

# CRAWFORD COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

501 Norway St Ste 2, Grayling, MI 48658 | 989-344-3264



## Message from the District Director

At MSU Extension, we believe that learning and working together make our communities stronger. In 2024, we helped farmers grow food more efficiently and overcome emerging challenges, supported individuals and families in making healthy choices and gave young people opportunities to develop leadership skills and explore interests and careers. Our programs bring people together to solve problems and create new opportunities across District 4.

This year, we focused on supporting local communities, improving stewardship of our natural resources and helping people prepare for the future. Whether through 4-H youth programs, farming workshops, community development support or health and wellness education, MSU Extension continues to provide valuable resources that make a difference in everyday life.

We are proud of the work we've done and excited for what's ahead. Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Together, we can build a brighter future for Crawford County.

### Impact



**29** commercial, farm, and homeowner soil samples processed



**397** participants from the county attending programs



**41** youth enrolled in 4-H



**182** county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs.



**14** volunteers



**110** programs (across the state) attended by participants from Crawford County



**107** participants in community, food and environment programs from Crawford County



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



## New Commissioner School session held in Grayling to support local leadership

On December 9, 2024, newly elected and returning county commissioners from across Northern Michigan gathered at Kirtland Community College in Grayling for the Michigan Association of Counties' (MAC) and Michigan State University (MSU) Extension's New Commissioner School (NCS) session.

The training was part of a statewide initiative designed to prepare county commissioners for effective public service following the November 5 general election. Participants explored the complexities of county governance, financial management, effective decision-making and strategies for building collaborative relationships.

The in-person workshop in Grayling was a key component of the NCS program, which also included online modules and webinars. Commissioners who completed both the online and in-person portions of the training received a certificate of completion from MSU Extension and earned County Commissioner Academy credits from MAC.

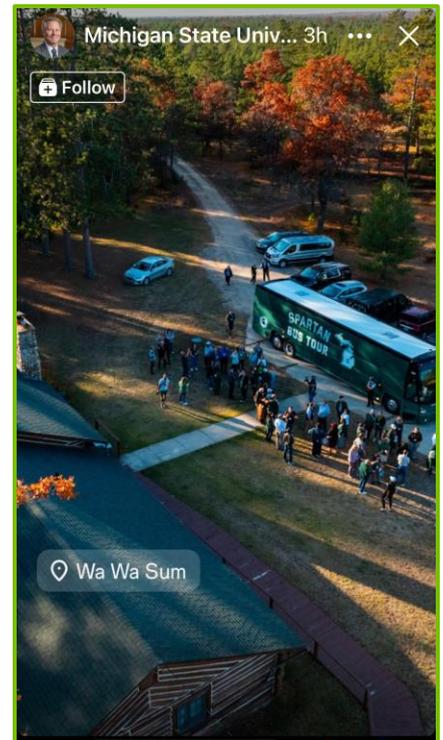
Led by MSU Extension specialists, including Eric Walcott, the Grayling session provided **71** attendees with interactive discussions, practical tools, and real-world scenarios to help them navigate their new or continuing roles with confidence.

This event continued a tradition of commissioner education that dates back to 1968, ensuring that county leaders are well-equipped to serve their communities effectively.

## MSU President's Spartan Bus Tour highlights Crawford County assets

In October 2024, MSU President Kevin M Guskiewicz, Ph.D led the inaugural Spartan Bus Tour through Grayling, Michigan. Faculty and administrators visited key sites around the city highlighting MSU's impact across the state. The first stop of the tour was Camp Grayling, the largest U.S. National Guard training facility, where environmental manager and MSU alum Matt Kleitch shared how MSU collaborates on conservation efforts to protect natural resources across the camp's 147,000 acres. Participants learned about the camp's military history, its \$20 million local economic impact, and its strong ties to MSU's Department of Military Science and ROTC program.

The tour continued to MSU's Camp Wa Wa Sum, a historic 144-year-old log cabin conference center on the AuSable River. Known for hosting groups like Trout Unlimited and state wildlife departments, Wa Wa Sum also serves as a research retreat for MSU and other Big Ten universities. Caretaker Kevin Gardiner guided visitors through the property, emphasizing its deep connection to MSU's research, conservation and community outreach efforts. The Grayling stops offered powerful examples of how MSU's work extends into Michigan's natural landscapes and communities, reinforcing President Guskiewicz's vision of strengthening partnerships statewide.





## 4-H afterschool program partnership with Devereaux Memorial Library

In spring 2024, Crawford County 4-H launched a successful after-school program at the Devereaux Memorial Library in Grayling, led by Community Nutrition Instructor Angela Cook. Recognizing the need for low-cost, after-school activities, Angela’s vision became a reality with a twice-weekly program running for 10 weeks. This marked a major step forward for Crawford County 4-H, which had previously seen only occasional youth participation.



Before the program was even advertised, interest was evident. A library director connected a parent in need with the program, leading to the first enrollment. Demand quickly grew, exceeding the 16-member goal with 17 youth officially enrolled. The program kicked off on April 8 with strong attendance, averaging 9–11 kids per session.

This initiative strengthened community partnerships and provided meaningful, no-cost opportunities for local youth. Parents expressed enthusiasm, sharing how much their children enjoyed the experience, making Angela’s long-time dream a reality.



## Exploration Days Experience draws 4-H Alum to MSU

Grayling High School alum Rylan Filstrom - now a college freshman and state champion in discus- became the school's first recipient of a District I athletic scholarship. She credits 4-H Exploration Days for influencing her college decision. Although she attended the event only once in 2018—when the county was between program coordinators—the experience left a lasting impact. After considering multiple universities, she ultimately chose Michigan State University, citing the sense of familiarity she gained during Exploration Days.

## Building Self-Management Skills to Prevent Opioid Misuse in Rural Michigan

To address opioid misuse in rural Michigan, MSU Extension is launching new grant-funded work to teach self-management skills for pain and sleep. The project includes public awareness campaigns, bundled health programs like *Tai Chi for Better Sleep* and *Mindfulness for Better Sleep*, and partnerships with healthcare providers to connect residents to resources such as the SLEEP program. MSU Extension also plans to train volunteers and staff to lead educational sessions, reaching at least **900 participants statewide**. Building on the success of programs like MiSUPER, this initiative aims to empower individuals to improve their health while strengthening rural communities.

## The value of partnerships:

Michigan State University Extension engages community partnerships to leverage resources, expand outreach and address local needs effectively. By collaborating with organizations, businesses and government agencies, MSU Extension strengthens programs in agriculture, health, youth development and community vitality, fostering sustainable solutions and improving the well-being of individuals and communities across Michigan.

### MSU Extension partnership with COA encourages older adults to gain mobility and confidence through exercise

MSU Extension has had a long partnership with Crawford County Commission on Aging (CCCOA). Working collaboratively allows our organization to benefit from the communication and outreach support of the Commission on Aging and our delivery of programming strengthens their impact in the community – keeping centers vibrant and engaging for participants.



Falls are a leading cause of injury among older adults, significantly impacting their mobility, independence and quality of life. Addressing these challenges is critical to promoting health, preventing injuries and improving quality of life for vulnerable populations. MSU Extension delivers Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention both in-person and virtually; this evidence-based program teaches participants techniques for improving balance, strength and mindfulness through weight shifting, controlled movements and Tai Chi walking. The program provides accessible, expert instruction designed to reduce the risk of falls. Participants have reported major improvements in their mobility and confidence.

One participant in 2024 shared that after attending the sessions, they were able to navigate steep trails, uneven terrains and even climb stairs at archaeological sites during an overseas vacation — activities they would have been unable to perform otherwise. This program was offered at the Crawford County Commission on Aging to **21 participants** by Extension Educator Nicole Persing-Wethington.

Once participants have taken the course in-person with an instructor, they are encouraged to continue the practice through an online video conference with an instructor and other participants from around the state. This allows MSU Extension to reach people in the comfort of their home and reinforce the techniques and safe exercise of the Tai Chi program.

#### Serving Crawford County:

Angela Cook, Community Nutrition Instructor  
Nicole Wethington, Health Educator

Jamie Greer, Support Staff  
Shawna Jobson, 4-H Program Coordinator  
Julie Darnton, District 4 Director

Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Quentin Tyler, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.