

MASON COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025



- West Shore Community College Rec Center
3000 N. Stiles Rd. Scottville, MI 49454
- msue.mason@county.msu.edu | 231-845-3361
- Follow us on Facebook @Mason-County-4H&MSU-Extension

Message from the District Director



I'm pleased to share the results of another successful year of collaboration between Mason County and Michigan State University (MSU) Extension. Your continued support has allowed us to make a meaningful impact on youth, families, businesses, and communities. This year, MSU Extension delivered a wide range of research-based educational services—helping individuals lead healthier lives, assisting new and local businesses, expanding youth leadership and career exploration opportunities, supporting farmers with business management and mental health resources, and more.

Our staff live and work alongside county residents, building strong community connections and responding directly to local needs. We maintained our online presence through virtual courses, timely responses to questions on topics from gardening to food safety, increased social media outreach, and a wealth of research-backed resources on our website.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership. On behalf of the MSU Extension team serving Mason County, we appreciate your support and look forward to another year of working together—and hope to see you at an upcoming program.

James Kelly
District Director

Staff

- Lori Cargill – 4-H Program Coordinator
- Julie Eriksen – Office Manager
- Brenden Kelley – Water Resource Educator
- James Kelly – District Director
- Charles May – STEM Programming

Overall Impact



1,881 Total reach of activity in Mason County
(Programming, consultations, office visits, soil tests, hot-line calls)



1,227 participants from the county attending programs.



174 client consultations



240 programs (across the state) attended by participants from this county.



52 programs hosted in Mason County



31 answered Ask Extension questions



26 volunteers



58 community coalitions and partnerships within the county that MSU Extension employees are members of

Communications Outreach



327,479 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, articles, radio and handouts..



45,583 Facebook views on the Mason County/4-H page



96 Plat books, soil tests, and other resources sold in Mason County.



127 4-H youth enrollments



34 4-H Clubs



875 # of total youth participants



24 total volunteers



17,092 4-H volunteer hour dollar value



Farm and Home Safety

The Mason and Oceana County Farm and Home Safety Day gave youth a fun, hands-on way to learn essential safety skills for home, farm, and community life. With MSU Extension and local professionals guiding activities—from CPR practice and fire extinguisher use to livestock handling, equipment awareness, and water safety—participants gained real-world knowledge that boosts their confidence and builds lifelong responsibility. The event showed that learning about safety can be engaging, memorable, and empowering for young people.



4-H STEM Programming

STEM Adventures, a partnership between Mason County 4-H and the Great Start Collaborative, creates hands-on learning experiences that spark curiosity and confidence in young children. By pairing children's books with interactive STEM activities, families explore concepts together and take-home resources to continue learning. The program's welcoming environment ensures every child feels supported—shown by moments like a hesitant participant gradually gaining confidence and joy as he joined in the straw building activity. STEM Adventures is strengthening family engagement, fostering creativity, and making STEM accessible to all.



Woodworking Returns

A memorial tribute to longtime 4-H volunteer Ivan Anthony sparked a growing woodworking movement in Mason County, helping 4-H expand free, hands-on learning through new partnerships and community support. With donations from local families and collaboration with the Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 4-H launched popular woodworking programs that quickly filled and inspired youth across afterschool, library, and fair settings. Growing interest has led to even more opportunities planned for the coming year, demonstrating how one legacy can ignite creativity, skill-building, and community connection for a new generation.

Mental Health and Wellness



The Teen Mental Health First Aid program at Mason County Eastern has strengthened students' ability to recognize and respond to mental health challenges, giving sophomores practical tools to support their peers and connect them to help. Through MSU Extension's partnership with Mason County Schools, the training is building a more informed, compassionate school culture—evidenced by students who continue to share how the program has positively influenced their confidence and well-being.



MSU Extension recently partnered with Mason County Eastern to deliver a research-based mental health training for students and staff. Once the current 9th-grade class completes the program in the coming weeks, every student in grades 9–12 will have received this training—making MCE the only school in Michigan to fully implement it across all high school grades. This achievement reflects the district's strong commitment to supporting student well-being. Congratulations to the board, superintendent, administrators, and staff for leading the way in prioritizing mental health.

Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement



Thanks to support from the Michigan 4-H Foundation and National 4-H Council, 1 Mason County teen joined other Michigan teens who traveled to Washington, D.C. for the 2025 Ignite by 4-H conference. Participants explored careers, built leadership skills, and connected with diverse peers from across the country—many experiencing their first flight or visit to the capital. Through hands-on workshops, inspiring keynote speakers, and the creation of youth-led community service projects, participants gained confidence, new friendships, and practical skills they can bring back to their home communities. This experience broadened their horizons and empowered them to make meaningful change.

Community Health & Nutrition



332 county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs.



212 nutrition and physical activity participants hosted in-county.



8 Number of sites receiving physical activity Policy, System, or Environmental education.



9 Policy, systems and environmental changes implemented at partner sites.



3,573 people impacted by policy, system, or education changes.

Garden To Cafeteria



Mason County Eastern’s greenhouse renovation—supported by an MSU Extension mini-grant—expanded the school’s farm-to-school efforts by enabling students and staff to grow fresh produce for the cafeteria and salad bar. Led by the food service director, science teacher, and motivated high school students, the project strengthened connections between nutrition education and hands-on gardening, increased student engagement, and boosted access to fresh, local vegetables for hundreds of students each day. The effort showed how a small school can make meaningful change by dreaming big and working together.

Healthy Eating



MSU Extension’s Show Me Nutrition program at Ludington Elementary is helping students build confidence and curiosity around healthy eating by encouraging them to be courageous when trying new foods. Through repeated exposure, creative food preparation, and supportive classroom tasting experiences, students learn that it’s okay not to love a new food right away—and that persistence pays off. Moments when children proudly announce, “I did it! I tried!” show how the program empowers them to expand their tastes, develop healthier habits, and make food exploration fun.

Cooking and Budgeting



Emerging adults were equipped with essential life skills to support their independence, thanks to a collaborative effort between MSU Extension, Staircase Youth Services, and Michigan Works!. Through an engaging 90-minute hands-on class, participants learned cooking basics, meal planning, and budgeting strategies while gaining confidence through interactive activities and a live cooking demonstration. Each young adult left with practical kitchen tools and ingredients to prepare healthy meals at home. The program was a standout success, empowering youth with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to make healthier, more affordable choices.

Supporting Seniors



A Matter of Balance

The fall-prevention program hosted at the Ludington Senior Center empowered older adults to improve balance, build strength, and reduce their risk of falling through practical strategies and guided exercise. Participants gained confidence as they set personal activity goals, learned to make simple safety adjustments at home, and practiced movements that support stability and mobility. Designed for anyone concerned about falling or seeking to maintain independence, the program helped residents stay active, safe, and engaged in their daily lives.



Just Breathe

MSU Extension's Stress Less with Mindfulness program provided Longfellow Towers residents in Ludington with practical, research-based tools to manage stress and cope with grief. Eighteen participants attended the "Begin with Breath" session, where they learned how mindful breathing and movement can reduce tension, improve emotional well-being, and support overall health. The training offered residents accessible strategies they can use daily, helping them feel more grounded, supported, and equipped to navigate difficult emotions.

Government and Community Vitality



MSU Extension strengthened local planning capacity in the City of Ludington by providing Site Plan Review and Special Land Use training to nine officials as they implemented a new zoning ordinance. Through evidence-based instruction drawn from the Citizen Planner and Zoning Administrator Certificate Programs, participants gained the skills needed to confidently review applications, interpret land-use law, and apply consistent, transparent procedures. This training improved the city's ability to manage development effectively, ensuring clearer decision-making and better outcomes for the community.



Six Mason County residents took the 2025 Citizen Planner training. It had a strong positive impact on participants, significantly increasing their planning knowledge, confidence, and ability to serve their communities effectively. Nearly all respondents reported substantial knowledge gains, over 93% felt more confident in their roles, and a similar share rated the program as valuable for their personal and professional growth. Participants also indicated they will apply what they learned by improving meeting preparation, fostering community involvement, and using planning concepts in real decision-making—showing that the program not only builds skills but also supports more informed, engaged local governance.

Environmental Stewardship and Natural Resource Management



Lake Monitoring

Twelve Mason County residents strengthened their ability to protect local waterways through an Exotic Aquatic Plant Watch (EAPW) Side-by-Side training on Thunder Lake. Led jointly by MSU Extension and EGLE, the hands-on session improved volunteer confidence and retention while teaching participants to identify and monitor high-risk invasive aquatic plants that threaten lake ecosystems and recreation. By empowering residents with the skills and tools to detect invasive species early, the program supports healthier lake environments, safeguards native habitats, and enhances long-term community stewardship of Mason County's natural resources.



Water Use Education

The first-ever West Central Irrigation Day filled a long-standing gap in irrigation and water-use education for western Michigan. Twenty-eight participants attended, reflecting strong demand driven by new regulations, emerging technology, and aging equipment. Despite a small number of returned surveys, most respondents reported their knowledge "increased a great deal," and the information shared was estimated to influence management decisions on **6,150 acres**. Participants also projected potential savings of **over \$46,000**—based solely on those who completed the survey—demonstrating the program's significant economic and on-farm impact.

Product Center – Small Business Support

- 6 clients served
- 29 total employees with over \$1,000,000 in sales
- 21 hours of consulting and research from MSU Product Center

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