! During this three-day event, youth will gain confidence and independence through hands-on learning and make friends for a lifetime. With over 100 sessions that engage youth in experiential learning, youth will be able to explore their passions. Sessions are offered in a variety of areas from STEM, Financial Literacy, Cultural Arts, Animal/Veterinary Science, Food & Nutrition, Expressive Arts, Recreational Sports and more!

Each youth and chaperone received a scholarship equaling over \$1,800.00



Ready Then
Ready Now
Ready for anything
Building a Ready Generation in a
World of Change

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

BERRIEN COUNTY 4-H 2024

PRIORITY AREAS

BERRIEN COUNTY 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS A PROGRAM OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION. LAST YEAR, MORE THAN 100,000 MICHIGAN YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN 4-H THROUGH VARIOUS ACTIVITIES, CLUBS, GROUPS, PROGRAMS AND EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF MICHIGAN. AS THEY ENGAGE IN THESE UNIQUE LEARNING EXPERIENCES, 4-H'ERS EXPLORE THEIR PASSIONS AND INTERESTS WHILE GROWING CONFIDENCE, LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.

MICHIGAN 4-H YOUTH ARE SUPPORTED BY CARING VOLUNTEERS WHO GIVE THEIR TIME IN A VARIETY OF WAYS – AS CLUB OR GROUP LEADERS, MENTORS, CHAPERONES, PROFESSIONAL SKILLS TRAINERS AND MORE!



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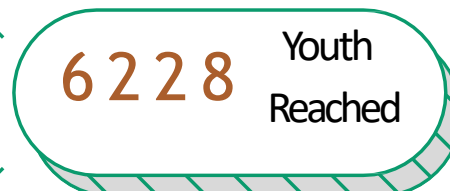
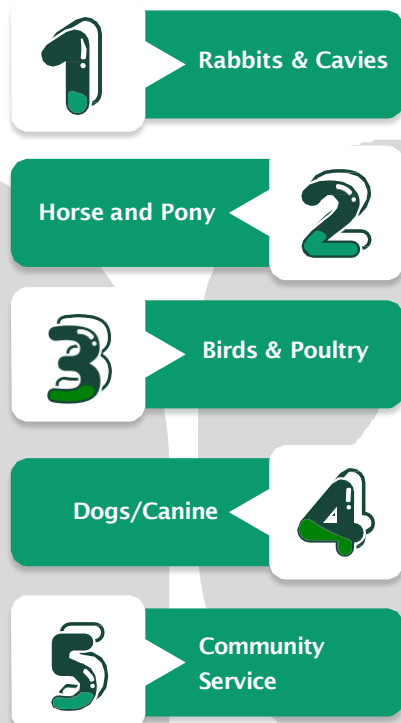
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TOP 5 PROJECT AREAS



Scholarships

4-H Capitol Experience

One (1) full scholarship equaling \$150.00

4-H Exploration Days

Two (2) partial Scholarships equaling \$1880.00

4-H Animal Science & Veterinary Camp

Two (2) scholarships equaling \$200.00

Mark of Excellence Scholarship

One (1) scholarship equaling \$40.00

Financial Hardship Scholarship

Two (2) scholarships equaling \$219.00

PATH Education Scholarship

Two (2) scholarships equaling \$204.98

State 4-H Horse Show

One (1) scholarship equaling \$80.00

Alumni Scholarship

Three (3) scholarships equaling \$2400.00

PATH Instructor Scholarship

Three (3) scholarships equaling \$408.00

MI 4-H State Horse Judging Contest

Team Scholarship equaling \$120.00

PEP Update

Three (3) Scholarships equaling \$682.50

Michigan 4-H Dog Workshop

Four (4) Scholarships equaling \$140.00

Great Lakes and Natural Resource Camp

One (1) Scholarship equaling \$500.00

4-H Animal Science Career Quest

Two (2) Scholarships equaling \$35.00

20%

of the annual endowment gift provided scholarships for educational experiential learning opportunities, camps and post-secondary education to reduce financial barriers for 4-H members and leaders.

Ready to Build Ready to Serve

EMBRYOLOGY

In the spring of each year, Berrien County youth were able to explore the fundamentals of chick life cycle including egg candling, environment oversight and egg development through the 4-H Embryology program. For youth in Kindergarten through 3rd grade an ag literacy component was provided. In 2024, there were seven teachers in five schools who participated in equating to **302 students** in grades Kindergarten through 9th grade.

HOMESCHOOL HANGOUTS

Kicking off a new partnership in 2024 with the Lincoln Township Library, Berrien County 4-H provided a variety of workshops for homeschool youth. From learning about zoonotic diseases to soaring to new heights in learning about bees as well as trying to solve the mystery of what sinks and floats and more! Youth gained a deeper understanding of a variety of educational topic areas.

In 2024, Berrien County 4-H hosted six (6) workshops and engaged **156 youth** throughout the program.

STEM CHALLENGE - FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The 2024 STEM Challenge called Food for Thought, provided fundamental knowledge on food security, how people are impacted locally and globally, and how youth can co-create more food secure communities. Youth engaged three (3) hands on activities including a board game, entrepreneurship experience and engineering activity. The program engaged over 471 youth.

STEAM EXTRAVAGANZA

3, 2, 1, LIFTOFF! Youth were able to grab their goggles to soar into the sky above as they explored the world of aerospace engineering during the Boys and Girls Clubs STEAM Extravaganza. Participants took on the challenge in designing and building an aerodynamic food transportation device (FTD) that could deliver a payload of resources to various targets using different trajectories during emerging crisis. The 4-H program educated over **410 youth** throughout the event.

BERRIEN COUNTY 4-H HORSE JUDGING TEAM

In 2024, the Berrien County 4-H Horse Judging Team competed and received top honors at the MI 4-H State Horse Show. Members had been actively practicing throughout the fall and into the spring in preparation for the April contest. Their hard-work and dedication led them to the following placements:

Overall Junior Novice Team Overall Junior Novice Team Reasons Junior Regular Overall Individual

Coached by Tom Rossman and Kaitlynn Miller, the team educates youth on breed characteristics, ideal horse movements, horse conformation and anatomy. Additionally, participants gained life skills in problem solving, public speaking and critical thinking.

Each judging team member received a full scholarship to aid in their registration. Scholarships were funded through the support of the annual endowment gift.

“4-H also helps to make new friends. Making new friends is great because you have more people to talk to and you are not so lonely. 4-H is a great program overall. This is why I love the 4-H program.”
- Berrien County 4-H'er

MSU Extension's Statewide Impact

Helping people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge and resources of Michigan State University directly to individuals, communities and businesses.



\$246.5 billion annual impact of food and agriculture on Michigan's economy



29,264,562 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



133,306 total youth participants



12,861 total volunteers



9,808 people participated in Food Safety programs including ServSafe®



67,320 participants in community, food and environment programs



1,876 Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent 96,653 hours helping individuals and communities grow

Berrien County Based Staff:

- ❖ Jamie Styburski, Office Manager
- ❖ Noah Cardew, 4-H Program Instructor
- ❖ Zelda Felix-Mottley, Health Educator
- ❖ Beth Ferry, Swine Educator
- ❖ Christian Haack, Community Nutrition Instructor
- ❖ Ben Phillips, Vegetable Specialist
- ❖ Micheal Reinke, Viticulture Specialist
- ❖ Kelly Stelter, 4-H Program Coordinator
- ❖ Yolanda Thrash, Community Nutrition Instructor



MSU Extension's Strategic Direction Plan



In 2024, MSU Extension completed a comprehensive Strategic Direction Plan, which illustrates our vision for the future, outlining strengths to build on and opportunities to embrace. To read the full report, go to canr.msu.edu/od/directors_office/strategic-direction or scan the QR code.



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