

# TUSCOLA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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## Our Staff:

- Nola Auernhamer – Supervising Educator
- Wendy Friend – Community Nutrition Instructor
- Diana Marruso – Support Staff Secretary
- ReAnna Wilkerson – 4-H Program Coordinator



**Karly Creguer**  
District 10 Director  
*Serving Huron, Lapeer,  
St. Clair, Sanilac, &  
Tuscola Counties*

## Message from the District Director

Even prior to the creation of the cooperative extension system in the U.S. in 1914, Michigan State University (then Michigan State College) was at the forefront of community education and outreach. The first livestock agent was hired in 1907. Now, in 2025, there are over 600 MSU Extension staff bringing evidence and research-based information to Michigan residents. They are embedded in the communities they serve, lending them first-hand knowledge of the local needs and opportunities. From non-biased seed trials and youth development to health education and economic development, MSU Extension is ready to respond to emerging needs. We can do this through our many partnerships with volunteers, coalitions, local groups and businesses, and county governments. Thank you for your continued support as we evolve to the demands of today's world while staying true to the extension mission established over 100 years ago.

## Impact



**1,397** participants from Tuscola County attending **307** programs



**36** partnerships in Tuscola County



**2,059** participants attending **49** programs hosted in Tuscola



**437** youth enrolled in 4-H in Tuscola County



**307** programs attended by participants from this county



**249** volunteers enrolled in Tuscola County



**17** community coalitions within Tuscola county that MSU Extension employees are members of



**118,278** contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, handouts

## Community Nutrition: Wendy Friend, Community Nutrition Instructor



Photo credit: Wendy Friend

In 2024, **390** Tuscola County residents participated in cooking and nutrition classes. We collaborated with the Tuscola County Transition Center and its various programs to pilot a curriculum designed for students living with cognitive/developmental disabilities. **34 students** at the Transition Center participated in hands-on nutrition and cooking lessons.

This pilot program has also led to a new partnership between MSU Extension, the Tuscola County Transition Center, Tuscola County Transition Network and The Michigan Center for Rural Health. Together, we are developing a family engagement course where students will take on leadership roles to help deliver nutrition classes to their parents.

Senior Project Fresh, part of the USDA Farm Bill, provides fresh produce to older adults. The program offers education and coupons to low-income residents over age 60, allowing them to purchase Michigan-grown fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, and honey from farmers' markets and roadside stands. In 2024, **249 coupon vouchers**, with a total value of **\$6,225.00**, were distributed to Tuscola County residents.

## Food Safety: Laurie Messing, Extension Educator

The goal of MSU Extension's food safety program is to provide education and outreach on research-based food safety best practices to avoid foodborne illness by using safe food handling practices. Using in-person and online education we provide information and resources for preparing and preserving safe food through ServSafe®, Safe Food=Healthy Kids, Preserving MI Harvest, Cottage Food Law and more programs.



**41** participants in  
**5** ServSafe®  
classes held in Tuscola



Photo credit: Laurie Messing

### Preserving MI Harvest Classes

- Caro Area District Library (Caro)
  - Preserving Fall Produce = **6** participants
- Rawson Memorial Library (Cass City)
  - Jam and Jellies = **4** participants
  - Preserving Dried Ingredients = **12** participants
  - The Gift of Preservation = **8** participants
- Reese Unity Library (Reese)
  - Preserving Fall Produce = **1** participant
  - Preserving Pumpkin and Squash = **9** participants

### Preserving MI Harvest

New local partnerships led to the offering of multiple in-person classes at Tuscola County libraries. Library patrons participated in various classes to learn about safe home canning, freezing, and dehydrating using research-based methods, resources and recipes. Additionally, as clients entered the Tuscola County Health Department, they viewed a Preserving MI Harvest display that educated consumers on safe home food preservation methods and recipes.

## Health & Well-Being: Kris Swartzendruber & Jacqui Rabine, Extension Educators



The Arthritis Foundation's *Walk with Ease* program empowers individuals to manage arthritis pain and boost their overall health. By focusing on enhancing balance, building confidence in walking, and reducing limitations caused by arthritis, this self-paced program encourages participants to gradually work up to 30-minute walks at least three times a week.

Participants in the *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention* program, offered through local in-person classes and online sessions, gain valuable knowledge on preventing falls, increasing strength, and managing chronic pain effectively.

Social and Emotional Health MSU through MSU Extension include *Stress less with Mindfulness*, *RELAX Alternatives to Anger*, *ACES and Positive Childhood Experiences*, and *Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)*.

Diabetes self-management programs include *Diabetes PATH* (Personal Action Towards Health) and *Dining with Diabetes*. The aim is to educate those who have this disease on ways to manage their chronic condition through increased physical activity, knowledge of healthy eating and improving communication with their healthcare providers.

For more information about our Health program, please scan our QR code.



## 4-H & Youth Development: ReAnna Wilkerson, 4-H Program Coordinator



Photo credit: ReAnna Wilkerson

### Youth Development Programs

The 4-H program in Tuscola County has seen significant growth over the past year. We continue to offer traditional 4-H livestock programs and clinics, while also introducing innovative options such as “Self-Defense Out of the Classroom,” a collaboration with the Michigan State Police. Other engaging activities include Maple Syrup events that support a local sugar shack, bracelet-making classes led by volunteers and 4-H members, and tulip planting for home gardening. It’s truly impressive to think about all that Tuscola 4-H offers. Our programs can take place in classrooms, backyards where you can practice your bow, or at state events like Exploration Days. Our goal is to provide endless educational opportunities that are both fun and accessible. After all, our motto is, “To make the best, better.”

### 2024 Thumb 4-H Camp

Tuscola County partners with neighboring county 4-H program coordinators in planning a local 4-day, 3-night 4-H camp providing an unforgettable experience for our youth. This great opportunity is for both our older teens and younger youth. Our older teens learn life and leadership skills, leading groups of 4-H youth and the youth get to experience rotating, exciting topics. In 2024, we had **44** participants and **15** camp counselors.

### The Tuscola County Fair

4-H youth work diligently throughout the spring, and even year-round, to plan and prepare projects to showcase and sell at the Tuscola County Fair. Our 300-plus 4-H and FFA participants experience camaraderie, competition and celebration together at the heart of Tuscola County - the fairgrounds. Coordinated by the Tuscola County Fair Board, MSU Extension staff, and our dedicated volunteers, the fair creates lasting impressions and serves as a fantastic opportunity to ignite excitement in new participants.



### Educational Opportunities

Tuscola County’s 4-H program coordinator, along with the State 4-H Events team and their volunteers, provides a variety of educational clinics and programs throughout the year. One of these programs is Youth for the Quality Care of Animals (YQCA), which teaches youth valuable habits and tips for developing their animal husbandry skills at home and during local fairs or shows. This program is essential for promoting biosecurity on their farms and ensuring the well-being of the animals.

2 - SPIN Clubs  
5 - active committees  
20 - 4-H clubs  
39 - sessions  
129 - hours of programs  
437 - 4-H members  
2,518 - participants

## Animal Agriculture: Dr. Jerad Jaborek, Extension Educator



Photo credit: Morgan Cook, MP Branded

### Emergency Response for Accidents Involving Livestock (ERAIL)

In 2024, the MSU ERAIL team held two in-person training sessions for emergency first responders. These comprehensive sessions covered topics such as animal handling and behavior, emergency action plan preparedness, euthanasia, and hands-on handling of various livestock species. In May, the first event took place in Imlay City, attracting **52 participants**. The second event occurred in October on the MSU campus, with **32 participants** in attendance. Furthermore, the MSU ERAIL team deployed **five new**, fully equipped emergency response trailers across Michigan, increasing the total to **eight statewide**, including one in neighboring Lapeer County.

### MSU Feedlot Educational Series

The fourth year of the MSU Feedlot Educational Series took place at Beagio’s Restaurant in Kingston. The series featured four presentations. In January, the focus was on carbon credits and the environmental sustainability improvements associated with reduced ammonia emissions when using Exporior, a beta-3-agonist product from Elanco Animal Health. February, United Producers Inc. (UPI) representatives presented financing, marketing, and risk management tools. March, Quality Liquid Feeds (QLF) shared data on what is to be expected when using a liquid supplement compared to a dry supplement for feeding cattle. Throughout the four sessions, a total of **109 participants attended**, and surveys indicate that **95-100% of attendees reported gaining knowledge from the presentations**.



Photo credit: Jerad Jaborek

# Agriculture & Agribusiness: Jenna Falor & Phil Kaatz, Extension Educators

## Field Crops Programs - Upper Thumb Area (Huron, Sanilac, Tuscola)

In 2024, we had **70** participants at the Crop and Pest Update in Peck, **81** participants at the annual Thumb Ag Day held in Ubly, **27** participants Field Crops Scouting School at the Saginaw Valley Research & Extension Center; **one** Regional Field Day, **nine** on farm soybean plots and **eight** Field Crops Webinar Series.

Jenna (pictured right) also organized hands-on activities on kid's days at local fairs. She displayed pans of different "soil" types, utilizing granulated sugar, flour and powdered sugar. Kids then built their own soil mixture. While they were playing with the "soil" learning about textures, she utilized different sized objects to explain the difference in particle size in a visual manner (beach ball, golf ball and bead).



Photo credit: Karly Creguer



## Field Crops – Virtual Breakfast Series

The 2024 Virtual Breakfast Series was a **26-week** webinar meeting for farmers, agribusiness personnel and others interested in agriculture. The series was conducted during the growing season with a focus on field crop and pest management, soil health, soil management, cover crops, and financial management. In production agriculture, things change fast during the growing season and the Virtual Breakfast Series is a convenient and valuable way to provide and assist producers and agribusiness professionals with solutions that address possible management options associated with emerging issues and concerns.



- **245** live participants from **Tuscola County**
- **1,493** podcast participants
- **2,620** Facebook live participants
- **5,414** YouTube video views
- **5,465** live participants
- **7,365** MSU Extension page views of Virtual Breakfast

## MSU Extension's Statewide Impact



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



**29,264,562** contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



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



**12,861** total volunteers



**133,306** total youth participants



**9,808** people participated in Food Safety programs including ServSafe®



## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION 2024 STRATEGIC DIRECTION PLAN

We are dedicated to addressing Michigan's most pressing needs.  
To read the full report, scan the QR code.

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