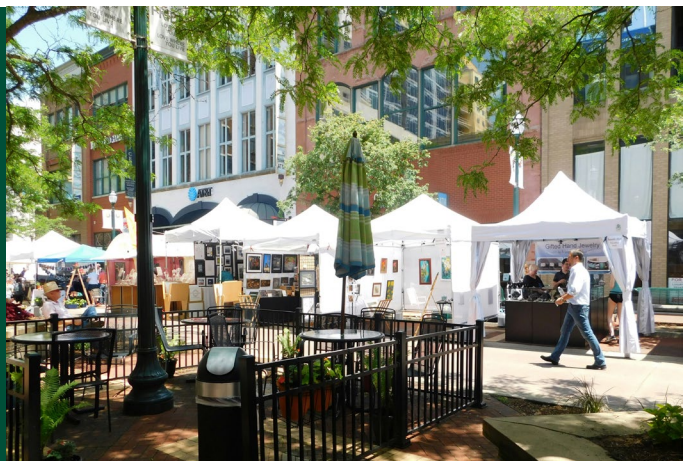


KALAMAZOO COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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269-383-8300 | <https://www.canr.msu.edu/kalamazoo>



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 Kalamazoo County.

Sincerely, Kai Gritter

Impact in Kalamazoo County



3,365 participants from the county attended programs



377 youth enrolled in 4-H



1,293 county residents participated in health & nutrition programs



132 answered Ask Extension questions



Residents participated in **590** programs (across the State) and **95** programs (hosted in the County)



341 MSU Extension volunteers



264 participants in county agriculture programs



235 client consultations

4-H & Youth Development:

Wild Spartans: Inspiring the Next Generation of Wildlife Scientists

Launched in October 2020, the **4-H Wild Spartans** program was designed to spark curiosity in youth and introduce new audiences to 4-H through the exciting world of **STEM careers in fisheries and wildlife**. In 2024, **139** youth from several counties, including Kalamazoo, met real-world scientists in live virtual sessions, exploring their research, fieldwork and career journeys. Youth had the chance to ask questions directly during live Q&As, while recorded sessions—complete with captions—were made available online for educators and homeschoolers.

Key Highlights:

- Reached over **400 families** across **12+ states and Canada**
- Featured **diverse scientists**, 80% from underrepresented backgrounds in STEM
- Offered both **live and on-demand** learning experiences
- Connected youth with **STEM learning and career prep resources**
- Built partnerships with professionals new to 4-H, enriching both youth and speaker experiences



Kalamazoo County Youth Fair & Family Festival

Throughout the week, 4-H youth showcased their hard work and talents in a variety of shows. During Community Festival Day, **500+ youth** explored 10 interactive educational stations, diving into hands-on learning in animal science, crops, fishing, archery, and health and nutrition.

The **4-H Livestock Auction** was a huge success, with **272 sales totaling \$253,928!** For example, **91 pigs alone brought in \$121,638**. A small portion (just 1–3%) supports the Kalamazoo County Livestock Superintendents Association, ensuring that next year's auction is even better. The rest? It goes right back to the youth who raised the animals—fueling their future goals and agricultural dreams.

In a powerful act of generosity, **46** lots of animals were purchased and donated to Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes and the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, providing fresh, nutritious food to those in need.

“We’re all about giving back to the community,” **Veronica Bolhuis**, 4-H Program Coordinator said.

From education to philanthropy, 4-H continues to grow leaders and strengthen the heart of Kalamazoo County.



From snakes to cows and everything in between, youth show their accomplishments

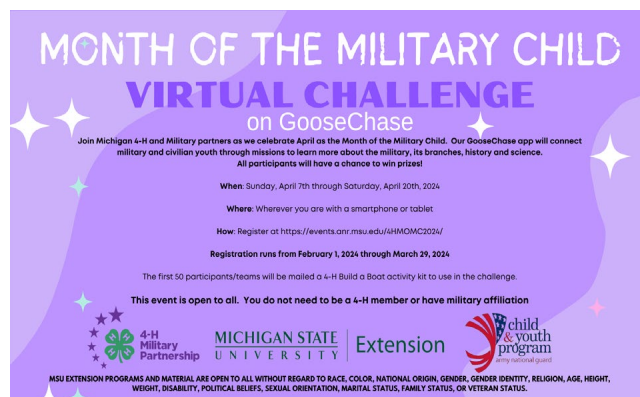
21 4-H clubs
227 4-H Volunteers
377 4-H members
2,313 4-H youth participants



4-H & Youth Development:

Fun activity in April - the Month of the Military Child!

The *Month of the Military Child* GooseChase engaged military families in a fun, interactive way to explore STEM and connect with 4-H. Participants completed creative, point-based missions using STEM kits from Shop 4-H and answered questions using reputable online sources. The event fostered learning, connection, and creativity while introducing youth to MSU Extension's 4-H programs. Each submission earned points, with bonuses for extra-inspiring entries. This was well received with a participant parent sharing,



"WOW! This is awesome! There are so many fun links and challenges! Thank you so much for putting this together! We are having fun checking these off and learning some things we didn't know!"

This program received national recognition in 2023, winning the 4-H Military Partnership "Innovating for Success" award from the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals!



Veronica Bolhuis,
4-H Program
Coordinator

4-H Programs Making a Difference!

In 2024, children and families continued to benefit from a variety of 4-H programs, in partnership with dedicated 4-H volunteers and MSU Extension staff.

Topics discussed include:

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



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, five of which were taught by Veronica Bolhuis (pictured above) to **71** Kalamazoo County youth.

This annual education initiative continues to strengthen youth knowledge and responsibility in animal agriculture.



Agriculture & Agribusiness:



Cheyenne Sloan, Blueberry and Small Fruit Educator, discusses soil composition

Michigan Viticulture Field Day

The Great Lakes grape-growing community gathered once again for the 35th annual Michigan Viticulture Field Day on July 31, 2024, at the Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center. As the region's longest-running educational event focused on grapes and wine, it featured hands-on demonstrations, the latest precision viticulture technology, and insights from local scientific research. Industry partners showcased cutting-edge equipment, while attendees enjoyed the event's signature steak cookout and Michigan wine tasting—an annual favorite.



GLEXPO addresses farming challenges by equipping stakeholders with the latest research, innovations and techniques.

The Great Lakes Expo (GLEXPO) is the premier fruit, vegetable and farm market expo in the Midwest. This annual event features educational sessions on important industry topics, a large trade show for networking and discovery, and other specialized workshops and meetings.

Each year, the event features a robust agenda of vegetable programming organized by MSU Extension. The educational presentations cover a wide range of crops, offering something for everyone to learn about new developments in the vegetable industry. In 2024, along with **92 Kalamazoo County residents**, registrants attended from 13 countries, 7 Canadian provinces, 41 US states and the District of Columbia, and 62 Michigan counties.

Second Annual Kellogg Biological Station Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (KBS LTAR) Field Day

In September 2024, over 80 attendees, including researchers, farmers and agricultural professionals, gathered in Hickory Corners for the second annual Kellogg Biological Station Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (KBS LTAR) Field Day. The event, with **10 attendees from Kalamazoo County**, showcased early agronomic and ecological changes in fields managed with advanced conservation strategies, as demonstrated in the aspirational cropping systems, including a five-crop rotation, no-till farming, cover crops and precision agriculture technologies. Presenters also provided practical tips about how to make these practices work, including Regenerative Ag Systems Educator **Christine Charles**, who discussed the economics of yield and profitability of the LTAR series of practices.



Director of the KBS LTAR, Phil Robertson, speaks at the 2024 LTAR Field Day



Agriculture & Agribusiness:

New in 2024 - Specialty Cut Flower Farm Tour Series!

To address a clear need for beginning-level agricultural education, MSU Extension developed a series of three Cut Flower Farm Tours designed for commercial growers looking to expand their knowledge and network with others in the industry.

Each of the tours focused on a specific educational theme explored through a facilitated discussion with MSU Extension educators and the host farmers. The series placed special emphasis on topics of soil health, insect and disease management, pesticide safety, and large-scale cut flower production.

As a result of attending this program, **94%** of respondents reported an improved understanding of the three manageable aspects of soil and **100%** of respondents improved their knowledge of pesticide safety.

A total of 24 specialty cut flower growers and small diversified farm managers from three U.S. states and 13 Michigan counties registered and attended at least one tour. Attendees were engaged, sharing that they *"really like this idea/program!"* They also stated that they thought it was a *"fantastic presentation!"*



Jeremy Jubenville, Floriculture and Greenhouse Extension Educator discussing *Forget Me Not* Flowers during the Tour



During March and April, Extension Vegetable Crops Educator Ben Phillips and Food Sovereignty coordinator Nickole Keith of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi, 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.

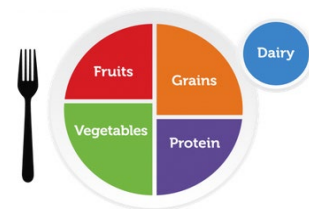
By the end of the multi-week session, students had started seeds from 40 different varieties of vegetables and filled three shelves with trays!

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

Health & Nutrition:

Summer at the Market: Learning in Every Aisle

When school's out, kids get to explore their communities in new ways -like tagging along to the weekday Kalamazoo Farmers Market. It's more than just fresh produce; it's a hands-on classroom! From counting change to spotting the cleanest carrots, every visit is packed with teachable moments.



MSU Extension joins the market with a booth full of recipes, handouts, and fun kid-friendly materials like stickers and coloring books. One familiar favorite? The MyPlate image. It's so well-known that kids often stop by just to say, "Hey, I remember that!" One young girl did just that, sparking a sweet memory with her mom about the MyPlate she used to eat from. Laughter followed—and a reminder that our programs leave a lasting impact.

As we celebrate 30 years of SNAP-Ed, we're proud to see generations growing up with nutrition education—at markets, schools, centers, and even online.

Jump Into Foods & Fitness Helps Young Learners Make Smart Choices

During a Jump Into Foods & Fitness series at Northwood Elementary in Kalamazoo, third graders explored the power of nutritious foods through hands-on activities and a strawberry-banana smoothie tasting.

Students identified ingredients and sorted them into food groups, learning how smoothies can fuel their bodies after physical activity. One student beamed, *"I'm glad we had smoothies because they have vitamin C! I need to have vitamin C because I was sick last week and it helps. My mom's going to be happy."*



SNAP-Ed programs help youth build lasting knowledge, confidence, and curiosity around healthy eating.



Education Day STEM Expo

On June 2, fourth and fifth graders from sixteen different elementary schools gathered at the Kalamazoo Growlers baseball stadium for the Education Day STEM Expo. In addition to enjoying a baseball game, students visited various educational booths, including one hosted by MSU Extension.

Kids got moving with a fun hula hoop activity before selecting a freebie from the table. The experience served as a playful reminder of the importance of staying active and making healthy food choices as part of overall self-care.

Health & Nutrition:

Movement matters at any age, and Middle School students know it!

In a seventh-grade health class, multiple middle school students learned through MSU Extension's *Teen Cuisine* curriculum, that exercise and nutrition go hand in hand. While many were already familiar with MyPlate and the 60-minute daily activity guideline, they didn't expect to get moving during class. In the first week, students were surprised to find physical activity built into lessons—something rare in a typical school day.



Kalamazoo County Community Nutrition Instructors, **Amanda Hulet, Jane Toll** and **Valorie Snyder** made these breaks fun and engaging, using plush dice to choose exercises or leading yoga and video workouts. After 5–10 minutes of movement, students returned to nutrition discussions feeling refreshed and focused.

On the final day, just before spring break, one student shared, *“My family just got a new trampoline, so I’m going to get lots of physical activity over break!”* As a thank-you, students created heartfelt cards for the CNIs, with messages like, *“When we exercised, it was really fun,”* and *“I personally enjoyed the exercise and the fun lessons you taught.”*

Making an impact through collaboration!

In 2024, MSU Extension delivered a variety of health and nutrition programs to **1,293 Kalamazoo County residents**. This was largely accomplished through collaboration with **36 local partners**, that included schools, community centers, libraries, housing communities, the Kalamazoo County Expo Center, and organizations such as El Concilio, Integrated Services of Kalamazoo, Milestone Senior Services and the Kalamazoo Farmers’ Market.

Residents attended multiple classes that covered the following topics:

- **Health:** *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention* facilitated by Laura Anderson, Health Educator.
- **Food Safety:** *ServSafe®, Michigan Cottage Food Law, Home Food Preservation* facilitated by Kellie Jordan, Program Instructor.
- **Nutrition & Physical Activity:** *Show Me Nutrition, Cooking Matters for Teens, Cooking for One* facilitated by CNIs Amanda Hulet, Jane Toll and Valorie Snyder.

Through education, outreach, and practical, evidence-based resources, we empower individuals and families to improve their well-being—from helping older adults stay active, to guiding parents in raising healthy eaters, to helping food handlers learn safe food-preservation skills and techniques.

To read success stories and access classes, articles, health resources, and more, explore:
https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_health or
scan the QR code:

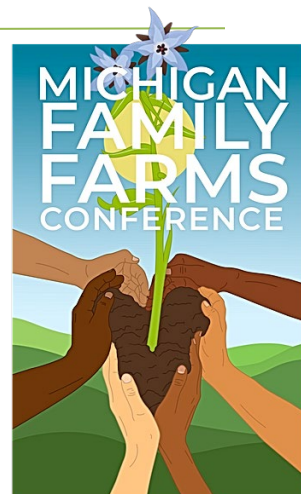


Community, Food & Environment

Michigan Family Farms Conference

In March 2024, Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS) in collaboration with MSU Extension welcomed over 300 attendees to its 20th annual Michigan Family Farms Conference at Kalamazoo Valley Community College – featuring seven themed tracks and 22 sessions on topics like grant collaboration, agritourism, and BIPOC farmer networking.

“This conference is a joyful space for learning, connection, and community,” said Lauren Marquardt, MIFFS co-executive director. “Our goal is to foster an equity-driven, community-centered environment focused on food and farming.”



Educating students about the food they eat is a positive outcome for many farm-to-institution programs. As one example, 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan’s Kids and Farms is a state-funded program that offers matching funds of up to ten cents per meal for schools and other non-school sponsors to use towards locally produced fruits, vegetables and dry beans. This program incentivizes increased local sourcing and encourages student education related to where their food comes from.

Wild About Conservation Webinar Series

The *Wild About Conservation* webinar series wrapped up another successful year with 536 registrants, including 15 international participants and more than **30 residents of Kalamazoo County**.

Designed for adults and older youth, the series focuses on conservation practices for yards and properties. It also offers continuing education opportunities for Extension Master Gardeners, Michigan Conservation Stewards, Master Naturalists, and anyone interested in creating a backyard sanctuary for nature. Participants registered for one or all sessions, which were free and held twice a month from June through September via Zoom.



Governing Essentials

In January, many Michiganders started their terms as elected or appointed officials in our local units of government. To help prepare local officials for their service, MSU Extension brought the popular *Governing Essentials* program to Hartford, MI with **11** Kalamazoo County residents in attendance.

Governing Essentials is a program designed for local elected and appointed officials who are looking to sharpen their skills and promote good governance practices.

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

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



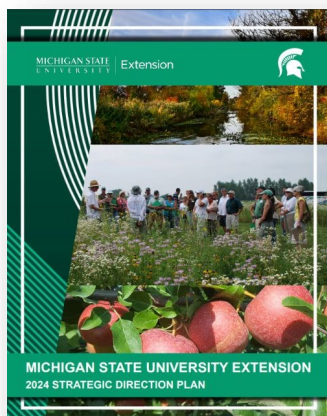
1,876 Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent 96,653 hours helping individuals and communities grow

KALAMAZOO COUNTY STAFF

- Amanda Hulet, Community Nutrition Instructor
- Cheyenne Sloan, Blueberry and Small Fruit Educator
- Christine Charles, Regenerative Agriculture Systems Educator
- Jane Toll, Community Nutrition Instructor
- Jeremy Jubenville, Commercial Horticulture Educator
- Julie Ford, Kalamazoo County and District 13 Support
- Kendra Shannon, Health & Nutrition Supervising Educator
- Mariel Borgman, Community Food Systems Educator
- Nancy Hostetler, Kalamazoo County Support
- Valorie Snyder, Community Nutrition Instructor
- Veronica Bolhuis, 4-H Program Coordinator
- William Barnwell, 4-H Program Instructor
- Wrifton Graham, Extension Master Gardener Coordinator



MSU Extension's Strategic Direction Plan



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, please go to canr.msu.edu/od/directors_office/strategic-direction or scan the QR code.



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