

GRATIOT COUNTY MSU EXTENSION ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Message from the District Director

Gratiot County MSU Extension provides its residents with access to resources and expertise in areas of agriculture, agribusiness, health, nutrition, community, food, environment, and children and youth development. Staff located in Ingham, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ionia and Montcalm Counties all serve this area as a part of a statewide team of Extension professionals. Anyone is welcome to visit our office and meet with local professionals or get connected to the appropriate regional expert, purchase soil test kits for their fields or gardens, find pesticide manuals critical for certification, have their pressure canner lid tested or ask questions. People contact us via telephone, email, in person, or online. In fact, 192,784 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts were made with Gratiot County MSU Extension in 2025.



1,429 people from Gratiot County attended MSU Extensions programs.



People from Gratiot County attended **272** MSU Extension programs (across the state).



693 people from Gratiot County participated in Agricultural and Agribusiness programs.



638 youth from Gratiot County participated in Children and Youth programs.



145 people from Gratiot County participated in Community, Food, and Environment programs.



402 people from Gratiot County participated in Health and Nutrition programs.

Overall Impact



MSU Extension employees are members of **2** community coalitions within the County.



There were **3** Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy System and Environmental sites receiving PSE education within the County.



There were **27** answers provided to “Ask Extension” questions asked by people from Gratiot County.



There were **10** policy, systems, and environmental changes with those PSE sites, **impacting 189** people.



1,295 people attended programs that were hosted in the County.



There were **192,784** contacts through e-newsletters and handouts.



117 people from Gratiot County volunteered with MSU Extension



There were **201** direct client consultations.

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity



There were **72,517** participants in community, food, and environment programs from across Michigan.



There were **476** virtual programs related to Financial Education, Food Systems, Water and Environmental Quality, Government and Businesses.



There were **15** Commercial and Farm soil tests samples processed.



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



There were **2** homeowner soil tests samples processed.



There were **447** participants in county agriculture programs.

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity

Launch of the MSU Extension Animal Agriculture YouTube Channel

In mid-2025, MSU Extension Animal Agriculture launched a [YouTube](#) channel to disseminate research-based information for livestock producers. Content focuses on practical topics such as herd management, nutrition, and disease prevention, and repurposes existing Extension materials in a format accessible to producers with limited Time availability.

Since its launch in July 2025, the channel has produced 21 videos and recorded more than 800 views, 16 subscribers, and over 1.2 hours of total watch time. The channel was active for part of the reporting year and demonstrated steady engagement during that period. MSU Extension plans to expand the channel through regular content updates and targeted outreach efforts to increase reach and support for Michigan livestock producers.



Gratiot County RED 2025



On May 1, 2025, Gratiot County's Swine Educator, Casey Zangaro and 4-H Program Coordinator, Ashley Foster, educated more than 420 fourth-grade students about swine and agriculture through a hands-on learning event. The program aimed to spark curiosity and build understanding of where food—specifically pork—comes from.

Students participated in interactive stations focused on animal care, biosecurity, and the science of swine production. Activities included learning swine basics, exploring products made from pigs, and viewing swine barn replicas. The event was designed to present complex agricultural concepts in an engaging, age-appropriate format. This initiative supported MSU Extension's mission to connect youth with agriculture and promote awareness of sustainable farming practices. By introducing students to swine production, the program fostered appreciation for the agricultural industry and its role in daily life. Feedback from teachers and students highlighted the event's success in making agriculture relatable and engaging. Many students expressed increased interest in farming, animal science, and agriculture. The outreach exemplifies the value of experiential learning and its role in inspiring future agricultural leaders.

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity

Educational Opportunities

Agriculture is constantly evolving, and growers need timely, accurate information on weather, crops, and pest management. To support this need, the Michigan State University Extension Field Crops team delivers relevant, research-based content through its *In the Weeds* podcast. Released every other week, the Podcast addresses critical issues affecting Michigan's farming and agribusiness communities.

The *Field Crops Virtual Breakfast* Series reached more than 5,500 live participants statewide in 2025, and of those participants, **74** were Gratiot County growers. The Virtual Breakfast Series offers free weekly online programs, providing timely, research-based information on emerging agriculture issues. By offering expert-led education in a convenient virtual format, the program enabled growers to access high-value information without leaving their farms, resulting in an average estimated savings of \$7.63 per acre from management changes informed by the series, and supporting improved crop health, pest management, and overall productivity.



Statewide Soil Health Assessment

A statewide soil health assessment was conducted in 2024 across Michigan on 94 fields. These fields represented a range of management approaches, from standard farming practices to advanced regenerative agriculture systems. Fields were selected from five ecoregions to reflect differences in soil types and climate across the state: the Upper Peninsula and northern Michigan, central Michigan, the Thumb, southeast Michigan, and southwest Michigan.

Building on this work, a comprehensive, interdisciplinary assessment was conducted in 2025 across 50 fields to better understand the relationship between farm management, soil health, and weather resilience. The study also examined how soil health supports yield stability and identified social and economic factors that influence farmer adoption of resilient management practices. Each field was sampled in detail to measure nitrogen loss (gas), soil carbon storage, soil health indicators, crop yield and quality, and yield stability. Socio-economic information was collected alongside field data. Four sampling locations were established within each field based on yield stability patterns and landscape position.

Extension and outreach activities were conducted statewide and within each ecoregion. Research continued in 2025, and Extension activities expanded to include farmers outside the project to share lessons learned and best practices.

Monica Jean, Morgan Filhart, and David Apple (pictured) contributed to this project through soil sampling, greenhouse gas measurements, and Extension activities.





There were **329** 4-H youth enrolled in 4-H clubs and **115** 4-H volunteers



685 people participated in nutrition and physical activity programs hosted in the County.



The 4-H volunteer hour value was **\$34,020.45**.



402 people from Gratiot County participated in health and nutrition programs.



There were a total of **133,301** youth participants in MSU Extension programs statewide



Statewide, **11,944** people participated in Food Safety programs.

Empowering Citizens of Gratiot County

Gratiot County's **Lion Club in Alma** hosted Holly Tired, MSU Extension Health and Nutrition Educator, and community members as she introduced the *Diabetes PATH* program. *Diabetes PATH* is a six-week program which focuses on managing diabetes symptoms, reducing pain, medication management, and emotional health.

Holly continued to teach the community members in Gratiot County with classes at **Alma, Breckenridge and Fulton Senior Centers**. She presented *Keys to Embracing Aging*. This program is aimed at aging with success and grace while increasing longevity. *Keys to Embracing Aging* focuses on attitude, physical activity, brain health, the importance of being social, financial security and sleep management.



Making a Lasting Impact

During the months of February and March, Roxanne White, MSU Extension Community Nutrition Instructor, taught *Show Me Nutrition* to Mrs. Knights kindergarten class at **South Elementary in Ithaca**. The program lasted six weeks and focused on developing foundations of lifelong health, while promoting less screen time; more physical activity and making healthy food choices.

"The life-long impacts from health and nutrition education are equally important for children to learn," Roxanne White. One kindergartener said "This was the best day, ever. I hope I remember this forever."





Cloverbud Day Camp



Cloverbud Day Camp offered hands-on activities designed to introduce young participants to 4-H and the county fair experience. Youth rotated through stations featuring games, crafts, STEM activities, and project-entry practice, building confidence and curiosity while encouraging early engagement in 4-H programs.



Gratiot County 4-H Community Frenzy

The **Gratiot County 4-H Program** hosted its **first annual 4-H Community Frenzy**, welcoming both 4-H and non-4-H families for an evening of educational and recreational activities. The event featured games, crafts, face painting, STEM activities, dog and cat project demonstrations, S.A.F.E. Archery, and a scavenger hunt highlighting fairgrounds activities. Approximately **150 participants** attended, with **over 70 percent** of registered families identified as non-4-H households interested in learning more about the program. The event strengthened community connections and increased awareness of 4-H opportunities, supporting future enrollment and engagement.

Gratiot County Partnerships

Alma Senior Center
Alma Hospital
Breckenridge Senior Center
Farm Bureau Gratiot County and Regional
Fulton Senior Center
GCFFY
Gratiot County Commission on Aging
Gratiot Isabella RESD
Greenstone – Gratiot County
Ithaca Schools
Pine River Township Hall
Saint Louis Farmers Market
The Grain Shed

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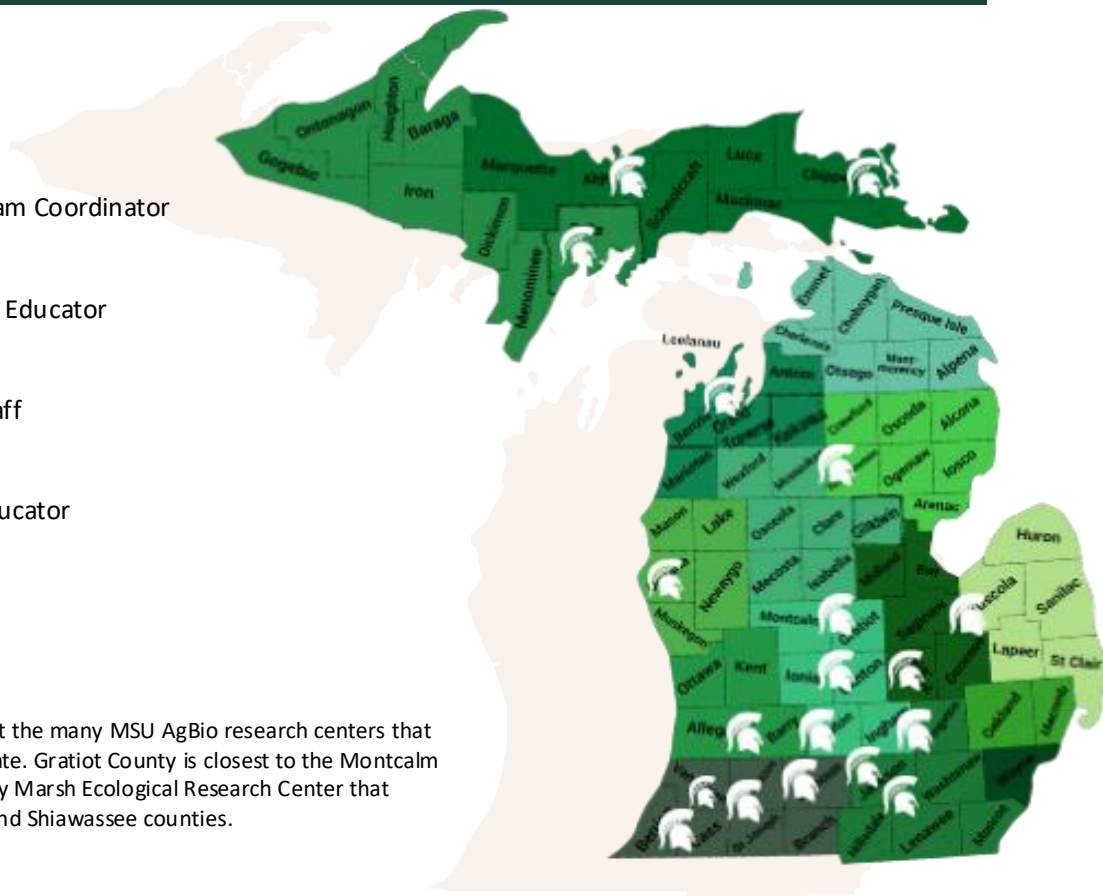
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Casey Zangaro – Swine Educator
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Holly Tiret (retired)

The Spartan helmets represent the many MSU AgBio research centers that are located throughout the state. Gratiot County is closest to the Montcalm Research Station and the Corey Marsh Ecological Research Center that shares a border with Clinton and Shiawassee counties.





District Directors

MSU Extension is structured into 14 districts. Programming and staffing occurs across district lines as dictated by community needs. The districts simply provide a mechanism for organizing and reporting on our relationships with community-based partners.

