

# GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

## 2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

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## Message from the District Director



I am pleased to share highlights from another impactful year of partnership between Michigan State University Extension and Grand Traverse County. Your continued investment ensures that residents of all ages have access to research-based education, responsive community support, and programs that strengthen the wellbeing and vitality of our region.

This year, our team continued to meet people where they are—whether in classrooms, on farms, in community spaces, or through flexible online and hybrid offerings. Because our staff live and work in the communities they serve, they remain closely connected to local needs and opportunities. That connection drives our work in youth development, agriculture and natural resources, health and nutrition, community and economic development, and lifelong learning.

Thanks to your partnership, we expanded opportunities for youth leadership and career exploration, supported families in building healthier lifestyles, strengthened local businesses, and provided farmers with tools and resources to support both economic resilience and mental health. These outcomes are a direct reflection of your commitment to fostering a thriving, informed, and connected community.

On behalf of the MSU Extension team serving our county, thank you for your ongoing trust and collaboration. We look forward to continuing this important work together and hope to see you at one of our upcoming programs or events in the year ahead.

**Jennifer Berkey**  
 District 3 Director  
 Michigan State University Extension

## Impact



**362**  
 Programs accessed by residents



**65,185**  
 Reached by social media



**3,861**  
 Reached through programming



**6,044**  
 Reached indirectly



## 2026 ORCHARD AND VINEYARD SHOW

The 2026 Northwest Michigan Orchard and Vineyard Show took place on January 13-14 at the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa, 100 Grand Traverse Village Blvd, Acme, MI 49610. The exhibit hall was open during the show and featured vendors of orchard and vineyard equipment and supplies. This year, we had over 50 vendors at the show. We tried a new layout for the show, and vendors liked the flow of the floor, and they had much greater access to attendees.

Both Tuesday and Wednesday offered a variety of topics relating to research and information on tart cherries, sweet cherries, apples, and wine grapes. Tuesday's sessions included tree fruit topics such as novel methods of controlling weeds, managing bitterpit in Honeycrisp apples, cold acclimation in apple, maximum residue limits in tart cherries intended for international markets, the state of

tart cherries globally, and applying pesticides with drones. On Wednesday, we had research updates on disease and insect management, improving color in apple, exploring agrivoltaics in orchard systems, navigating variability in tart cherry, and we concluded the day with groundwater discharge permitting.

This year, we had our largest turnout of attendees since the pandemic. We had over 340 participants at this year's show.

## NORTHWEST MICHIGAN GROWER BUS TOUR

In March 2025, the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center (NWMHRC) staff organized a tour to West Central Michigan and the Ridge. The goal of this tour was to showcase new technology on fruit farms around the state. The bus departed from the NWMHRC at 7am with over 70 growers on a chartered bus. Our first stop was in Hart, Michigan where we had high-density apple pruning

demonstration; we also highlighted top worked Honeycrisp trees. At our second stop, the grower had used a Vivid X Vision system to estimate his yields and bins per acre. This technology is mounted to an ATV, and research conducted by MSU researchers showed that this equipment helps growers achieve a tighter estimate for annual yields. We looked at a large planting of high-density sweet cherries under rain covers, and we also had a pruning demonstration of this new orchard system. We toured a sweet cider processing plant, and we saw a new line for packing fresh market sweet cherries. The tour ended with a stop to highlight a new irrigation system, the first one of its kind installed in Michigan; the water delivery and irrigation scheduling is done through a cloud, so growers use it from a smart phone. In addition to the 70 NW growers on the bus, we were joined by local growers from west central and the Ridge at each site for a total of over 150 attendees on this tour.



## NEW PATHOLOGY EQUIPMENT

In fall of 2025, the Northwest Michigan Horticulture Research Center purchased new laboratory equipment that expands the ability of NWMHRC researchers to do more in depth plant pathology research and testing. This research will include a deeper in-center dive into critical diseases in apple such as fireblight and apple scab, and diseases in cherry such as cherry leaf spot, American brown rot, and bacterial canker. Some of the new equipment includes the following: a laminar airflow workstation, a benchtop autoclave, a microbiological incubator, a centrifuge, and many smaller tools essential for pathology work. The NWMHRC team now has the tools and equipment to make sterile media in house, and plate fungal and bacterial pathogens. This capability will allow researchers to work with multiple disease pathogens and test for pesticide resistance in fungal pathogens collected in local orchards. Surveys conducted between 2016 and 2019 have shown widespread resistance to key SDHI fungicides that have been used in commercial tart cherry orchards. Growers need this critical information for proper management of diseases to produce a marketable crop. This lab will serve as the off-campus outlet for tree fruit plant pathology research.

## IRRIGATION UPDATE

In 2024, the Michigan Tree Fruit Commission awarded the NWMHRC

funds to update the irrigation system. This spring, we were excited to start the install of the new WiseConn Irrigation system. Our old irrigation system was starting to wear out and the automated technology was dated.

WiseConn is a relatively new technology, that some growers across Michigan are starting to adopt. It is categorized as a “smart irrigation system,” as it provides precision drip and sprinkler irrigation solutions, combining hardware (valves, controllers, sensors) with cloud-based software for monitoring, analytics and scheduling. They also integrate with other agritech platforms (e.g. CropX), so data from soil moisture, weather, sensors, etc., can feed into decision-making. We are in the process of connecting our WiseConn Irrigation system to our Enviroweather Station, so it can use real-time data to drive irrigation decisions.

Because the system uses real-time data (soil moisture, weather, flow, etc.) to schedule irrigation, it delivers the right amount of water, only when needed. That minimizes waste from overwatering or running irrigation during rain.

The NWMHRC’s Farm Manager, Dan Bacheler, worked with Whitewater Irrigation and WiseConn to install this new system. Dan is in the process of learning how to operate and best utilize this new system and is excited about being able to

automate irrigation timing remotely. We are excited about all the potential projects this new system may introduce.

This system is coming just at the right time. We have three new irrigation projects that are ongoing at the station: two in high-density apples and one in tart cherries. As we have light soils in northern Michigan and rainfall has become more erratic, dialing in the best water delivery will be critical to produce high quality crops.

We are also fortunate to have a newer MSU faculty, Dr. Younsuk Dong, on board to collaborate on our new irrigation trials. Dr. Dong received a Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and MSU collaboration grant to address climate resiliency. The new apple irrigation trials are supported through this innovative program. We look forward to some great data on best practices for watering and fertigation fresh market apples.

Thank you to the Michigan Tree Fruit Commission for their support in this project! Thanks also to the Climate Resiliency program for funding innovative irrigation research!



AgBioResearch  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



**More than 1,200**  
participants attended  
Extension viticulture  
programs in 2025



## MSU EXTENSION'S IMPACT ON MICHIGAN'S GRAPE & WINE INDUSTRY IN 2025

Michigan's grape and wine industry is an important part of the culture, economy, and agricultural landscape of Northwest Michigan. Through Michigan State University (MSU) Extension, local vineyards and wineries receive year-round support that connects university research with practical solutions growers can use in their daily operations.

Our primary focus is on helping grape growers manage risks, improve vineyard health, and produce high-quality fruit that

supports the region's wineries and agricultural tourism.

Throughout 2025, MSU Extension delivered educational programs, workshops, and field demonstrations covering vineyard management, pruning practices, soil health, pest and disease management, and adapting to changing weather conditions. These programs brought together growers, vineyard managers, and industry professionals to share knowledge and strengthen collaboration across the region. More than 1,200 participants attended Extension viticulture programs during the year, demonstrating strong community engagement

and continued interest in advancing Michigan's wine industry.

A major focus of this work has been developing practical tools that help growers make better decisions. One upcoming resource will help vineyards better understand how winter temperatures affect grapevines—an important issue in northern climates where extreme cold can damage crops. Tools like this allow growers to prepare ahead of challenging weather conditions and protect long-term vineyard productivity.



Extension efforts also supported innovative projects aimed at improving efficiency and sustainability in Michigan vineyards. Current initiatives include improving methods to estimate grape yields before harvest, helping farms better plan labor and winery operations, and exploring new technologies that may allow plant diseases to be detected earlier.

Earlier detection helps growers respond more effectively while reducing unnecessary inputs and environmental impacts.

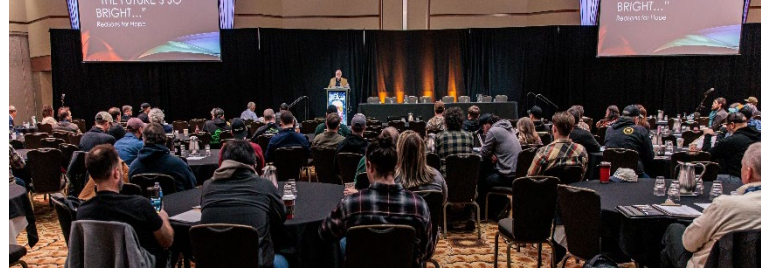
In addition to organized programs, MSU Extension provides ongoing seasonal support through weekly vineyard updates, educational articles, and direct consultations with growers



throughout the growing season. This continuous communication ensures that local farmers have timely information needed to respond to weather challenges and changing vineyard conditions.

The grape and wine industry continues to grow across the

Northwest Michigan, supporting farms, local businesses, tourism, and rural communities. MSU Extension remains committed to working alongside growers and community partners to strengthen agriculture, encourage innovation, and support the long-term success of Northwest Michigan's wine region.



## HOP RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND OUTREACH RESEARCH GRANT FUNDING 2025-26

MSU Extension Educators, professors, specialists, and graduate students continue to secure federal and state funding for hop research in Grand Traverse County and beyond.

## STATEWIDE MSU HOP RESEARCH PROJECTS

MSU Extension continued to partner with the Hop Growers of Michigan and Promote Michigan on a USDA Specialty Crop Block grant (\$110,810) entitled: "Enhancing the competitiveness of the Michigan hop industry." The project was administered from October 2023-September 2025. The project objective was to increase sales of Michigan-grown hops in Michigan and throughout the Great Lakes Region through a targeted promotion campaign and a brewer/consumer engagement strategy.

Dr. Sirrine in collaboration MSU professors, Michigan hop growers, and Bell's Brewery were recently awarded a MDARD Craft Beverage Council grant (\$31,546) to evaluate the aromatic and chemical profiles of 3 different hop cultivars based upon different post-harvest

handling methods. The research will take place during the 2026 hop harvest. The results may help expand market opportunities for Michigan hop growers and brewers.

Annually, based upon requests from the Michigan Brewers Guild and the Hop Quality Group, MSU designs a survey instrument to collect cultivar, acreage, yield, and hop quality data from all Michigan hop growers. Respondents account for 85% of the total hop acreage in Michigan.

Brewers, growers, and MSU researchers will be able to use the information to improve plant selection, improve hop quality, incorporate Michigan hop varieties into new beer recipes, and more.

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

MSU extension educators, professors, and graduate students continue to deliver educational content in a variety of forms including conference presentations, the annual MSU Hop Management Guide for growers, peer-reviewed journal articles, and more.

## MSU SPRING HOP KICKOFF MEETING

MSU Extension hosts the annual online ZOOM meeting with hop

growers, researchers, specialists, and additional stakeholders. The meeting includes important updates to the MSU Hop Management Guide, pest control options and recommendations, irrigation and fertility best practices, and updates from the Hop Growers of Michigan. The 2026 kickoff took place on April 9 and featured Dr. Tim Miles, MSU (Hop Diseases and Control), Dr. Erin Hill, MSU (Weed ID and Control and MSU Plant and Pest Diagnostic Services), Muhammad Usman (Hop nematode research update), Erin Lizotte, MSUE (Hop IPM), and Dr. Betsy Verhoeven, Oregon State University (Hop nutrient uptake and accumulation).

## MSU HOP CHAT WEBINAR SERIES 2025-2026 BI-MONTHLY MAY-AUGUST

MSU Extension hosts a bi-monthly online meeting that brings together hop producers, educators, scientists, state and national industry experts, and more to discuss current growing conditions, best management practices, and pertinent issues such as potential changes to maximum residue limits that may impact Michigan hop exporters.



## MSU EXTENSION REGIONAL HOP GROWING REPORTS

In 2025 Dr. Rob Sirrine produced bi-monthly hop reports for 7 regions across Michigan during the growing season. The reports included up to date precipitation levels, daily temperature, and accumulated growing degree days as well as temperature, soil moisture, growth, disease, and insect pressure forecasts. These reports continue in 2026 for four growing regions across Michigan.

## MICHIGAN'S GREAT BEER STATE CONFERENCE & TRADESHOW

(January 14-16, 2026), Radisson Plaza Hotel at Kalamazoo Center, Kalamazoo, MI. Organized and hosted by the Michigan Brewers Guild, MSU Extension, and the Master Brewers Association of the Americas-District Michigan. The MI Great Beer State Conference is the premier Midwest brewer-grower conference and tradeshow attended by over 400 speakers, trade-show

representatives, and attendees from across the U.S. Dr. Sirrine and MSU colleagues coordinated a Hop and Beer Sensory Education training, organized the 9th annual Michigan Chinook Cup, presented on the state of Michigan craft beverage raw materials (hop and barley), and invited and hosted craft beer value chain experts from Washington, Pennsylvania, and Colorado. The conference and trade-show has a direct economic contribution of over \$200,000 to the local economy.

## 3RD MICHIGAN CRAFT BEVERAGE SUMMIT (MARCH 23-25, 2026) DELTA MARRIOTT CONVENTION CENTER, MUSKEGON, MI.

The Summit was organized by the Michigan Craft Beverage Council and was aimed to educate and connect growers, producers and other industry suppliers and to create collaborative partnerships and advance an ever-growing state craft beverage industry. Dr. Sirrine (MSUE), Dr. James DeDecker (MSUE), and Dr. Nikki

Rothwell (MSUE), Dr. Brooke Wilke (MSU), and Dr. Mike Reinke (MSUE) were invited to participate on a speaker panel discussing the role of MSUE and MSU in Michigan's craft beverage raw material supply sector.

## COLLABORATION

MSU Coordinates the Great Lakes Hop Working Group, a multi-state collaborative, comprised of university scientists, specialists, and government agriculture workers, that develops hop research and education priorities to meet the needs of hop growers across the Central and Eastern U.S. and Canada. The group meets virtually every month during the growing season.

MSU works hand in hand with the Hop Growers of Michigan, a 501(c)(5) non-profit organization, whose mission is to: advance the interests of Michigan hop growers and the Michigan hop industry through support of research and educational initiatives and promotion of Michigan-grown hops.



### FARMS ASSISTED REPRESENT:

**\$19.7M** in net worth



**\$4.7M** in annual sales



## FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Farm Business Management Educator Chris Bardenhagen works with area farmers on succession planning, financial management, and cost of production (farm-level and industry-level). Most farmers faced mounting difficulties this year, including ever-growing input costs, trade volatility, and in some cases overproduction leading to weak prices. These issues make farm planning very difficult, and so consultations with MSU Extension Farm Business Management advisors are even more important and valuable in these challenging times.

Chris assisted nine area farms with Telfarm program outreach this year, helping to determine end-of-year tax strategies and to perform annual balance sheet financial analysis. Farmers who participate in the

program gain a greater understanding of their farm's financial strengths and weaknesses, and how they can improve upon their financial standing. This in turn helps improve the farms' resilience. The aggregate net worth of the farm businesses that Chris assisted is over \$19.7 million dollars, and these farms had over \$4.7 million dollars in sales in 2025.

Chris also consulted with many growers and other industry actors related to recently-finished industry cost of production studies. Along with regional MSU Extension educators, Chris completed four Michigan studies in 2025: Apples, blueberries, cabbage, and peaches. Chris and Erin Lizotte have also been working with the chestnut industry on a cost study, as this is a potential alternative crop for tree fruit growers. Growers can use these studies as a decision making tool,

adjusting the spreadsheet and tables to consider different planning scenarios.

This year, Chris also consulted with many area farmers regarding important decisions relating to farm transfer plans. Succession planning is a hot topic with farmers right now, and Chris is connected with more than 12 farm families. He also presents regularly on the topic at local, regional, and state-level events. Succession planning tools and resources equip farm families to make informed choices to successfully transfer business skills, responsibilities, and assets to the next farming generation.



**Advised  
12+ farm families  
in planning for the  
next generation**



EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER

2,939 Extension Master Gardener Hours Volunteered Valued at **\$102,248**

102 Horticulture or pest management questions answered through the GT County office

EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER

MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers participated in 28 volunteer projects in Grand Traverse County in 2025 for a total of 2,939 volunteer hours. The value of this volunteer contribution can be estimated at \$102,248, based on the independent sector’s published value of volunteer time for 2025 (\$34.79/hr). These projects impacted county residents by improving quality of life, empowering youth, protecting waterways, and improving food security. In addition, providing flowering plants to support butterflies, bees, and other pollinators was the focus of several projects this year. Pollinator gardens at Hull Park and Clinch Park in Traverse City provided flowering plants to support bees and butterflies, along with educational signs so that visitors could learn about the importance of pollinators to our region. Similarly, 17 flower planters along Front St in Downtown TC were maintained by MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, contained flowers for pollinators, and provided

educational signage inviting visitors to participate in a citizen science project if they wanted to learn more. During the pollinator planting day in May, members of the TC community, schools, and partner organizations joined EMG volunteers to help place the plants in the planters at Clinch Park. Participants learned about pollinator protection and container gardening while planting the plants in the 40+ planters owned by the DDA that would later be placed in locations throughout Traverse City’s Downtown.

Every year we welcome new MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers to the program through a 3-day volunteer onboarding. During volunteer onboarding in 2025, volunteers toured potential volunteer projects in Grand Traverse County, such as The Grand Traverse Area Children’s Garden, and the Boardman River Nature Center. These trainee volunteers are required to volunteer 40 hours in support of MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer projects in their first year to become

fully certified as MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers.

County residents can always access the latest research-based horticulture resources through the Grand Travers County MSU Extension office as well as through our remote options like the MSU Extension Lawn and Garden Hotline and Ask Extension. In addition, every Wednesday from Memorial Day to Labor Day at the MSU Extension Office in Grand Traverse County, MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and staff, are available for a walk-in plant diagnostic clinic. This service allows residents to receive real-time solutions to their residential plant and pest problems during the growing season. MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers share environmentally friendly recommendations that help keep plants healthy and protect the regions natural resources. In 2025, 102 gardening or pest management questions were answered for county residents through the MSU Extension Office in Grand Traverse County; this is a 25% increase over the previous year.



## MICHIGAN AGRABILITY

The Michigan AgrAbility project helps people who want to continue working in agriculture even when illness, injury, or chronic conditions create barriers to work. AgrAbility is a USDA-funded partnership between MSU Extension and Easterseals MORC, with a mission to enhance quality of life so that farmers, their families, and communities can thrive, using assistive devices and adaptive equipment that makes farming safer and easier on the body.

In 2025, Michigan AgrAbility coordinated two events with client partners: a farm visit field day in Holland and a maple tubing installation day in Newberry. The field day brought together staff from Michigan Rehabilitation Services, the Michigan Center for Rural Health, Kent County Farm Bureau, and Extension to

demonstrate the adaptive items that allow Doug VerHoeven to safely use his equipment and successfully farm 90 acres. The tubing installation day took place on Veteran's Day at a veteran's farm and provided hands-on training on how to make a small-scale maple sugar operation easier on the body by using tubing instead of lugging heavy buckets of sap across the snow.

The project also provided guidance to two MSU College of Engineering Mechanical Engineering Capstone projects: making improvements to a previous design group's rolling kneeler cart prototype to help a client tend low-growing lavender while protecting her fragile foot bones and an arm support addition to an exoskeleton that could be useful for anyone who had experienced a stroke or injury affecting one arm so that they can lift and do overhead work such as pruning.

Throughout the year, the team worked with 164 clients at their farms and collaborated with Michigan Rehabilitation Services to provide equipment such as quick-attach hitches, lifts on tractors and combines, and cattle handling systems to 22 farmers across the state. AgrAbility also worked with Easterseals MORC to provide \$9,500 in donations to cover equipment for 12 farmers such as hand control levers, an air ride seat and an electric wheelchair, improvements that will make their work safer and easier on the body. Former clients also donated nine items back to the program, amounting to nearly \$30,000 worth of equipment that is back in use.

Staff had great presence around the state and provided 21 presentations, tabled at nine events, and had 341 direct interactions, from a total of more than 7,550 participants present at events.



## FARM STRESS

Farming remains one of the most unpredictable and stressful professions in Michigan. Through the MSU Extension Managing Farm Stress Program, we continue to combine farm business expertise with behavioral health support to strengthen the resilience of agricultural communities. Program leadership is based in our Benzie County office, allowing for responsive local engagement alongside statewide delivery. In 2025, the program led 74 training workshops, reaching more than 1,700 participants statewide, with measurable improvements in participants' confidence to manage their own stress and to support farmers experiencing distress. Workshops are offered at community libraries and partner

sites, including evenings and weekends, to improve accessibility for producers.

Local organizations interested in hosting a program are encouraged to contact their county office.

89 counseling sessions were supported in 2025, maintaining a pathway to professional care for farmers and farm family members at low or no cost.

Our other efforts included updated curricula, expanded media outreach, and release of the short documentary *Weathering Together* to explore the effect of stress on Michigan farmers and raise awareness of available resources.

Scan to view the short documentary *Weathering Together*



*Farming is tough, but you don't have to do it alone. MSU Extension stands by our farmers and is ready to support you.*

In 2025, the program led **74 training workshops**, reaching more than **1,700 participants**



2024-2025  
PROGRAM YEAR

Grand Traverse 4-H had **665** youth enrolled in **45** 4-H clubs.

The program would not be possible without the assistance of the many volunteers that are involved, including **204 Gold level volunteers** and **23 Silver level volunteers**.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

**17 Grand Traverse County participants** at 4-H Exploration Days

**4 Local 4-H youth** who traveled to Washington, D.C., for 4-H Citizenship Washington Focus

**1 Grand Traverse County youth** who traveled to Lansing for 4-H Capitol Experience

GRAND TRAVERSE  
COUNTY 4-H



EXPANDING  
OPPORTUNITIES  
THROUGH NEW CLUBS

Grand Traverse County 4-H continued to grow during the 2024–2025 program year, expanding opportunities for youth by chartering three new year-round community clubs: Blueberry Barnyard, Liberty Livestock, and Hearts Helping Hands. These additions increased the total number of community 4-H clubs in the county to 43, providing more young people with access to hands-on learning, leadership development, and meaningful connections.

Each new club reflects the unique strengths of the young people and volunteers who brought them to life. Hearts Helping Hands was chartered by a young man with

special needs who had aged out of the 4-H program but wanted to create an inclusive space where youth with special needs could experience the same sense of belonging and opportunity that 4-H had provided him.

Blueberry Barnyard was chartered by a youth from Texas attending Interlochen Arts Academy. Recognizing the international community at the academy, she established the first-ever 4-H club associated with Interlochen to share the 4-H experience with students from around the world. The club also received a \$1,000 Michigan 4-H Foundation Mini Grant to support educational programming for its members.

INVESTING IN YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT

Grand Traverse County youth continued to benefit from

educational experiences that prepared them for future success. The Ready, Aim 4-H Shooting Sports Club – Kingsley received a \$500 Michigan 4-H Foundation Mini Grant to purchase new archery equipment, enhancing opportunities for members to develop safe shooting sports skills and confidence.

Seventeen youth represented Grand Traverse County at 4-H Exploration Days, where they explored a wide variety of educational sessions. Topics ranged from using drones in agriculture and evaluating meat cuts to learning the fundamentals of rugby, allowing participants to discover new interests while building life and career skills.



**4-H**  
*Celebration*

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2025**  
AT 6:00PM

*Bancroft's Farm*  
5150 MILLER ROAD  
BUCKLEY, MI

NO RSVP NECESSARY

**ENJOY A  
DELICIOUS PIG  
ROAST &  
BRING A DISH  
TO PASS!**

*Euchre,  
Tug o' War  
& Corn  
Hole*



## CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERS AND COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

The dedication of Grand Traverse County's volunteers continues to be the foundation of a thriving 4-H program. In 2025, Keri Bancroft, President of the Northwest Michigan Livestock Council, received the prestigious Michigan 4-H Salute to Excellence Outstanding Lifetime Volunteer Award in recognition of her decades of service. Demonstrating her continued commitment to youth, she donated the monetary award back to the Northwest Michigan Livestock Council to support future programming.

The 4-H Leader's Association also launched a new tradition by hosting the first annual 4-H Celebration at the Bancroft Farm. Designed as a pig roast and family reunion-style potluck, the event brought together current and

former 4-H families to celebrate the program's rich history. Volunteers who have dedicated decades of service were recognized, stories spanning more than 50 years of local 4-H were shared, and families enjoyed games and fellowship that strengthened the sense of community.

## GROWING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration remained a key component of Grand Traverse County 4-H programming. Partnerships among Michigan State University Extension 4-H, the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program, Long Lake Elementary School, and the Botanic Garden created new opportunities for youth in grades 2–8 to earn Junior Master Gardener certification through classroom instruction and a half-day summer camp.

The county also expanded its commitment to healthy living by

securing an AmeriCorps member who will serve for nine months during 2026, providing additional healthy living education and programming for youth throughout the county.

## BUILDING GLOBAL AND CIVIC LEADERS

Grand Traverse County 4-H continued to provide experiences that broaden youth perspectives beyond their local communities.

A local 4-H family hosted a Japanese exchange delegate through the Michigan 4-H International Exchange Program, marking their second summer as a host family. Their continued involvement has inspired their son to pursue an exchange opportunity in Japan in the coming years, strengthening international friendships and cultural understanding.

## 2025 4-H LIVESTOCK EDUCATION EXPO

**24** educational sessions  
**259** participants from  
Grand Traverse County



### BUILDING GLOBAL AND CIVIC LEADERS

Four local youth attended 4-H Citizenship Washington Focus in Washington, D.C., with financial assistance provided by the Johnson Foundation. During the week-long leadership program, participants explored the nation's history, government, and civic responsibility. Inspired by the experience, one participant has applied to serve as a page in the United States Senate during her junior year of high school.

Additionally, one Grand Traverse County youth participated in 4-H Capitol Experience in Lansing, gaining firsthand exposure to Michigan's legislative process and strengthening their understanding of state government.

### REACHING YOUTH ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

Grand Traverse County 4-H continued to connect with youth and families through major community events, including the annual Education Expo and the Grand Traverse County Fair. These events introduced new audiences to 4-H programming, showcased member projects and achievements, and highlighted the many opportunities available for young people to develop leadership, citizenship, and life skills.

### LOOKING AHEAD

Throughout the 2024–2025 program year, Grand Traverse County 4-H demonstrated its commitment to helping youth become Beyond Ready. Through innovative clubs, educational experiences, volunteer leadership, community partnerships, civic engagement, and international opportunities, 4-H empowered young

people to build confidence, discover new passions, and develop the skills needed to succeed in school, careers, and life. The continued growth of the program reflects the dedication of its volunteers, families, partners, and youth leaders who work together to ensure every young person has the opportunity to learn, lead, and thrive.

## 2025 NORTHWEST MICHIGAN FAIR

### LIVESTOCK AUCTION

Gross sales **\$1,389,280.60**

Animal Projects **37**

Auction Buyers **643**

Youth Participated **502**



Across **39 community locations**, partners implemented **123 improvements** that positively impacted more than **20,700 Michigan residents**.



## NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: CONTINUING A LEGACY OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

For more than 30 years, Michigan State University Extension partnered with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to deliver SNAP-Ed, helping Michigan residents build healthy eating habits, increase physical activity, and make the most of limited food budgets through education, partnerships, and community change efforts.

Following a federal decision to end SNAP-Ed funding, direct programming concluded on September 30, 2025. During the final year of funding, a dedicated MSU Extension team completed program closeout activities, preserved program resources and lessons learned, and developed tools to support future community health efforts.

### COMMUNITY CHANGE HUB

To extend the impact of decades of community-based work, MSU

Extension developed the Community Change Hub ([extension.msu.edu/changehub](https://extension.msu.edu/changehub)), a free online resource that helps community members, organizations, educators, and leaders:

- Identify local priorities and opportunities.
- Engage residents and partners.
- Build on community strengths.
- Implement and sustain positive change.

While rooted in nutrition and physical activity initiatives, the Hub can be used to address a wide range of community priorities.

### INVESTING IN COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE

MSU Extension also invested \$65,000 through the Community Change Fund to support local efforts that make healthy choices easier and more accessible. Across 39 community locations, partners implemented 123

improvements that positively impacted more than 20,700 Michigan residents.

### RESOURCES FOR MICHIGAN COMMUNITIES

MSU Extension continues to offer free online resources developed through SNAP-Ed, including:

- Food Budgeting Resources
- Cook Healthy, Spend Less
- Healthier Childcare Environments Toolkit
- Physical Activity Resources
- SNAP-Ed Success Stories

Although SNAP-Ed funding has ended, the knowledge, partnerships, and resources developed over more than three decades continue to support healthier communities across Michigan.



**Scan here for more information**



MSU PRODUCT CENTER

Bailey’s Farm is a kombucha manufacturer that sources 100% of ingredients from local farms within an 8-mile radius. Their business has grown significantly over the last four years to nearly 100 retailers across Michigan. However, outdated bottling equipment increasingly consumed their time and slowed their growth. Bailey’s Farm decided to partner with the MSU Product Center to write, and ultimately receive, a \$62,564 grant for more advanced equipment. Their bottling line triples output while automating much of their packaging labor.

DIRT TO GLASS

Dr. Nino Sachaleli, Associate Professor and agritourism expert from the Republic of Georgia is

working with MSU Extension through the Global Scholars program. She presented at the Dirt to Glass Party on the Piazza event and showcased the history of making wine in the Republic of Georgia which dates back 8,000 years. She brought wine for the attendees to taste and shared her knowledge about their ancient process with our local winemakers.

2025 CEC CONFERENCE

The 2025 Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) conference, coordinated by Michigan State University Extension, took place in downtown Lapeer on May 29–30, 2025. Parker Jones, former Product Center Innovation Counselor at MSU Extension, helped lead the CEC planning committee. The conference brought together 103

attendees representing 46 municipalities across 37 Michigan counties to participate in over 20 breakout sessions hosted inside local downtown storefronts and buildings.



**Product Center**  
Food • Ag • Bio  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

**2024-2025**  
**by the numbers**

**33**

**Customer Count**

**50**

**Counseling Hours**

**140**

**Total Employees**

**\$6,091,877**

**Annual Sales**

**\$153,164**

**Capital Formation**



## SEA GRANT

Michigan Sea Grant funds research, education, and outreach projects designed to foster science-based decisions about the use and conservation of Great Lakes resources. The program also supports Michigan State University Extension educators located in coastal communities whose work highlights information about Michigan's coastal Great Lakes areas. Grand Traverse County has the longest history in the state, having hosted a Sea Grant educator since the early 1970s.

In 2025, Sea Grant Extension was active, impacting residents and

interested persons in Grand Traverse County on issues such as:

- Fisheries (serve on FishPass Education Committee);
- Recreational boating (serve on the MI Clean Marinas Board of Directors);
- Providing programs on lake level variations and coastal erosion and other coastal issues.

Sea Grant continues to co-lead on the annual Freshwater Summit, hosted annually in October at the Hagerty Center, bringing key Great

Lakes and inland waters topics to over 100 residents (updates on Arctic Grayling reintroduction; Lake Whitefish and Food Web issues; Lake Level changes, etc.).

Sea Grant teaches a multi-hour session at Northwestern MI College on "Intro to Great Lakes Issues" each fall to over 35 students and is active in networking for the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center (groundbreaking in 2025) and programs such as LakeBed 2030.

2024-2025  
PROGRAM YEAR

21 residents explored planning and design options

About 80 people attended policy meeting about STR's



Bethany Prykucki



Mary Reilly

CLGFP Report 2025-02

THE SHORT-TERM RENTAL  
ECONOMY IN MICHIGAN

IMPLICATIONS, POLICY OPTIONS, &  
POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Yuxin Shen  
Ph.D. Student, Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics  
Michigan State University

Mark Skidmore, Ph.D.  
Professor and Morris Chair in State and Local Gov't Finance and Policy  
Michigan State University

Tyler August  
Government and Community Vitality Educator  
Michigan State University Extension

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Prepared for  
MSUE Center for Local Government Finance & Policy

CLGFP Report 2025-02

July 30, 2025



MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY | Extension

GOVERNMENT  
& PUBLIC POLICY

PLANNING AND  
PARTNERSHIPS

East Bay Charter Township partnered with MSU Extension to facilitate a community forum focused on preserving open space and farmland. On May 27, 21 residents explored planning and design options and contributed ideas to support community goals amid increasing housing pressures.

After several Whitewater Township planning officials attended MSU Extension's October programming on Short Term Rental Policy Options (in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties), they knew MSU Extension was the right organization to facilitate a STR community conversation. The Township partnered with

Bethany Prykucki and Mary Reilly to facilitate and provide STR policy option content for a January 18 meeting. About 80 people attended the session. The community input was documented in a report to the Township to inform future STR policy decisions.

GRAND TRAVERSE  
LEADERSHIP

On June 25, 2025, the Grand Traverse Leadership team and county commissioners participated in a facilitated session focused on strengthening trust, understanding, and shared expectations within the group. The morning began with a welcome, an overview of the session's purpose, and the establishment of group agreements. Participants then engaged in an individual reflection

activity exploring what brought them to the organization and moments of pride connected to its mission. These reflections were carried into small story circles, where groups of three to four shared personal experiences through intentional listening. The session continued with an interactive Real Colors workshop, allowing participants to complete a self-assessment, learn about personality styles, and explore how these dynamics influence communication within a board setting. To close the day, the group discussed what effective board functioning looks like, articulated expectations of one another, and began drafting norms to guide their collective work moving forward.

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