

# BERRIEN COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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<https://www.canr.msu.edu/berrien>



## Message from the Interim District Director

In 2025, MSU Extension in Berrien County delivered strong outcomes across youth development, agriculture, and health education. Highlights included producer education, 4-H engagement, and community-based health and nutrition programming. These efforts reflect dedicated staff and collaboration. We thank our Berrien County partners and stakeholders for their continued support.

## Impact in Berrien County



**4,710** Participants from the County attended programs



Residents participated in **547** programs (across the State) and **135** programs (hosted in County)



**417** 4-H Enrolled Youth



**203** MSU Extension Volunteers



**484** Client Consultations



**495** Participants in County agriculture programs



**100** Answered 'Ask Extension' Questions



**84** County partnerships

# Children & Youth Development

*"In 5 years, I have learned and gained so much growth through 4-H. 4-H has given me so many resources, opportunities and new friends! Every year I learn something new and exciting."*

*2025 Mark of Excellence Award Recipient*

**26**

**4-H SPIN and  
Community  
Clubs**

**417**

**4-H members**

**183**

**4-H Volunteers**

**7231**

**4-H youth  
participants**



## Roots, Shoots and Irrigation

On July 14, 2025, a partnership between the Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center and Berrien County 4-H provided 13 youth from the Boys & Girls Club of Southwest Michigan Career Exploration Camp with a look at agricultural research careers.

Ben Phillips, MSU Extension Vegetable Crops Specialist, led a tour of the center's vegetable research plots, shared insights into the work of a vegetable researcher, demonstrated a pilot irrigation system, and engaged youth in collecting data.

Participants graded zucchini based on quality standards and compared their results to electronic grading equipment before taking home a zucchini!

## 4-H Centennial Forest

In May 2025, the Berrien County 4-H Leaders Council invited local 4-H clubs to submit proposals to revitalize the 4-H Centennial Forest at the Buchanan School Farm.

The Four Flags 4-H Club was selected to redesign the flower bed using native pollinator-friendly plants and completed the project in July by planting native species, mulching the area, and installing a sign provided by the Berrien County 4-H program.

Established in 2002 when trees were planted by Berrien County 4-H youth, the Centennial Forest continues to serve as a learning environment for youth and remains open to the public.

# Children & Youth Development



**"We can still make it work!" "What if we tried..."**



## Lincoln Township Library Homeschool Series

Through five 4-H experiences, participants experimented with butter to uncover the science behind milk and its journey from farm to table. While learning about Australia, participants discovered Aboriginal Dot Painting, including the significance of cultural symbols while building creativity and empathy. Additionally, youth explored China by interpreting visual letters and creating their own.

Youth compared apple varieties to discover why some are sweet and others tart, learned how apples are grown and the products they become, and voted for favorites in a taste test. In the healthy eating session, families explored how colorful foods fuel the body, practiced building a balanced plate, and created fruit kabobs. Additionally, homeschool youth at the Lincoln Township Library learned how proteins, vitamins, and minerals combine in a total mixed ration, built a take-home "trail mix" to visualize feed proportions, and discussed protein's role in a balanced diet for animals.

Together, these programs strengthened observation and problem-solving skills, expanded food literacy and cultural awareness, and empowered participants to make informed, healthy choices while deepening connections to local food systems throughout the community.

## Salvation Army Partnership SPIN Clubs

In collaboration with the Salvation Army, a variety of 4-H SPIN Clubs put "learn by doing" to work through lessons in gardening, engineering, and expressive arts that built real-world skills. Youth identified native, non-native, and invasive species, applied those skills in a park scavenger hunt, and used an adapted Project F.I.S.H. Go Fish! game to model resource competition.

Additionally, participants interpreted soil test results, explored soil health with a "trail-mix" analogy, built mini-greenhouse germinators, and installed plugs.

Members planted seeds and co-designed garden site protections, demonstrating resilience. In a sustainability-focused session, participants powered a blender bike to pulp recycled paper, troubleshooted a mechanical jam, pressed pulp into sheets, and bound handmade journals.

***"These microgreens are bussin!"***

***"We actually get to grow our OWN microgreens?!"***

*2025 Cultivating Spark  
SPIN Club Members*

# Community, Food & Environment



Center for Lakes and Streams founding members (left to right): Dr. Jo Latimore, Ruth Kline-Robach, Kelsey Bockelman, Erick Elgin, and Paige Filice.

## Berrien County Residents Learn Best Management Practices for Lakes and Streams

The MSU Extension Center for Lakes and Streams coordinates statewide research, engagement, and education, highlighting programs offered with partners. In 2025, the statewide team of educators and faculty dedicated to conserving Michigan's inland lakes and streams provided programming for **six (6) Berrien County residents**.



## Government and Community Vitality Programming in Berrien County

In 2025, MSU Extension Educators provided a variety of government and community vitality programs to **28 Berrien County residents**, on topics including:

- ❖ Understanding the Land Division Act
- ❖ Governing Essentials
- ❖ Redlining in Michigan
- ❖ Fiscally Ready Communities Series
- ❖ Citizen Planner
- ❖ Local Government Budgeting in Uncertain Times

The **MSU 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 information, explore:  
[www.canr.msu.edu/productcenter](http://www.canr.msu.edu/productcenter)

### MSU Product Center Statewide

Clients: **566**

Counseling Hours: **3,365**

Annual Sales of Clients: **\$84,677,879**

## Community Food Systems Programming in Berrien County

In 2025, the MSU Extension Community Food Systems Team provided programming to **19 Berrien County residents**. Their work centers around the Michigan Good Food Charter, a statewide plan for creating and sustaining good food systems rooted in Michigan communities. Topics include:

- ❖ Organic Farmer Training Program
- ❖ On Farm Produce Safety
- ❖ Beginning and Small Farmers
- ❖ Agritourism

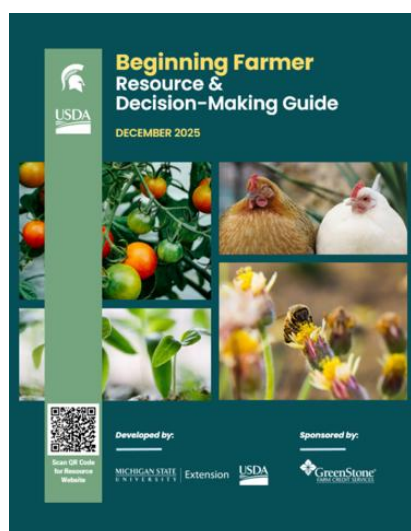
# Agriculture & Agribusiness

**The Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO (GLEXPO)** is an annual event that draws thousands of farmers from Michigan and beyond to Grand Rapids, Michigan, each December. Michigan State University Extension educators are heavily involved in coordinating the educational offerings for this event.



Producers connected with over 4,500 fruit, vegetable, farm market and greenhouse individuals and over 400 industry-leading companies. In 2025, **104 attendees from Berrien County** learned how to implement the newest innovations on their farms!

*Every one of these workshops was FANTASTIC! Y'all really outdid yourselves this year.*  
--Participant



## Beginning Farmer Resource & Decision-Making Guide Launches

The *Beginning Farmer Resource and Decision-Making Guide* provides a pathway to resources a new farmer or decision-maker may need to get started and support their production journey. Starting with production in mind, resources give farmers an introduction to important farming topics and direct them to education and decision-making tools as well as how to connect with agricultural partners.

The Beginning Farmer Resource & Decision-Making Guide is a living document that will be updated as new content becomes available.

[www.canr.msu.edu/resources/beginning-farmer-resource-and-decision-making-guide](http://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/beginning-farmer-resource-and-decision-making-guide)

## MI AG Ideas to Grow With

Created in 2021, this unique event offers educational opportunities across the agricultural industry, with sessions for farmers, homeowners, aspiring producers, and others interested in food and animal production. More than **30 Berrien County residents** attended the week-long program featured tracks on livestock, fruit and vegetable production, crop production, beginning farming, irrigation and water management, food preservation, and agrivoltaics.

**For more information about Extension Agriculture & Agribusiness in Michigan, explore**  
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/extension-agriculture-agribusiness-in-michigan-24>

# Agriculture & Agribusiness

## Ukrainian Agricultural Leaders Visit Michigan to Study Vegetable Handling and Processing

A group of five Ukrainian agribusiness owners visited Michigan in 2024 to learn about vegetable production as Ukraine worked to rebuild domestic supply. In fall 2025, a larger group of 15 returned to study vegetable sorting, packing, processing, and storage systems.

**Ben Phillips, MSU Extension Vegetable Crops Specialist**, helped coordinate the four-day tour, which covered more than 1,000 miles across Michigan and included visits to processors, equipment dealers, and growers. The trip was fully funded by BRIDGES, a Ukrainian partner organization.



## 2025 MSU Spring Spray Drone Fly-in



Back for its second year, the 2025 MSU Spring Spray Drone Fly-in is an all-day educational event designed for both current and aspiring spray drone operators. This event combines expert-led discussions with hands-on demonstrations, providing valuable insights into optimizing drone-based chemical applications. Attendees learned from industry experts about best practices, regulations, and the latest research on spray drone applications in agriculture and related industries.

Speakers included **Mike Reinke, MSU Extension Viticulture Specialist**, with updates on MSU spray drone research. Through forging connections and becoming an educational leader in this burgeoning technology, MSU Extension's efforts may push the aerial agricultural technology industry forward, benefiting farmers and their communities by ensuring adoption of more safe and effective spray drone practices.

## MSU Extension welcomes Daniel (Dan) Dick!

In November, Dan Dick joined MSU Extension as the **Tree Fruit Specialist** based at the Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (SWMREC) in Benton Harbor. Dan completed his master's degree in Horticulture at MSU. During his graduate studies, his research focused on the impact of Phytohormones on fruit quality and ripening of Northern Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*). Welcome Dan!



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

# Health & Nutrition



Kellie Jordan

## ServSafe Training

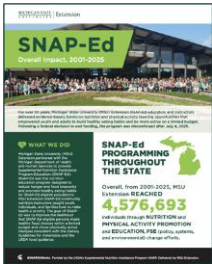
Michigan State University Extension offers ServSafe, a national certification program for those working in food service, specifically managers and other leaders. ServSafe teaches about foodborne illness, how to prevent it and how to train employees about the latest food safety issues. The ServSafe Manager course uses proven techniques, provides new Food & Drug Administration food code rules and content related to the food industry. Topics include providing safe food, forms of contamination, the safe food handler, the flow of food, food safety management systems, safe facilities & pest management, cleaning & sanitizing.

This course provides participants education to successfully pass the ServSafe Food Protection Manager Certification exam. In 2025, Food Safety Instructor, Kellie Jordan trained more than **20 Berrien County** food service workers in ServSafe.



## SNAP-Ed Reached Millions Throughout Michigan

For over 30 years, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension SNAP-Ed educators and instructors delivered evidence-based, hands-on nutrition and physical activity learning opportunities that empowered youth and adults to build healthy eating habits and be more active on a limited budget. Overall, from 2001-2025, MSU Extension reached 4,576,693 individuals through nutrition and physical activity promotion and education, PSE (policy, systems, and environmental) change efforts. Following a federal decision to end funding, the program was discontinued after July 4, 2025.



Scan the QR code to download the report



Yolanda Thrash

Of note, our Expanded Food Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) funded Community Nutrition Instructor, Yolanda Thrash, continues to provide nutrition programming in Berrien County! In 2025, as part of a six-week *Jump Into Foods & Fitness* program, she reached **179 second-, third-, and fourth-grade students** at Moccasin Elementary. Together, they explored healthy eating through hands-on nutrition education. Many students tried jicama for the first time, learning about its health benefits and cultural origins. The program's impact extended beyond the classroom when one student encouraged his father to buy jicama, and together they discovered a new healthy snack! This shows that youth can inspire healthier family choices!

## Promoting Health & Wellbeing

In 2025, MSU Extension Instructors and Educators provided a variety of health and nutrition programs to **1,434 Berrien County** residents, on topics including: *RELAX Alternatives to Anger; Positive Discipline Online Series; Tai Chi for Better Sleep; Cooking for One; Adult Immunization Update; Building Resilience to Avoid Burnout; and Serving Up Food Safety*

# 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.*



**\$244.2 billion** annual impact of food and agriculture on Michigan's economy



**206,346,096** contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



**133,301** total youth participants



**13,660** total volunteers



**11,944** people participated in Food Safety programs including ServSafe®

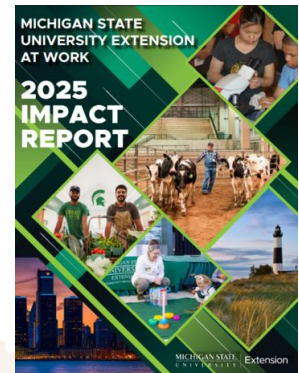


**72,517** Participants in Community, Food and Environment Programs



**1,998** Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent 119,864 hours helping individuals and communities grow

In 2025 alone, **almost 300,000 Michiganders** participated in MSU Extension programs, and they had plenty of programs to pick from — we delivered **more than 8,000 programs** last year! Some people took classes to plan their retirement. Some took classes to learn how to can tomatoes. Others learned how to improve their farm's recordkeeping, start a mindfulness practice or support their children's development. And that's just the start of our impact across the state.



## Berrien County Based Staff:

- ❖ Jamie Styburski, Office Manager
- ❖ Kelly Stelter, 4-H Program Coordinator
- ❖ Noah Cardew, 4-H Program Instructor
- ❖ Yolanda Thrash, Community Nutrition Instructor
- ❖ Zelda Felix-Mottley, Health Educator

- ❖ Beth Ferry, Swine Educator
- ❖ Ben Phillips, Vegetable Specialist
- ❖ Michael Reinke, Viticulture Specialist
- ❖ Dan Dick, Tree Fruit Specialist

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