

CALHOUN COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Our Staff:

- Sylvia Benavidez, County Support Staff
- Cressie Vargo, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Kathy Fischer, 4-H Supervising Educator
- Kellie Jordan, Food Safety Program Instructor
- Nisha Ritchie, 4-H After School Program 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, Mary Bohling

Impact in Calhoun County



1,643 Participants from the county attended programs



458 4-H Enrolled Youth



809 County residents participated in health & nutrition programs



43 Ask Extension Questions Answered



Residents participated in **405** programs (across the State) and **57** programs (hosted in County)



170 MSU Extension Volunteers



1,052 Statewide participants in County programs



218 Client Consultations

4-H & Youth Development: Cressie Vargo, 4-H PC



Cressie Vargo

Calhoun County 4-H
Program Coordinator

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.

Topics included:

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

29 4-H clubs

160 4-H

Volunteers

458 4-H members

1,254 4-H youth
participants



Attendees gather for food and fellowship during the 2025 MLK Community Celebration

2025 MLK Community Celebration

The annual event, held for the eighth consecutive year and second under MSU Extension sponsorship, drew over 225 attendees to the Albion Community Center despite bitter cold weather. The evening began with a free dinner sponsored by Oaklawn Hospital and prepared by a local caterer with additional chicken donated by Family Fare. Following dinner, attendees gathered in the auditorium for speakers and performers honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a Beloved Community, along with recognition of local volunteers. Notable guests included school and district leadership, former and current state representatives, and Albion College staff.

No Ordinary Apple

Sixty-six Calhoun County youth participated in a special reading event at Arbor Academy in Battle Creek, where Kalamazoo County 4-H Program Coordinator Veronica Bolhuis engaged students through a partnership with HNI staff. Reading *No Ordinary Apple*, Bolhuis led an interactive discussion on the five senses, taste buds, and the importance of mindful eating, emphasizing how slowing down and using the senses can enhance healthy food choices.



Agriculture & Agribusiness:

MI Ag Ideas to Grow With

This unique event, created in 2021 offers a full array of educational sessions for farmers, homeowners, others interested in food and animal production, and those considering agricultural endeavors. Eighteen Calhoun County residents attended the two-week series that featured 29 educational sessions on 8 tracks: animal agriculture, beginning farmer, field crops, general sessions, irrigation day, preserving MI harvest, solar photovoltaics, and vegetables. Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) and Certified Crop advisor (CCA) credits were available for relevant sessions.



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.

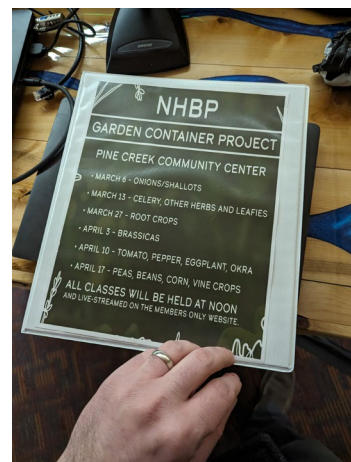
Producers connected with over 4,500 fruit, vegetable, farm market and greenhouse individuals and over 400 industry-leading companies. Six attendees from Calhoun County learned how to implement the newest innovations on their farms.

Veg Out! Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi

Pleased with the success of last year's program, 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 during March-April, 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!



The **Summer Irrigation Workshop**, held August 1, 2025, at Kellogg Biological Station, brought together 24 participants from 10 counties to learn about irrigation challenges on small- to mid-size farms. The program included hands-on demonstrations, vendor exhibits, and instruction on irrigation scheduling, concluding with a roundtable on Michigan's irrigation future. Participants earned certification credits with evaluations showing significant knowledge gains and an estimated impact on 7,005.25 acres and \$14,351 in potential savings or earnings.



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



Homer Middle School Examines Energy Drinks

Community Nutrition Instructor Nisha Ritchie delivered a Teen Cuisine lesson at Homer Middle School, where students analyzed Nutrition Facts labels on favorite snacks and drinks, converted added sugar from grams to teaspoons, and measured it for a visual display. A local news reporter observed the class at the teacher's request.

I learned a lot about the drinks, and what's healthy, and what's not. This has changed what I drink on a daily basis. Thank you for the information. ---Student

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 **809 Calhoun 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*

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

Community, Food & Environment



Calhoun 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 **10** Calhoun County residents.

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

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**

Government and Community Vitality Programming in Calhoun County

In 2025, MSU Extension Educators provided a variety of government and community vitality programs to **62** Calhoun 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*

Community Food Systems Programming in Calhoun County

In 2025, the MSU Extension Community Food Systems Team provided programming to **47** Calhoun 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:

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

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®

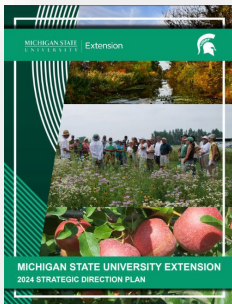


73,800+ Participants in Community, Food and Environment Programs

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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