MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

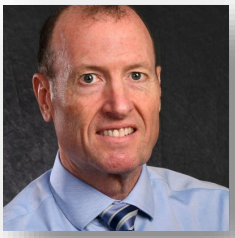
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

612 E. Main St. Centreville, MI 49032
269-467-5511 | https://www.canr.msu.edu/st_joseph

Our Staff:

- Carma Johnson and Jackie Brazo, County Support
- Kayla Mitchell, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Jon LaPorte, Farm Management Business Educator
- Eric Anderson, Soybean Educator
- Lyndon Kelley, Water Management & Irrigation Educator
- Nicolle Ritchie, Field Crops Agronomist Educator





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 St. Joseph County. Sincerely, Bill Hendrian

Impact in St. Joseph County

2,063 Participants from the County attended programs

647 4-H Enrolled Youth

228 County residents participated in health & nutrition programs

38 Answered Ask Extension Questions

Residents participated in **269** programs (across the State) and **32** programs (hosted in County)

250 MSU Extension Volunteers

819 County residents participated in ag & agribusiness programs

187 Client Consultations

4-H & Youth Development



Kayla Mitchell, St. Joseph County 4-H Program Coordinator

Children and families of St. Joseph County continued to benefit from a variety of programs in partnership with dedicated 4-H volunteers and MSU Extension staff.

Topics included:

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

25 4-H clubs
246 4-H Volunteers
647 4-H members
2,296 4-H youth participants

2025 4-H Camp

The 2025 Summer 4-H Camp in St. Joseph County welcomed 53 youth ages 8–12, including participants from Cass and Branch counties. Held in June at the Amigo Centre in Sturgis, the three-day, two-night camp offered activities such as canoeing, fishing, crafts, hiking and team-building experiences. New in 2025, five youth ages 13–15 participated as Camp Counselors-in-Training (CITs), working alongside counselors and supporting campers. They demonstrated strong leadership, enthusiasm, and readiness for future counselor roles.



4-H Campers at the Amigo Center in Sturgis

Fourth Grade Conservation Tour

St. Joseph County MSU Extension, the Conservation District, and Parks & Recreation hosted a Conservation Tour for 4th graders, with participation increasing in 2025 to 396 students from 10 local schools. The Centreville FFA Chapter supported the event by providing six student volunteers to serve as tour guides.

Students rotated through seven 16-minute educational stations covering topics such as trees and forest products, macroinvertebrates and pond ecology, wildlife identification, invasive species and pollinators. Partners including the Conservation District, DNR, 4-H, and MSU Extension educators delivered hands-on learning, from planting white pine seedlings and identifying animal furs and skulls to creating bean necklaces and exploring rainfall and soil erosion through a rain simulator.



4-H GROWS HERE

Agriculture & Agribusiness

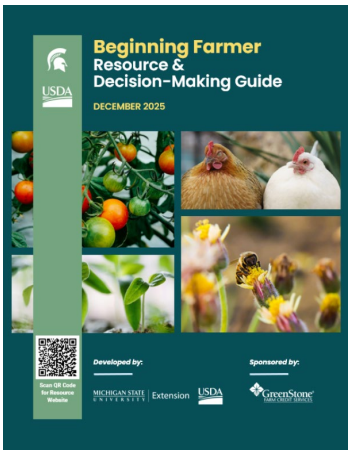


Jon LaPorte, MSU Extension Farm Business Management Educator for SW Michigan

Scan to download the ***Beginning Farmer Resource and Decision-Making Guide***

Beginning Farmer Resource and Decision-Making Guide

In December 2025, Jon LaPorte was co-lead and author/contributor of the highly anticipated *Beginning Farmer Resource and Decision-Making Guide*. The downloadable guide provides a pathway to resources a new farmer or decision-maker may need to get started and support their production journey. Starting with production in mind, resources give farmers an introduction to important farming topics and direct them to education and decision-making tools as well as how to connect with agricultural partners.



Over the course of two years, over 50 authors and contributors worked through multiple phases of content development. This included content reviews, guide layout and design, and a final round of design reviews before the guide was ready for publication. The *Beginning Farmer Resource and Decision-Making Guide* is a living document that will be routinely reviewed. Over time, new content will be added to ensure that the guide continues to meet the needs of Michigan's beginning farmers.



Nicolle Ritchie, MSU Extension Field Crops Agronomist Educator for SW Michigan

Associated Press Interviews Nicolle Ritchie

In August, a reporter from the Associated Press reached out to MSU Extension Communications for an interview on corn pollination in Michigan. Nicolle Ritchie received the request based on her recent SW Michigan field crops update. Ritchie provided information on how the crop in SW Michigan was looking and with permission, shared contact information for two local growers to speak with the reporter. The article was published about a week later and multiple growers shared positive feedback. This was a success for Ritchie (and for MSU Extension) because it was a high-profile article that focused on both the science and the in-field observation aspects of farming in SW Michigan.

Scan to download the AP Article: ***To get that perfect ear of corn, weather has to cooperate. But climate change is making it dicier***

Agriculture & Agribusiness



Lyndon Kelley, MSU Extension Water Management & Irrigation Educator

Summer Irrigation Workshop

The Summer Irrigation Workshop, held August 1, 2025, at the Kellogg Biological Station in Hickory Corners, MI, brought together 24 growers, agribusiness professionals, MSU Extension educators, and industry representatives from 10 counties. Participants, representing farms primarily between 0–500 acres, networked and explored current irrigation issues. The program opened with introductions by Angie Gradiz, followed by a hands-on soil texture demonstration led by Dr. Younsuk Dong and student Caden Wade, where attendees tested their own samples to better understand irrigation scheduling.



Lyndon Kelley, presenting

Participants were guided through a catch-can uniformity test and a demonstration of variable rate irrigation, with insights from Dr. Dong. After a vendor session featuring six organizations and an interactive sprinkler demonstration by **Lyndon Kelley**, the workshop shifted to irrigation scheduling tools, where participants worked in small groups based on their interests. The event concluded with a roundtable discussion facilitated by Christine Charles, allowing participants to share perspectives on the future of irrigation in Michigan, including key challenges and opportunities.



Eric Anderson, MSU Extension Soybean Educator for SW Michigan

632 St. Joseph County residents participated in St. Joseph County-based agriculture programming in 2025

New MSU Extension Bulletin E3541 for Dairy Feed Applications

High-oleic soybeans (HOSB) offer farmers an opportunity to improve profitability while meeting growing demand for healthier oils and high-quality livestock feed. Developed to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. soybean oil against alternatives like palm, olive, and canola oils, HOSB differ from commodity soybeans primarily through their elevated oleic acid content. Demand has increased in recent years, driven by food manufacturers and dairy producers incorporating roasted HOSB into feed rations. This bulletin, co-authored by **Eric Anderson**, highlights the nutritional benefits of high-oleic oil, key agronomic and production practices, and marketing opportunities, including contract considerations, with additional guidance available in MSU Extension Bulletin E3541 for dairy feed applications.



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension E3540

INTEGRATING HIGH-OLEIC SOYBEANS INTO FARM SYSTEMS: EXPLORING PRODUCTION, MARKETING AND CONTRACTS

Eric Anderson[1], Hanna Campbell[2], Teresa Crook[1], Phil Durst[1], Jon LaPorte[1], and Martin Mangual[1]
[1] MSU Extension, [2] Michigan Soybean Committee

Introduction

High-oleic soybeans (HOSB) have the potential to improve human health and increase farm profits for those able to take advantage of near-term opportunities.

Farmers have an opportunity to improve profitability while meeting demand for healthier oils and livestock feed with HOSB. Developed to increase U.S. soybean oil's competitiveness against palm, olive, corn, sunflower and canola oils, HOSB differ from commodity soybeans. The differences are mainly in their fatty acid profiles, particularly higher oleic acid content.

Demand has grown rapidly in recent years, driven by food manufacturers and dairy farms using roasted HOSB in feed rations. This bulletin outlines the nutritional benefits of high-oleic oil, agronomic and other production practices, marketing opportunities and contract considerations for HOSB. Refer to MSU Extension Bulletin E3541 for an in-depth review of roasting, storing, grinding and feeding HOSB in a dairy operation.

Nutritional Advantages

Linoleic and linolenic acids are polyunsaturated (more than one double bond along the carbon chain), which contributes to instability in oil and reduces both fryer life and shelf life. Oleic acid, a monounsaturated fat, improves oxidative stability.

Many consider olive oil to be the gold standard when it comes to healthy oils. It has approximately 75% oleic acid, while oil from commodity soybeans has only 23% (Table 1). The United Soybean Board has set industry standards for high-oleic and low-linolenic oil at >75% oleic and <3% linolenic acids (Bilyeu, 2020), respectively. High-oleic soybean oil is sometimes referred to as high-oleic, low-linolenic (HOLL) oil. Thus, HOSB oil is more stable with a shelf life 2–3 times longer than that of commodity soybean oil.

Historically, soybean oil has been hydrogenated, or partially hydrogenated, to improve its stability. However, this also produces trans fats, which are particularly unhealthy as they raise "bad" cholesterol (LDL) and lower "good" cholesterol (HDL). In 2015, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (2024) declared trans fats were no longer generally recognized as safe (GRAS) and banned their use in 2018 with a final compliance date of January 1, 2021.

1

Scan to download the ***MSU Extension Bulletin E3541***

Health & Nutrition

Teens Drink their Greens

Cooking at home empowers us to choose nutritious, flavorful ingredients, with fruits and vegetables making up half of a healthy diet**.** **Sixth graders at Three Rivers Middle School** explored this through Cooking Matters for Teens, learning about MyPlate and basic cooking skills while making Popeye Power Smoothies. Although hesitant at first about adding spinach, most students tried and enjoyed the smoothies, showing how exposure and positive encouragement can shift perceptions. The lesson highlighted how adults influence youth attitudes toward food and demonstrated that healthy cooking can be quick, simple, and adaptable. By building knowledge and confidence, SNAP-Ed helps youth see that preparing nutritious meals is accessible and within their control.



I think this is the first thing I've eaten with spinach in it. – Three Rivers Middle School student participant

Special Note: For over 30 years, MSU Extension SNAP-Ed staff delivered evidence-based, hands-on nutrition and physical activity learning opportunities that empowered youth and adults to build healthy eating habits and be more active on a limited budget. Following a federal decision to end funding, the program was discontinued after July 4, 2025.

2025 Fast Facts

66,592 people participated in MSU Extension health programs, either in person, virtually, by telephone, and self-directed toolkits.

3,085 programs offered by health and nutrition educators and program instructors

1 Million+ content views across our MI Health Matters and Think Food Safety social media channels

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 supporting farmers in managing stress.

91 St. Joseph County residents participated in health and nutrition programs in 2025. Residents benefited from a variety of topics including

- Food Safety (31)
- Health and wellbeing (29)

For additional success stories, and access to classes, articles, health resources, and more, explore: https://www.canr.msu.edu/food_health

Community, Food & Environment



Tyler Augst, MSU Extension Government & Community Vitality Educator for Southwest Michigan

MSU Extension Training Increases Confidence of St. Joseph County Land Use Decision Makers

On June 3, 2025, MSU Extension hosted a 90-minute training in St. Joseph County led by Extension Educator Tyler Augst, attended by 25 local planning commission members and elected officials. The session strengthened participants' understanding of planning commissions by covering legal authority for planning and zoning in Michigan, roles in meetings, and ethical decision-making. Post-training evaluations, completed by 15 participants (60% response rate), indicated the program was highly valuable and increased participants' knowledge, skills, and confidence, with detailed results summarized in the following pages.



MSU Product Center Statewide Clients: **566**

Counseling Hours: **3,365**

Annual Sales of Clients **$84,677,879**

Government and Community Vitality Programming in St. Joseph County

In 2025, MSU Extension Educators provided a variety of government and community vitality programs to 65 St. Joseph County residents, on topics including:

- *Understanding the Land Division Act*
- *Communicating Through Conflict*
- *Zoning Board of Appeals Certificate*
- *Governing Essentials*
- *Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference*
- *Fiscally Ready Communities Series*
- *Citizen Planner*

Housing and Money Management Programming in St. Joseph County

In 2025, MSU Extension certified housing and money management counselors delivered trusted, unbiased education to St. Joseph County residents. Topics:

- *Financial Home Ownership*
- *Every Penny Counts*
- *How Much Home Can You Afford?*
- *Mortgage Foreclosure Basics*
- *Make a Spending Plan Work for You*

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.

66,154 participants in MSU Extension agriculture and agribusiness programs

139,000 total youth participants

66,592 people participated in Food Safety programs including ServSafe®

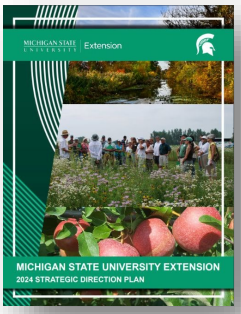
1 Million + content views across our MI Health Matters and Think Food Safety social media channels

$1.8M in volunteer time leveraged for programming

73,800+ Participants in Community, Food and Environment Programs

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
MASTER GARDENER
VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

1,998 Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent **95,067** hours helping individuals and communities grow



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

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