

BRANCH COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Our Staff:

- Tamra Bildner, Office Manager
- Angie Gradiz, Agriculture Water Use Efficiency & Irrigation Educator
- Megan Wilczynski, 4-H Program Coordinator



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 Branch County. Sincerely, Mary Bohling

Impact in Branch County



1,863 Participants from the county attended programs



724 4-H Enrolled Youth



796 County residents participated in health & nutrition programs



14 Ask Extension Questions Answered



Residents participated in **269** programs (across the State) and **74** programs (hosted in County)



216 MSU Extension Volunteers



1,781 Statewide participants in County programs



95 Client Consultations

4-H & Youth Development: Megan Wilczynski 4-H PC



Megan Wilczynski,
Branch County 4-H
Program Coordinator

Children and families of Branch County continued to benefit from a variety of programs in partnership with dedicated 4-H volunteers and MSU Extension staff.

Topics included:

- Career exploration and workforce development
- Child & family development
- Healthy living
- Leadership & civic engagement
- Science literacy

34 4-H clubs
215 4-H
Volunteers
724 4-H members
3,348 4-H youth
participants



Branch County 4-H Pie Auction Raises

\$14K+ The Branch County 4-H Leaders Council hosted its annual spaghetti dinner and pie auction at The Gathering Barn. Over 50 pies were homemade by council members, supporters, and volunteers. They were auctioned in both live and silent formats, raising more than **\$14,000**. Three top supporters received personalized awards. Attendees shared pie slices during the auction, creating a lively, community-driven event.

In its 14th year, the funds raised from this popular event will help with programming, project supplies, Expo Days, National 4-H Congress, local camps and scholarships!

Kids in the Kitchen

Tasteful Kreationz, a local catering company owned by 4-H supporter Tricia Mayer, developed an Italian-themed cooking class featuring pizza, homemade Alfredo, salad, and dessert. The program came together successfully, with strong youth participation and a positive experience for both youth and adults. Held in the industrial kitchen at the fair's Dearth Community Center, the class also benefited from Mayer's generous donation of supplies, allowing each participant to take home a cutting board. Due to its success, we look forward to expanding and continuing the program in the future.



Agriculture & Agribusiness: Angie Gradiz, Educator



Angie Gradiz

Summer Irrigation Workshop

The Summer Irrigation Workshop, held August 1, 2025, at the Kellogg Biological Station in Hickory Corners, Michigan, brought together 24 growers, agribusiness professionals, MSU Extension educators and specialists, and industry representatives from 10 counties to network and learn about current irrigation issues affecting primarily small- to mid-size farms (0–500 acres). The program featured hands-on demonstrations in soil texture analysis, catch-can uniformity testing, variable rate irrigation systems, and sprinkler types, along with vendor showcases and classroom-based instruction on irrigation scheduling tools.

The workshop concluded with a facilitated roundtable discussion on the future of irrigation in Michigan. Participants were eligible to earn RUP, CCA, and MAEAP Phase 1 credits. Evaluation results showed significant knowledge gains and an estimated impact on 7,005.25 acres, with potential savings or earnings of \$14,351.



GLEXP0 Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO

The Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO (GLEXP0) 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. Eight attendees from Branch County learned how to implement the newest innovations on their farms.

Branch County Farmers Day – 55 Years!

The Branch County Farmers Day was held Feb. 17, 2025, at the Branch Area Careers Center in Coldwater, Michigan, bringing together 53 growers, agribusiness professionals, MSU Extension educators, and industry partners from six counties. The program featured two educational tracks—one RUP-eligible and one focused on non-pesticide topics such as profitability, conservation, water policy, and agrivoltaics—with sessions covering key field crop management issues. Evaluation surveys showed increased participant knowledge, with reported management impacts on an estimated 2,648 acres and potential savings or returns of \$17,278.



Health & Nutrition:



Kellie Jordan
Food Safety Educator

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 Educator, Kellie Jordan trained 41 Branch County food service workers in ServSafe.



Quincy High School Examines Energy Drinks

MSU Extension CNI Nisha Ritchie completed a six-week Teen Cuisine nutrition series with Polly Schiel's high school class. After learning to interpret Nutrition Facts labels, calculate added sugar, and understand sugar's effects on the body, one participant applied this knowledge outside the class by questioning a peer about the sugar content of an energy drink and explaining its potential health impacts, encouraging healthier choices.

This program is wonderful and I can't wait to have her (Nisha) back next year with another group of students. This is very important for ALL students to know, and I wish she could do this with every student in our building. –Quincy High School Teacher

Special Note: For over 30 years, MSU Extension SNAP-Ed staff 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. Following a federal decision to end funding, the program was discontinued after July 4, 2025.

Promoting Health & Wellbeing

In 2025, MSU Extension Educators provided a variety of health programs to **796 Branch County** residents, on topics including:

- ❖ *RELAX Alternatives to Anger*
- ❖ *Be Kind to Your Mind 2.5*
- ❖ *Rethink Your Drink*
- ❖ *Health for Better Living*
- ❖ *Adult Immunization Update*
- ❖ *Building Resilience to Avoid Burnout*
- ❖ *Serving Up Food Safety – Various Topics*

14 Branch County residents were impacted by a site receiving nutrition or physical activity Policy, System, or Environmental (PSE) education.

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.

Branch County Residents Learn Best Management Practices for Lakes and Streams

Educator Erick Elgin met with 35 Branch County residents to discuss Michigan’s most pressing lake, stream, and watershed conservation and stewardship challenges. The MSU Extension Center for Lakes and Streams is a team of Extension educators and outreach faculty based throughout Michigan with a shared mission of advancing the conservation and stewardship of Michigan’s inland lakes and streams.

Government and Community Vitality Programming in Branch County

In 2025, MSU Extension Educators provided a variety of government and community vitality programs to 19 Branch County residents, on topics including:

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

Housing and Money Management Programming in Branch County

In 2025, MSU Extension certified housing and money management counselors delivered trusted, unbiased education to Branch County residents. Topics:

- ❖ *Financial Home Ownership*
- ❖ *Every Penny Counts*
- ❖ *How Much Home Can You Afford?*
- ❖ *Mortgage Foreclosure Basics*
- ❖ *Make a Spending Plan Work for You*

2025 Statewide Impacts

Community, Food & Environment

73,800+

people participated in more than 2,000 community, food and environment programs

226

partnerships and **121** coalitions supported by our educators

\$1.8M

in volunteer time value leveraged for programming

MSU Product Center Statewide

Clients: **566**

Counseling Hours: **3,365**

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

The **MSU Product Center** helps Michigan entrepreneurs and businesses to develop and launch new product and service ideas into the food, beverage, and agriculture markets. Whether you are a budding entrepreneur or operate a well-established company, the Product Center is your key to the front door of MSU’s vast and varied technical expertise, research and outreach services.

To access all Community, Food, and Environment programs and resources, go to <https://www.canr.msu.edu/community>

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.



66,154 participants in MSU Extension agriculture and agribusiness programs



1 Million + content views across our MI Health Matters and Think Food Safety social media channels



139,000 total youth participants



\$1.8M in volunteer time leveraged for programming



66,592 people participated in Food Safety programs including ServSafe®

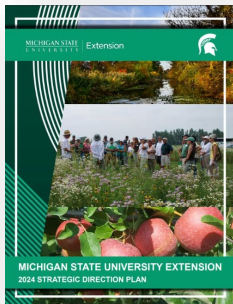


73,800+ Participants in Community, Food and Environment Programs

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



1,998 Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent **95,067** hours helping individuals and communities grow



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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