

LEELANAU COUNTY

2025-2026

ANNUAL REPORT

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Photo Courtesy of James Eye View Photography



Message from the District Director

I am pleased to share highlights from another impactful year of partnership between Michigan State University Extension and Leelanau 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



259

Programs accessed by residents



3945

Reached through programming



96,380

Reached by social media

AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



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 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 a high-density apple pruning demonstration and highlighted top-worked Honeycrisp trees. At our second stop, the grower had used a Vivid X Vision system to estimate 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 had a pruning demonstration of this orchard system.

We toured a sweet cider processing plant and saw a new line for packing fresh market sweet cherries. The tour ended with a stop highlighting a new irrigation system—the first of its kind installed in Michigan—with water delivery and scheduling managed through the cloud and accessed by smartphone. In addition to the 70 Northwest Michigan growers on the bus, local growers from West Central Michigan and the Ridge joined at each site, for a total of over 150 attendees.

NEW PATHOLOGY EQUIPMENT AT NWMHRC

In fall 2025, the Northwest Michigan Horticulture Research Center (NWMHRC) purchased new laboratory equipment to expand its capacity for in-depth plant pathology research and testing. This investment strengthens research on critical apple diseases such as fire blight and apple scab, as well as cherry diseases including cherry leaf spot, American brown rot, and

bacterial canker. New equipment includes a laminar airflow workstation, benchtop autoclave, microbiological incubator, centrifuge, and other essential tools. These additions allow researchers to prepare sterile media on site and culture fungal and bacterial pathogens, supporting work with multiple diseases and testing for pesticide resistance in pathogens collected from local orchards. This capacity is especially important given survey results from 2016–2019 showing widespread resistance to key SDHI fungicides used in commercial tart cherry production. Access to current disease and resistance data helps growers make informed management decisions to protect yield and crop quality. The enhanced laboratory will serve as an off-campus hub for tree fruit plant pathology research supporting the region’s agricultural industry.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



*Each year, Rothwell and her staff open the research center during the National Cherry Festival, welcoming more than **2,500 visitors** to learn about cherry production*

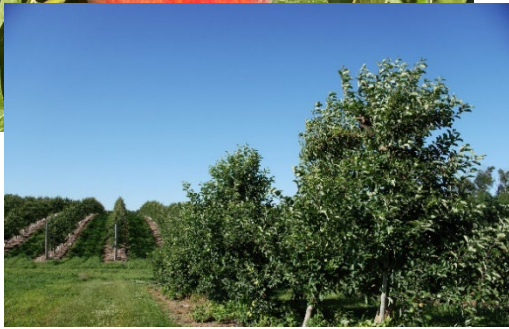
IRRIGATION UPDATE AT THE NW STATION

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 outdated. 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 pro-gram. We look forward to some great data on best practices for

watering and fertigation of 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! **NIKKI ROTHWELL 2025 CHERRY INDUSTRY PERSON OF THE YEAR** Nikki Rothwell, an MSU Extension specialist and coordinator of the NWMHRC, was named the 2025 Cherry Industry Person of the Year, one of the industry’s highest honors. A trusted leader in Michigan’s cherry industry for decades, Rothwell is recognized for her impactful research, innovative pest and disease management strategies, and unwavering commitment to grower education and support. Her work has fundamentally improved cherry production practices, including leading efforts that transformed management of spotted wing drosophila, while her outreach, adaptability, and leadership during times of industry need have made her an indispensable advocate for growers and the broader cherry community.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



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

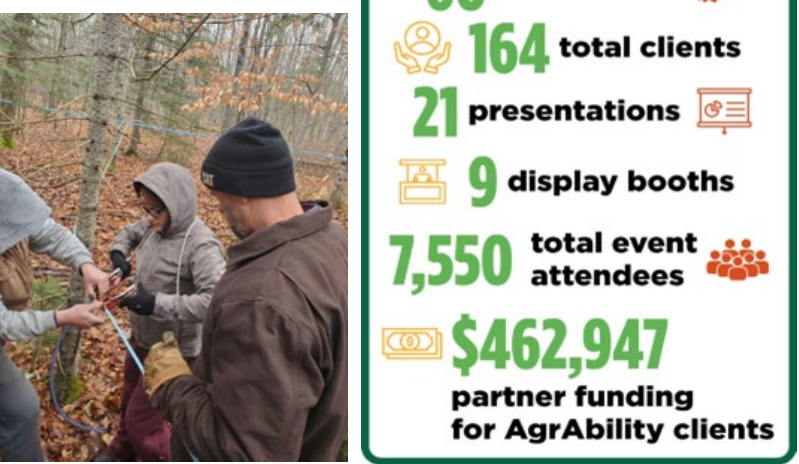
program gain a greater understanding of their farm’s financial strengths and weaknesses, and how they can improve their financial standing. This in turn helps improve the farms’ resilience. The aggregate net worth of the farm businesses that Chris assisted is over \$19.7 million dollars, and these farms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

AGRICULTURE PROGRAM





2024-2025
by the numbers

60 new clients 

 **164** total clients

21 presentations 

 **9** display booths

7,550 total event attendees 

 **\$462,947**
partner funding
for AgrAbility clients

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 Mr. 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.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



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. 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*



In 2025, the Farm Stress program:



Led more than
74 training workshops



Reached over
1,700 participants



DIRT TO GLASS



**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 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 cold can damage crops. Tools like this allow growers to prepare ahead of challenging weather conditions and protect long-term vineyard productivity.

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



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

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 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.





Leelanau County Extension MG Volunteers



633 volunteer hours valued at \$22,877



70 horticulture/pest management questions answered through the Leelanau County office

EXTENSION
MASTER GARDENER

This year, through volunteer outreach, MSU Extension Master Gardeners continued to share science-based gardening knowledge, engaged citizens and empowered communities in environmentally responsible gardening practices.

Currently, MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers are actively volunteering in 12 volunteer projects throughout the county. Last year, Leelanau County MSU Extension Master Gardeners volunteered for 633 hours, a time contribution valued at \$22,877. MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer activities impacted county residents by improving quality of life, empowering youth, protecting waterways, and improving food security. Projects in 2025 included the Native Plant Demonstration Garden at the Leelanau County Government Center, The Leelanau School Gardens, Inland Seas Education Association, St.

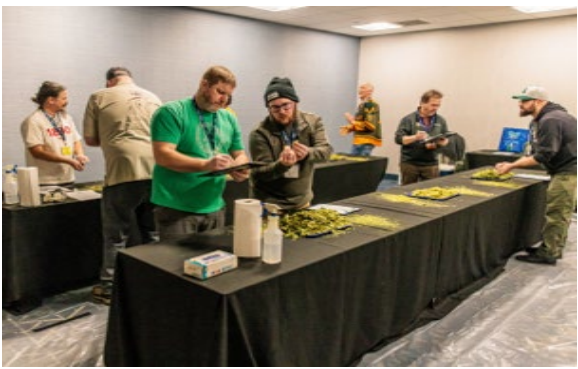
Mary's Church and School Garden and the Poor Farm Garden.

County residents are always welcome to call, visit, or email the MSU Extension office for assistance with horticultural issues. Additionally, MSU Consumer Horticulture staff and MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers hosted a plant diagnostic clinic every Wednesday, June through September of 2025. Residents were welcomed to bring samples of plants, insects, diseases and other problems; MSUE staff and Master Gardener volunteers provided the expertise to diagnose problems and provide management recommendations for 70 county residents last year. In addition, Leelanau County residents were able to receive answers to their horticultural questions by using either the online service Ask Extension or MSUE's statewide Lawn and Garden Hotline (1-888-678-3464), which are hosted by teams of MSU specialists, educators, and MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers. County residents who access these services

receive evidence-based recommendations for environmentally friendly garden practices that protect our families, wildlife, and waterways in the county.

Several projects in the county support food security for residents. For example, at the historic "poor farm" in Maple City, MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers support the Row-by-Row food garden which partners with Food Rescue of Northern Michigan to distribute food throughout the region.

Additionally, through the Get Started Gardening program county residents have free access to beginner vegetable gardening kits. Thanks to a partnership with Leelanau Christian Neighbors, nearly 50 county families received garden kits including vegetable seeds, a garden plan, gardening tipsheets, and recipes to use with the produce they grew. Residents also had access to Get Started Gardening videos and a webinar to help them learn how to use the seeds in their garden kits.



**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.

4-H PROGRAM



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS & LITERACY ENGAGEMENT



4-H PROGRAMS AROUND THE COUNTY TRACTOR SAFETY

Leelanau County 4-H once again offered its annual Tractor Safety Program at the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center during May. Two dedicated volunteer instructors utilized the Purdue Extension *Gearing Up for Safety* curriculum to guide participants through both classroom instruction and hands-on tractor operation experience in preparation for certification testing. Twelve participants enrolled in the program this year. Those successfully completing the course received certification allowing them to safely operate tractors.

TINY TAPPERS AND TAP TIME

Tiny Tappers for Cloverbuds (ages 5-7) and Tap Time for youth ages 7-9 continued to grow in popularity during the 2025-2026 year, expanding to include additional autumn and winter sessions. Through a partnership with Suttons Bay Congregational Church, the after-school dance program was able to continue in a dedicated church-supported tap space, giving

participants additional opportunities to build confidence, coordination, and performance skills.

EMBRYOLOGY PROGRAM

Leelanau County 4-H continued its embryology programming in local schools during spring 2026. Glen Lake Public Schools hosted the program for 17 youth in the High-Five Program, while 31 kindergarten students at Leland Public Schools also participated. Using newly purchased embryology equipment including an automatic egg turner, candling light, and brooder, students explored the chicken life cycle through hands-on learning. Participants practiced egg candling, identified fertilized eggs, monitored embryo development, and observed chicks hatching in real time. Lessons also connected stages of chicken development to broader concepts in animal and human growth and development. Both schools expressed interest in continuing the program next year.

APPLE EDUCATION GRANT TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMMING

Leelanau County 4-H continued its fourth year participating in the MSU Extension/4-H Apple Education Community Initiative grant. Grant-funded technology including Apple iPads, Apple Pencils, headphones, Sphero robots, and a charging cart supported STEM and creative learning

opportunities through schools, clubs, and community programming. Throughout the 2025-2026 school year, students in the Suttons Bay School District utilized iPads for digital illustration and animation projects. Using the Procreate app, students created original digital artwork while building creativity and technology skills.

SKI AND SNOWBOARD PROGRAM

Leelanau County 4-H successfully reintroduced ski and snowboard instruction during winter 2026 after several years without a slope-based program. Held at Hickory Hills across six Sundays in January and February, the program served 17 participants including 13 skiers and 4 snowboarders. Many youth were first-time participants learning foundational skills such as balance, stopping, turning, lift safety, and hill awareness. Youth were grouped by ability level and demonstrated steady progress and increased confidence throughout the season. By the final session, several beginner participants were independently riding the tow rope and navigating the slopes on their own. Families noted the growth in both skill and confidence, with one parent sharing, “I really noticed how much they got down the basics.” The final session concluded with ribbons, hot cocoa, and a celebration of accomplishments, with many families’ expressing excitement for the program to return next year.



Photos from Exploration Days by Heather Cook

STATEWIDE OPPORTUNITES AND RECOGNITION FOR LEELANAU COUNTY 4-H YOUTH

LEELANAU 4-H SWIM SCHOOL

The first new Leelanau 4-H Swim School wrapped up successfully during summer 2026, providing local youth with foundational swimming and water safety instruction. Participants attended six lessons taught by a certified instructor who focused on helping swimmers build confidence and develop core swimming skills in a supportive environment. Youth practiced floating, bubble blowing, scooping, jumping into the water, and basic swim techniques while learning important water safety concepts. Throughout the program, participants demonstrated noticeable progress in both comfort and skill

level. One participant who began the program hesitant to put her face in the water proudly submerged her head and jumped into the pool independently by the end of the session. The program provided an important opportunity for skill development, confidence building, and summer recreation, while generating strong interest, for future swim programming opportunities.

LEELANAU COUNTY YOUTH 4-H EXPLORATION DAYS

Leelanau County youth participated in 4-H Exploration Days held on the campus of Michigan State University. This statewide pre-college experience allows participants to live in residence halls, attend educational sessions, and explore future academic and career interests while experiencing campus life. Twelve youth from Leelanau County attended the event alongside two adult chaperones. Transportation support

was provided through a partnership with Leland Public Schools, whose bus drivers transported youth from Leelanau and neighboring counties to the event.

The program is designed to help participants:

- Build confidence, independence, accountability, and decision-making skills
- Strengthen communication, teamwork, leadership, and citizenship abilities
- Meet peers from diverse communities and backgrounds
- Explore future educational and career interests
- Experience Michigan State University and its campus resources
- Develop social and academic skills important for future success
- Participate in opportunities not always available



2025 LIVESTOCK
SHOWING AUCTIONS

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN
4-H FAIR LIVESTOCK
COUNCIL

The Northwest Michigan Fair 4-H Livestock Council hosted its annual 4-H livestock auction during the August 2025 fair. Participants dedicated months to preparing their projects through animal care, training, and record book completion before exhibiting at the fair. Youth showcased a wide variety of species including lambs, goats, poultry, swine, cattle, horses, rabbits, and alpaca/llama projects. Following the shows, market exhibitors had the opportunity to sell their projects through the annual livestock auction. Leelanau County 4-H members had a strong presence throughout the fair season and earned numerous honors across multiple species. Lillian Gibson

earned Reserve Grand Champion Halter Horse honors with her horse Lucy, while Addi Anderson received Reserve Grand Champion Dairy Feeder recognition. Joey Roelofs was awarded Grand Champion Meat Chickens, and Luke Verschaeve earned Reserve Grand Champion Junior Beef Heifer honors. In the steer barn, Garrett Grant received the Excellence Award and Kenneth Grant earned the Rising Star Award. Charlotte Crowther earned Grand Champion honors in the Open Alpaca/Llama Obstacle class in addition to receiving the Rising Star Award for alpaca/llama, while Kinsley Crowther earned Grand Champion Pack and Open Reserve Champion Showmanship honors in the alpaca/llama division. Additional accomplishments included Margaret Ritola receiving the Rising Star Award in the lamb barn and JC Oosse earning Grand Champion

Market Production Pullets honors. In the goat division, Samantha Claar earned Reserve Champion Dairy Doe Open honors, Faith Steffens received both Grand Champion Market Goat and Grand Champion 4-H Wether Goat honors, and Judy Steffens earned multiple awards including Reserve Champion Market Goat, Reserve Champion Goat 4-H Showmanship, Reserve Champion Market Doe, Reserve Champion Open Showmanship, and Overall Reserve Champion Breed Doe Open honors. Isabelle Plamondon earned Reserve Champion Showmanship honors in the 4-H chicken division, while Violet Claar earned Reserve Champion Showmanship honors in the 4-H rabbit division. In addition to livestock exhibits, youth also showcased creativity and project learning through individual and club displays featured in the Tanner Building throughout fair week.



2025 NORTHWEST MICHIGAN 4-H FAIR

In addition to livestock exhibits, youth also showcased creativity and project learning through individual and club displays featured in the Tanner Building throughout fair week.

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN 4-H LIVESTOCK EDUCATION EXPO

In partnership with the Northwest Michigan Fair 4-H Livestock Council, regional 4-H staff organized the Northwest Michigan 4-H Livestock Education Expo at the Grand Traverse Resort. The event brought together educators and industry professionals from across Michigan to provide interactive educational workshops focused on livestock production, showmanship, veterinary health, agricultural careers, and broader 4-H opportunities.

Forty-eight Leelanau County youth participated alongside 351 youth from across the region.

Participants attended 23 workshops throughout the event, resulting in 658 educational credits awarded to exhibitors. These credits help fulfill educational requirements necessary

Notable Fair Data Points

430 youth participated across multiple counties

9 Junior Beef projects were purchased and donated back to youth to continue as large beef projects

The livestock auction generated **\$1,389,280.60 in gross sales**

for participation in the Northwest Michigan Fair livestock auction.

The event received strong positive feedback from participants and families, with many expressing interest in continued and expanded educational opportunities in future years.

STATEWIDE PARTICIPATION OF COUNTY YOUTH

Leelanau County youth continued to participate in statewide leadership and educational opportunities through Michigan 4-H programs including 4-H Capitol Experience and 4-H Exploration Days.

One Leelanau County 4-H member served on the planning committee for

this year's 4-H Capitol Experience, helping organize activities and discussions held at Michigan's State Capitol. The event is designed for youth in 9th grade through age 19 and focuses on civic engagement,

leadership development, advocacy, and public policy. Participants joined issue groups led by teen facilitators where they discussed current topics, explored government processes, and collaborated with peers from across the state.

Issue group topics included:

- Environment and Natural Resources
- Health
- Jobs and the Economy/Infrastructure
- Agriculture
- Civil Rights and Youth Advocacy
- Education and Teacher Retention
- Crime and Law Enforcement



Lene

4-H PROGRAM



Pop-up Markets reached **1,867** students along with **85** staff

SCHOOL POP UP MARKETS

Leelanau County 4-H partnered with local schools and community organizations to host a series of school pop-up markets throughout the county during the 2025-2026 year. Events were held at St. Mary School, Leland Public School, Suttons Bay Public Schools, Glen Lake Public Schools, and Northport Public School, bringing together agriculture, nutrition, education, and community engagement opportunities directly to youth during the school day.

Across all locations, the pop-up markets reached 1,867 students along with 85 teachers, staff, and community members. Events featured up to nine local farm and agriculture vendors at a single location alongside Michigan State University Extension and 4-H activity stations focused on hands-on learning opportunities including smoothie bikes, robotics, and crafts.

The events were additionally supported by adult volunteers and school staff throughout the county. Students had the opportunity to interact directly with local farmers and agricultural producers while learning about healthy foods, local agriculture, STEM activities, and hands-on 4-H programming. The smoothie bike stations were especially popular, allowing youth to blend and create their own smoothies while learning that healthy foods can also be fun and delicious. By combining education, community partnerships, and interactive experiences, the school pop-up markets helped connect youth with local agriculture and introduced many students to new learning opportunities available through 4-H and MSU Extension.

LIFT PROGRAM PARTNERSHIP

Leelanau County 4-H continued

partnering with the LIFT program to provide hands-on educational and recreational opportunities for youth. At Old Settlers Park on Glen Lake, participants took part in a one-day fishing program utilizing the “Michigan Fishing is Catching On!” and National 4-H Fishing Curriculum. Youth learned about fishing safety, Michigan fishing regulations, conservation practices, invasive species awareness, fish identification, casting techniques, and aquatic habitats before practicing hands-on casting and fishing skills at the water. Participants who caught fish identified species, measured fish length, and discussed conservation practices such as size limits and catch-and-release.

In an additional LIFT partnership activity, youth participated in a textile-based learning program where they created tie blankets while building creativity and hands-on crafting skills in a collaborative environment.



MSU PRODUCT CENTER
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The Michigan State University Product Center supports entrepreneurs in Northwest Michigan who are launching or growing businesses in food and agriculture. From farm-based products to value-added goods, the center provides expert guidance through business planning, market research and feasibility analysis.

Through its Traverse City-based innovation counselor, the Product Center offers personalized guidance to help local entrepreneurs turn ideas into viable products and services. In 2025 alone, staff worked with entrepreneurs in Leelanau County, supporting \$835,200 in capital formation.

By fostering local business development, the Product Center plays a key role in strengthening the regional economy and building a resilient, community-based food system.

LEELANAU COUNTY PRODUCT CENTER IMPACTS



11 Businesses



61 Counseling Hours



6 jobs created/2 jobs retained



Over \$3,287,000 million in annual sales



\$117,200 Sales Growth in 2025



77 total employees (combined)



\$835,280.00 Capital Formation

GOOD GOVERNANCE / SEA GRANT



NORTHERN MICHIGAN SMALL FARM CONFERENCE

LOCAL POLICY EDUCATION

MSU Extension is a key partner in the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference held at Leelanau School in Glen Arbor. Mary Reilly taught a one-hour program, *From Laws to Farm Stands: Getting to Know Michigan’s Right to Farm Act and GAAMPs* to a group of 23 people at the August 18-19 conference.



MICHIGAN 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. Sea Grant also provides access to science-based information about Michigan’s coasts and the Great Lakes. The program also supports Michigan State University Extension educators located in coastal communities whose work highlights information about Michigan’s coastal Great Lakes areas. In Leelanau County, some examples of impactful work areas include the annual Lake MI Sport Fishery Workshop (held at Westshore Community College); work with recreational boating and marina sectors such as the Michigan Clean

Marina program (Elmwood Township Marina recently re-certified in 2025); Lake level variation, coastal erosion and beach safety issues; and general information on commercial fishery and heritage issues including work with Fishtown Preservation Society, Grand Traverse Band Ottawa & Chippewa, etc. If you have questions about any Great Lakes coastal issues, please contact Mark Breederland (breederl@msu.edu / 231.590.0413), Michigan Sea Grant Extension Educator.



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