

# OTTAWA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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## Message from the District Director

The MSU Extension mission statement states, “Michigan State University helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities.” The Ottawa County – MSU Extension Annual Report brings this mission to life for county commissioners and residents. The data and stories within show how education is impacting lives in Ottawa County. As you will see in this report, Ottawa County and MSU Extension form an integrated partnership serving the needs of students, farmers, senior citizens, veterans, and anyone else seeking to better their lives through learning.

## Impact



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



**544** programs (across the state) attended by participants from this county



**3,252** participants from the county attending programs and 4-H



**168** volunteers serving the county

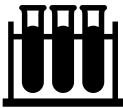


**148** answered Ask Extension questions

## Overall Impact



**61,798** contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



**141** soil test samples processed for Ottawa County



**470** virtual programs related to Financial Education, Food Systems, Water and Environmental Quality, Government and Businesses



**67,320** participants in community, food, and environment programs from across Michigan



**764** client consultations



**95** programs hosted in the county

## Financial Literacy

In 2024, Ottawa County residents attended a variety of financial literacy webinars and in-person events. MSU Extension provides resources and education on money management, foreclosure prevention, buying your own home, retirement planning and more to help residents and their families be more financially healthy. Some of the webinars Ottawa County residents attended are; Homebuyer Education, Surviving & Thriving a Fixed Income, Savvy Tips for Small Business, Informed Renter, Retirement Myths & Facts and Adulting 101.



## Virtual Coffee Break Podcast

The Virtual Coffee Break Podcast is produced by dairy educator Martin Mangual, with support from the entire MSU Extension Dairy team. There are **74** total episodes of the podcast with **9** episodes added in 2024.



**9** Virtual Coffee Break Podcast episodes published in 2024



**1,230** total Virtual Coffee Break Podcast plays in 2024



**753** people who tuned in to the 9 new Virtual Coffee Break Podcast episodes in 2024



**8,633** total Virtual Coffee Break Podcast plays

# SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS



**680** participants in  
county agriculture programs



**\$246.5 billion** annual  
impact of food and agriculture on  
Michigan's economy - STATEWIDE



**160** residents who participated  
in Beekeeping or Pollinator  
programs



**216** Ottawa County residents  
who attended Great Lakes Expo



## West Michigan Dairy Education Dinner

January did not only mark the beginning of a new year, but also the debut of a new dairy extension program from Michigan State University. The West Michigan Dairy Education Dinner hosted a full room of 34 attendees that directly represented over 12, 000 dairy animals, plus another 60,000 in 53 additional herds served by the consultants and veterinarians in attendance.

The central topic for the night was *"How to get more from your parlor?"* Dr. Roger Thomson presented novel research regarding milking efficiency and what we can do to improve it. The second Speaker, Dr. Ron Erskine focused on how *"the more things change, the more they stay the same,"* reminding attendees how important it is to be consistent in our basics to have a positive impact on milk quality. All surveyed participants stated they increased their knowledge, with 19 out of 20 also planning on implementing changes in their dairy operations based on the received information. Additionally, those expecting to implement changes estimated that they will have some impact, and 2 farmers expecting a major impact on their herds. After the dinner event, some dairy producers followed up with our MSU Extension Educators to implement some Extension programs on their farms. These included 4 Parlor evaluations and 3 Milker Training programs. Overall, the event included great education, a delicious dinner, and an Ice cream bar to close a successful MSU Extension program that will surely return in 2025.



## Apple Education

In addition to our education with growers, Lindsay Brown, MSU Extension Educator developed and delivered a talk called *"The Science behind Apple Harvest"* to groups in the fall. This talk included the history of apple production in the area and demonstrations on how we evaluate apple maturity. This was a fun interactive talk with Chester Township Senior Services and a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class.



# SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS

## Enhancing Manure Management Practices in Michigan – Charles Gould

Proper manure management is vital for environmental sustainability, agricultural productivity and regulatory compliance. However, this task requires a deep understanding of best practices, emerging technologies and evolving regulations. The Michigan Manure Management Summit, hosted by Michigan State University (MSU) and Michigan Farm Bureau, serves as a key platform for providing this education. Targeted at farmers, for-hire manure applicators, and industry professionals, the Summit addresses knowledge gaps, offers Continuing Education Units (CEUs), and fosters the implementation of safe, effective manure management strategies.



January 2024, the Michigan Manure Management Summit hosted 116 participants ranging from farmers, for-hire applicators and conservation professionals. The event featured expert-led presentations and workshops on topics such as safety practices, emerging technologies, regulatory updates and manure application strategies. Sessions like "Real-Time Nutrient Application Technology" and "Manure Can Kill You: Safety Around Manure" provided practical insights for improving efficiency and safety in manure management. Participants engaged in hands-on learning. The Summit also facilitated networking among attendees and professionals, creating opportunities for continued collaboration. Evaluation responses from 75 attendees highlighted the Summit's impact:

- 69% of respondents planned to implement changes in their operations.
- Key knowledge gains included understanding manure gas hazards, utilizing technology for nutrient application and incorporating safety measures.
- The "Real-Time Nutrient Application Technology" session achieved the highest knowledge improvement.
- 100% of respondents who completed evaluations recommended the Michigan Manure Hauler Certification Program to others.



The Summit successfully increased attendance from prior years and enhanced participants' confidence and skills, particularly in safety and technological applications. The Michigan Manure Management Summit equips farmers and applicators with critical knowledge and tools to manage manure safely and sustainably. By fostering improved practices, the event supports environmental protection, enhances agricultural productivity and ensures compliance with regulations, benefiting communities and ecosystems across Michigan.

## Small Fruit Education

Another commodity that is crucial to the Agriculture industry of Ottawa County is blueberries. In 2024, **112 growers** participated in MSU Extension Small Fruit programs to learn how to manage major production risks. A few of the programs were: 2024 Fruit School, 2024 Blueberry Kick-off Meeting, Blueberry Field Day and Pest Management Training. Carlos Garcia-Salazar, a small fruit educator, has also been working to correctly translate the Pesticide Applicator Core Manual from English to Spanish.





# SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS



## MSU Extension Summer Field Day Event

The Christmas tree industry has seen an influx of new growers. Many of these growers are new to farming in general and to Christmas tree specific challenges. One of the greatest challenges is weed management. Uncontrolled weed growth can have huge impacts on the overall success/failure of a tree operation. Another challenge many new growers face is in how best to shape their Christmas trees to match customer demands.

To address these challenges, MSU Christmas tree team hosted a field day at MSU, which consisted of three stops focusing in on both weed management and shearing principles, but also demonstrating MSU Christmas tree research programs. The post-meeting survey responses showed that 100% planned to make a change on their farm in the coming year with the information learned, improved their knowledge of weed identification, improved knowledge of weed control options and improved their knowledge of how to shear and prune Christmas trees. Christmas tree growers will have more success in their farming operation with the ability to identify weeds on their farm, understand what weed control options they can take, and the best principles to shape and shear trees to match to their customer preferences.

## 2024 Michigan Garden Plant Tour

The Michigan Garden Plant Tour (MGPT) is a partnership of MSU's Horticulture Department with six greenhouse businesses in Michigan (Four Star Greenhouse, Mast Young Plants, Raker and Roberta's, Pell's Greenhouse, DGI Propagators, and Walter's Gardens). The MGPT is a coordinated open house where trial gardens and young plant producers showcase gardens with new cultivars and existing catalog items for consumers, growers, seed company representatives and brokers. The goal is to evaluate new plants' garden performance under the growing conditions in Michigan. The objective of the tour is to educate growers and industry professionals about new and existing plant selections. It was held from July 29 through August 9 of 2024.



During the tour, there were **1,434 recorded** visitors at the host locations. Many visitors, including those at three tour sites, did not sign a visitor book so, this number is an underestimate. The host sites have the opportunity to present their "Best of the Best" cultivars from their trial gardens at the 2024 Greenhouse Growers Expo.

## Dig In! 2024 Series

The Dig In is an online educational series of 10 classes for Extension Master Gardeners (EMG). This is provided so that all EMGs can complete their 10-hour continuing education requirement without cost, from wherever they are located. **1,301 people participated in this series in 2024, 38 of them were from Ottawa County.** This was an increase from last year's 34 Ottawa County participants.

## Youth Programming

The goal of the 4-H Youth Development model is for 4-H to “provide kids with community, mentors, and learning opportunities to develop the skills they need to create positive change in their lives.” You need to look no further than the amazing youth in the Ottawa County 4-H program.



**36** active 4-H clubs and committees



**491** youth enrolled in 4-H



**1137** total youth participants



**108** total 4-H volunteers



### Morgan Mills – New 4-H Program Coordinator

Morgan Mills is the new Ottawa County - MSU Extension 4-H program coordinator as of April 2024. Morgan has a master's degree in animal science from MSU, specializing in dairy cattle nutrition.

Morgan brings a wealth of experience to her new role. One of her key skills is her ability to translate research findings into practical applications, a skill she has demonstrated at various conferences across Michigan, Indiana, Florida and Canada. Throughout her academic career, Morgan has held leadership roles in the Sigma Alpha agricultural sorority at the University of Florida and in the Animal Science Graduate Student Association at Michigan State University. She was drawn to this role because of the county's strong commitment to agriculture, the opportunity to collaborate with 4-H members and volunteers and her desire to make a positive impact on young people's lives.



### New Club Formed and Growing Quickly

In January of 2024, Critter Barn was chartered as an official 4-H club in Ottawa County. The club aims to make livestock projects more accessible for families living in suburbs or city environments, where space to house animals is limited. By joining the 4-H club, youth are able to house their animals at Critter Barn's facilities and volunteer weekly to help at the farm. Since their start in the beginning of 2024, Critter Barn has enrolled over 40 members into their program, teaching animal agriculture to families from a multitude of backgrounds.



### Ottawa County 4-H Member Attends National 4-H Congress

Over Thanksgiving Break, 4-H hosts the National 4-H Congress for high school age members. This five-day event takes place in Atlanta, Georgia, where participants engage in leadership, community service, civic engagement, and inclusion. It also provides an opportunity for youth to network with other 4-H'ers from across the country.

Stellamia Aerts, a 4-H member from Ottawa County, attended the 2024 Congress and participated in educational workshops, engaging hands-on activities and community service projects in the city of Atlanta. Stellamia said that she learned skills that would leave her with the ability to make an impact in her own community back in Western Michigan and connections that would last a lifetime.

Ottawa County 4-H was able to support Stellamia in this opportunity for teen leadership development by offering a partial scholarship to cover the registration costs.

### 2024 State Horse Show

In August of 2024, 13 Ottawa County 4-H'ers participated in the State 4-H Show. The three-day event includes more than 275 classes of 4-H members and their projects competing on a statewide basis at the Michigan State University Pavillion for Agriculture and Livestock Education in Lansing.



### 4-H and FFA Livestock Judging Contest

In 2024, 19 Ottawa County 4-H'ers attended the Michigan 4-H and FFA Livestock Judging State Contest. This contest is put on each year in collaboration between 4-H, FFA and Michigan Livestock Expo. During this contest, participants can demonstrate their livestock evaluation and selection skills, as well as improve their communication and decision-making skills. The contest includes both individual and team competition with classes of beef cattle, boer goats, sheep and swine that count towards the total score.

### Ottawa County 4-H'er Receives Scholarship

In November of 2024, Ottawa County's Olivia Pung was one of 60 students that was awarded a \$2,000 Michigan State University (MSU) Pre-College Scholarship due to her involvement in the 4-H Animal and Veterinary Science Camp. Any student who participated in a MSU sponsored pre-college event was eligible to apply and had to write an essay and submit an application. The scholarship will be applied to Olivia's first year at MSU as a degree-seeking student.





# Public Health & Nutrition Programming



**1,155** county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs



**6** Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy System and Environmental sites receiving PSE education within the county



**23** policy, systems, and environmental changes with those PSE sites



**415** residents positively impacted with the 23 policy, systems and environmental changes within those PSE sites

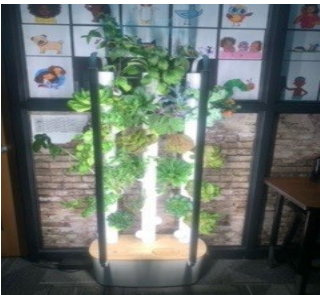


## Pantry Picks

Love in Action, a pantry in Grand Haven, has been working on changing their system and environment. Using mini grant funds, the pantry has reorganized the shelves into food groups. They have put up posters on the back of the reorganized shelves that depict which food group is available on that shelf. Bins and crates have improved the displays for fresh fruits and vegetables. A recipe rack is available with grab and go recipes which are healthy and includes foods available in the pantry. The pantry has conducted a survey with the participants who say they love the recipes and find it easier to shop now with the food better organized.

## Indoor Garden Success

MSU Extension’s Amy Prins has been programing at Woodside Elementary School for over seven years. Mrs. Harris, a second-grade teacher, has been a big champion in supporting nutrition education for her students. Mrs. Harris applied for a grant to purchase a hydro garden for her classroom. Each student gets to grow, care for and harvest whatever they plant. Some of the kids have grown lettuce, tomatoes and other various veggies. They were so excited to show Amy what they grew.



## Food Safety

In 2024, 94 Ottawa County residents took classes and accessed resources from MSU Extension’s Food Safety Team. These classes covered a variety of topics that helped residents gain the knowledge and training to prevent food borne illnesses. Some examples of the classes attended are:

- Michigan Cottage Food Law
- Pantry Food Safety – It’s Your Job
- Safe Food = Healthy Kids
- ServSafe®
- Cooking for Crowds
- MDARD Everyday Food Safety
- Preserving MI Harvest – Various Topics
- Food Safety for Food Service Workers

## Michigan Apple Crunch

The Michigan Apple Crunch is an annual event hosted by MSU Extension and the Michigan Farm to Institution Network each October to promote national Farm to School Month and celebrate the iconic Michigan Apple. 3,330 Ottawa County residents participated in the 2024 Michigan Apple Crunch. 340,918 Michigan residents participated across the state.



## Embracing Aging

Kai Gritter facilitated a six-week series with seniors in Coopersville that discussed 12 keys for optimal aging. Class participants were very engaged and expressed their appreciation for the series. They shared many personal experiences that supported the program content and requested more programming from MSU Extension.



## Great Reminders to Eat Healthy

Kai facilitated a Healthy Eating presentation for older adults at Evergreen Commons in Holland. Almost 40 individuals registered and attended the session and were very engaged in the discussion. Multiple participants expressed their thanks for the session and shared stories about how their health had improved upon making healthy lifestyle choices. They expressed interest in additional health programming. The Project Coordinator reached out to thank Kai for presenting and stated they would like to have her back again soon.

## Health & Mindfulness

In a continued effort to manage our physical and mental health in 2024, MSU Extension’s Health team educators reached 355 Ottawa County residents (a 33% increase in participation from 2023) by offering numerous session opportunities. These sessions explored mindfulness basics such as breathing, moving, eating, walking, thought surfing, taming your busy mind and more. Research has shown that people who are more mindful are generally happier and report less anxiety, symptoms of depression, anger and worries. Some of the session topics were:

- RELAX, Alternatives to Anger
- Sleep Education
- Brief Practices in Mindfulness
- Building Resilience to Avoid Burnout
- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Mindful Walking
- Be Kind to Your Mind
- Mindfully Feeding Infants/Toddlers
- Mindfulness for Children
- Teaching Kids Mindful Eating
- Mindful Educators
- Walk With Ease
- Begin With A Breath
- Chronic Pain PATH Toolkit
- Calming Down & Destressing
- Mindful Eating
- Stress Less With Mindfulness
- Tai Chi for Arthritis and Diabetes
- Positive Attitude
- Caring for the Caregiver
- Keys to Embracing Aging
- Mental Health First Aid

## Positive Attitude in Coopersville

Kai Gritter was invited by a community partner to present a “Positive Attitude” class to members of the Coopersville Rotary Club. Members warmly welcomed Kai to their lunch meeting and were engaged during the session. Afterward, the community partner scheduled six weeks of sessions with her. They were held at the Coopersville District Library from mid-April through May.



# Ottawa County 2024

## The MSU Product Center

Michigan State University Extension and the Michigan State University Product Center assist entrepreneurs and businesses in developing products and services in the food and agriculture markets. Its team of experts consults with clients on a one-on-one basis, helping new entrepreneurs navigate from concept development to launch and beyond. The MSU Product Center also offers specialized services such as labeling, packaging, and nutritional analysis. If you are interested in business counseling from the MSU Product Center, please visit our [website](#).



**132** counseling hours



**24** customers helped



**\$218,400**  
in annual sum sales



**6** jobs created



**3** jobs retained

## The MSU Product Center awards Protein Pints as the 2024 Young Innovator of the Year

On April 24, 2024, the Michigan State University Product Center recognized several food and beverage businesses for their achievements over the past year. Protein Pints was recognized as the Young Innovator of the Year. The brand is co-owned by two best friends – Paul and Mike. Paul is currently an MSU student majoring in Entrepreneurship and the Broad College of Business



Protein Pints is a frozen dessert company that offers four flavors: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and peanut butter chip. Each pint contains thirty grams of protein, is low-sugar and low-calorie. As of this month, you can find Protein Pints at grocery store chains such as Kroger and Meijer's.



## Small Potatoes, Big Impact

In June 2024, we released the publication “Small Potatoes, Big Impact: Michigan Farm to School Potato Processing Partnership Case Study,” which highlights how potatoes from Crisp Country Acres in Holland are being served to 16,018 students in school meals through a partnership with ValleyHUB Food Hub, coordinated by MSU Extension. You can view the full report at this [link](#).

# Ottawa County 2024

## Veteran's Outreach



Due to the direct and collaborative efforts of MSU Extension's Veterans Outreach team, thousands (6,753) of veteran community members (veterans, family members, service providers, etc.) were reached in 2024. The SNAP Outreach team attended numerous events across the state, including Veteran Coffee hours, Benefits Fairs, Stand Downs, Coalition meetings and a Veterans Leadership Summit. They also promoted MSU Extension's Veteran Outreach efforts at food banks, with Rotary Club members, County Commissioner Boards and during a Veterans Day Concert. They addressed food and nutritional insecurity by sharing 13,807 SNAP Outreach for Veterans brochures and 6,007 USDA seeds statewide. Additionally, they continued to connect and promote MSU Extension programs and resources to the veteran community through the MSU Extension Veterans website (12,887 views) and traditional social media (Facebook and Instagram) engagement (15,551 reach).

## Fishery Restoration at Ottawa Sands

Michigan Sea Grant (MISG) staff collaborated with Ottawa County Parks and Recreation (OCPR) to assess fish populations and engage the public ahead of major restoration efforts at Ottawa Sands County Park, a 345-acre former sand mine turned nature destination. MISG's Dan O'Keefe led public outreach and youth fishing programs, working with local schools and agencies to monitor fish in the park's inland lake.

Surveys revealed a low bluegill-to-bass ratio, leading to underfed bass. To address this, MISG recommended adding woody habitat to protect young bluegill and boost food availability. O'Keefe and students conducted fish sampling, contributed to ongoing monitoring plans, and developed lesson materials using real data.

In 2023, a \$142,800 state grant jumpstarted restoration projects. Construction in 2024 enhanced facilities and restored over 26 acres of habitat, including shoreline softening, lagoon conversion and new wetlands. Researchers from Grand Valley State University also assessed water quality and macroinvertebrates.

Fish are already using the new habitats, and the park reopened in the fall of 2024.



**15** residents who participated in the Michigan Naturalist Recertification Program



**101** residents who participated in the MiCorps Volunteer Stream Clean-up Program

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