

CALHOUN COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Our Staff:

- Sylvia Benavidez, County Support Staff
- Cressie Vargo, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Kathryn Fischer, 4-H Supervising Educator
- Kellie Jordan, Food Safety Program Instructor
- Nisha Ritchie, Community Nutrition Instructor



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 Calhoun County. Sincerely, Kai Gritter.

Impact in Calhoun County



1,930 participants from the county attended programs



Residents participated in **377** programs (across the state) and **72** programs (hosted in county)



490 youth enrolled in 4-H



147 MSU Extension volunteers



1,107 county residents participated in health & nutrition programs



76 participants in county agriculture programs



128 client consultations



72 answered Ask Extension questions

4-H & Youth Development:

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

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

31, 4-H clubs
128, 4-H Volunteers
490, 4-H members
1,517, 4-H youth participants



In May, Calhoun County's 4-H Program Coordinator Cressie Vargo partnered with the Battle Creek Kiwanis Club to host their annual Conservation Day, an outdoor educational event for 65 fifth-grade students and staff from Harrington Elementary. Participants explored conservation topics, fire safety, and engaged with various programs, including the popular Calhoun County Sheriff's Mounted Division horses!



Over 4,000 Michigan youth completed the national Youth for the Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) certification, a program promoting food safety, animal well-being and character development. There were **102** in-person Instructor-led YQCA trainings offered, one of which was taught by Kathryn (Kathy) Fischer (pictured above right) to **29** Calhoun County youth. **This annual education initiative continues to strengthen youth knowledge and responsibility in animal agriculture.**

Calhoun County Farm Tractor Safety Training for Youth

With equipment provided by Stealy Farms of Battle Creek, the 4-H volunteer-led *Tractor Operator Program* taught **five** youth Safety Basics, Agricultural Hazards, The Tractor, Connecting & Using Implements with the Tractor, Materials Handling, and provided hours of driving experience. All attendees passed their final written and driving tests and were issued tractor operator licenses.



This [National Safe Tractor and Machinery Operation Program](#) (NSTMOP) program is offered every other year and is open to all, ages 14 and up. **Eight** volunteers gave more than **140 hours** of their time during this nine-week program. Stealy Farms hosted an end-of-program cookout for the students and their families.

Five new Calhoun County youth are Safe Tractor and Machinery Operators

This program thrives thanks to the invaluable support of our partners, community, and volunteers!



Health & Nutrition:



Kellie Jordan,
Food Safety Instructor

Michigan State University Extension offers ServSafe®, a national certification program for those working in food service, specifically managers and other leaders. In 2024, Kellie Jordan (pictured left) trained more than **30** food service workers in Calhoun County, completing **64 hours** of instruction during **eight sessions** throughout the year.

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 and pest management, and cleaning and sanitizing. **This course provides participants education to successfully pass the ServSafe® Food Protection Manager Certification exam.**



In March, Kellie partnered with the Marshall District Library to provide training on *Cottage Food Law*. This training provided guidelines for individuals to prepare food safely in a home kitchen. A total of **nine** Calhoun County residents attended the session.

The training was also offered virtually to reach local entrepreneurs and teach them how to successfully start a Michigan Cottage Food business. Afterward, participants received a certificate of completion, boosting consumer trust, and one farmers market board member shared, "*The Zoom Cottage Law class is very well done. I'm going to recommend every Cottage seller take this course.*"



Nisha Ritchie,
Community Nutrition
Instructor

Making healthy changes

Nisha Ritchie (pictured left) partnered with the **Haven of Rest** in Battle Creek to offer the *Cooking for One* program to residents facing homelessness and addiction. In one lesson, participants measured sugar in popular drinks, sparking eye-opening conversations. One resident shared, "*I learned how much certain things contain (sugar) and how detrimental it is. I quit drinking soda.*"

During a six-week *Show Me Nutrition* series with Tekonsha Elementary's 3rd grade class, a Title 1 paraprofessional recognized the value of Nisha's lessons and took action to reinforce them. Inspired by the content, she added *The ABC's of Health* to the school library to support continued learning.



She shared, "*Listening to the nutrition information you were teaching them, I felt I needed to bring some nutrition books into the school's library to support your program.*"

Agriculture & Agribusiness:



During March and April, Vegetable Crops Educator Ben Phillips and Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi Food Sovereignty Coordinator Nickole Keith collaborated on a lunch and learn project at the Pine Creek Reservation between Fulton and Athens.

Participants were supplied with a binder containing the curriculum and seed packets. For six weeks, participants spent 30 minutes discussing the vegetables of the week with the option of starting seeds during the session or at home.

By the end of the multi-week session, students had started seeds from **40 different** varieties of vegetables and filled three shelves with trays!



Each December, the [Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo](#) (GLEXP0) serves as a premier conference for fruit, vegetable, horticulture and farmer market growers to learn about the latest research and innovations in agriculture and farming.

Farmer and grower livelihoods depend on maintaining productive and profitable operations and GLEXP0 offers producers continuous learning so that farms can compete in an increasingly global market.

The GLEXP0 board along with [Michigan State University Extension](#) hosts a variety of educational sessions and discussions to further the knowledge and resources growers need to be competitive in today's markets. Our team of vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, and community food system educators and specialists organized 65 out of 93 educational activities with **3,162 in attendance**.

Nine Calhoun County residents attended GLEXP0 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."*



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

Community, Food & Environment:



Tyler Augst, Government & Community Vitality Educator

Citizen Planner Training for Calhoun County

MSU Extension, in partnership with Calhoun County Community Development, provided training to **22** land use decision makers in south central Michigan through the Citizen Planner Program in the fall of 2024. Citizen Planner is a non-credit course that leads to a certificate of completion awarded by MSU Extension. Citizen Planner has over 20 years of success in training local appointed and elected officials to successfully fulfill their roles on public bodies like planning commission and zoning boards of appeals.

Many individuals appointed to these roles have limited experience with land use or local government. Extension programs like Citizen Planner help build their capacity to serve effectively. Of the 22 participants who registered in Calhoun County, **20 completed all six sessions—totaling 18 hours of training—and earned their Certificate of Completion.**

Building Strong Fiscal Foundations for Michigan Communities

In partnership with the Michigan Department of Treasury, Tyler Augst (pictured above left) co-facilitated eight *Fiscally Ready Communities* webinars. The series reached **1,163 local government officials and staff** across Michigan, including residents from Calhoun County. Topics included: Budgeting for Fiscal Sustainability; Capital Asset Management and Planning; Internal Controls; Nuts and Bolts: Fees, Fines, Purchasing, and Receipting; and From Fundamentals to Best Practices.

The sessions had a strong impact: **87%** gained knowledge of financial best practices, **82%** felt more confident assessing fiscal health, and **81%** improved their job effectiveness." The program is strengthening financial sustainability and governance in communities statewide and resonating with participants, one of whom shared:

"Even though I am exposed to this information on a regular basis, I look to utilize webinars such as these to improve my knowledge and understanding on these topics to assist in a better functioning organization."

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.



\$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



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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