

GENESEE COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Message from the District Director

Our mission is to improve lives. . . . We offer a variety of programs and services to make a positive impact on the residents we serve. On behalf of MSU Extension staff, I would like to thank you for your continued support.

Mark Rankin, District 9 Director
 Serving Bay, Genesee, Midland, Saginaw, and Shiawassee Counties

Impact



\$108,566,783
total economic impact



\$8,339,743
spending with local business



6,874 participants
from Genesee County
attending programs



188 Answered 'Ask Extension'
questions



3,792 youth
participation in 4-H



219 total volunteers serving
in Genesee County

Overall Impact



26 community coalitions within the county that MSU Extension employees are members of



27 policy, systems, and environmental changes with those PSE sites



13,840 contacts with residents in the community



\$189,781 volunteer value to the community of Genesee County



1,780 programs, meetings, and consultations in the community



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



5,977 volunteer hours in the community

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity



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



470 virtual programs related to financial education, food systems, water and environmental quality, government and business



93 partnerships in Genesee County



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



1,092 participating in nutrition and physical activity hosted in Genesee County



271 participants in county agriculture programs

MSU Extension Community Food Systems

Team Goal and Program Areas

The MSU Extension Community Food Systems team works to make the Michigan food system accessible, equitable, fair, healthy, diverse and sustainable by focusing on the people who shape food systems through education, connection, networking, research, assistance and consultations. The Community Food Systems team leads programming that: supports community food value chains, supports food and farming business sustainability, enhances land and ecosystem quality, cultivates networks and increases community engagement in agrifood systems.



Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council

FLINT & GENESSEE
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

MSU Extension supports the coordination of the Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council. The Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council is a network of food champions whose mission is to develop a resilient and reliable local food system rooted in community engagement, collaboration, and education. The network works to create a robust and sustainable local food system that provides all Genesee County residents with affordable and healthy food.



Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council

Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council Attended the 2024 Urban Food Systems Symposium in Columbus, OH

In June 2024, MSU Extension collaboratively supported the attendance of ten Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council Members at the Urban Food Systems Symposium in Columbus, OH. Flint-area food entrepreneurs, nonprofit professionals, and young leaders were able to participate in keynote presentations, concurrent sessions, urban agriculture tours and networking with urban food systems professionals from across the country.

Leaders of the Flint and Genesee Food Policy Council also presented a poster about the lessons learned in the council's first year of existence. Overall, the experience brought Flint community members of different backgrounds - including those who would traditionally not attend an academic symposium - together to learn, connect and plan for future collaboration to support a stronger Flint food system.

Michigan Apple Crunch

The Michigan Apple Crunch is an annual event to promote National Farm to School Month and celebrate the iconic Michigan Apple. Thousands of participants from K-12 schools, early care and education sites, other institutions and organizations across the state and Great Lakes Region register to crunch into a local Michigan apple on this special day. Apples provide a great way to get local schools and institutions excited about supporting local farmers and they are a nutritious snack that is available in Michigan eleven months of the year.

In 2024, **825** sites in Michigan participated, with a total of **340,918 crunchers!**



30 Genesee County had one-on-one consultations with farmers, food business owners or community members.

MI Food Stories Online Course

Michigan food consumers can now learn more about the stories of the foods they eat and explore their role in Michigan's food system by completing the MI Food Stories online course. This course aims to help Michigan food consumers become more knowledgeable about the Michigan food system. Course participants will engage in online activities that explore food production, processing, consumption and distribution in Michigan; share food stories from their communities; and recognize their connectedness to food, agriculture, the environment and the economy.

Course link

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/mi-food-stories>

MSU Extension Consumer Horticulture/Master Gardener Program

The Consumer Horticulture team serves Michigan through its educational lawn and garden programming. We provide research-based information and training to our communities. In addition, we answer questions from the public through Ask Extension and our MSU Extension Lawn and Garden Hotline. Ask Extension is an online tool that allows Michigan State University Extension experts to answer questions submitted by the public. In 2024, experts answered 6,179 questions statewide (188 in Genesee County), along with 1,540 hotline questions. Alongside these tools, our “Gardening in Michigan” Facebook page and website houses ornamental and vegetable gardening resources and hosts free educational videos.

In 2024, Genesee County residents from this region participated in MSU Extension Consumer Horticulture programs such as fruit tree grafting, indoor plant propagation, plant selection for native pollinators, winter garden planning and tree pruning. This included virtual programs such as Dig In!, a continuing education program for Extension Master Gardener Volunteers that prepares them to work with and educate the public. Residents also participated in the ten-week Foundations of Gardening course. Eleven scholarships were awarded to Foundations of Gardening participants in this region.



Genesee County Master Gardeners working in Rust Park located in Grand Blanc



Genesee County Master Gardeners working in the Pollinator Garden at Edible Flint Education Farm located in Flint.

The Consumer Horticulture team works with local organizations such as Edible Flint, DeVries Nature Conservancy, libraries, and local schools to improve access to horticultural education in the community. The Consumer Horticulture team trains and supervises Extension Master Gardener Volunteers. These passionate volunteers work with community partners across the state, focusing on public education and helping maintain educational gardens such as the Edible Flint Education Farm, Rust Park, Crossroads Village, Dow Gardens, Phoenix Community Farm and the Hemmeter Elementary Arts & Science Garden. They also work with organizations that provide fresh vegetables to those in need through food donation gardens.



Foundations of Gardening is a ten-week online certificate course that covers the fundamentals of gardening. It includes weekly webinars delivered by MSU Extension horticulture experts and learning modules with readings, videos and interactive activities. This course is the prerequisite for applying to become an MSU Extension Master Gardener (EMG), but is open to anyone regardless of interest in becoming an EMG. Scholarships are available for those who wish to apply.

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/foundations-of-gardening>

Parent and Youth Programming

MSU Extension's Child and Family Development services provide tools to help parents and caregivers. Our programs get children ready for school and promote social and emotional wellness and positive behaviors in children and youth.

Staff within District 9 provided workshops on topics such as: Positive Discipline, Reducing Challenging Behaviors, Learning to Talk, Co-Parenting, Screen-Time for Young Children, Teaching Kids Mindfulness, and the ABC's of Early Literacy



73 online and in-person programs were provided to **1,258** parents and **652** providers throughout District 9



150 parents in **Genesee County** participated in a parenting workshop series and/or playgroup



700 parents in **Genesee County** participated in one-time workshops/training for parents



100% of attendees who completed a pre/post evaluation reported gaining knowledge in basic youth development and techniques



From a parent:

*"Thank you so much! Your training on **Positive Discipline** was excellent, and I am so thankful for the opportunity to learn, especially as a first-time mom. I really appreciate getting access to the resources you provide, and I loved the specific tips, ideas, and activities the instructors shared. I am really looking forward to attending more sessions and will be spreading the word about your classes to my other mom friends!"*



Child and Family Development staff at the Genesee County Fair



Child and Family Development staff at Flint Farmer's Market for Project Fresh



MSU Extension Children and Youth Institute

The **STOP** (Schools, Teachers, and Officers Preventing school violence) **grant** operates as a funding source to raise awareness to youth mental health challenges (anxiety, depression, self-harm, etc.) by offering mental health education within the State of Michigan.

The STOP grant effort includes workshops that have been implemented within the following partnerships within Genesee County: **Day of Wellness Pickup Basketball Event; (15 youth reached)** locations Whaley's Children's and Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village. **Mindful Mechanics; (39 youth reached)** locations Clio High School, Swartz Creek Middle School and Madison Academy. **Stress in the Workplace – Professional Development Presentation; (25 Youth reached)** locations Flint School of Performing Arts. **Mindfulness Training – School Assembly Presentation; (160 youth reached)** location Mott Middle College. **Teen Mental Health First Aid; (25 youth reached)** locations Boys and Girls Club of Flint, Boys and Girls Club Nazarene Church, and Whaley's Children's Home. **Your Thoughts Matter; (20 youth reached)** **Youth Mental Health First Aid; (22 youth reached)** location International Academy of Flint. **Kindness/Positive Affirmations; (8 youth reached)** location Oatmeal Club.



Day of Wellness Pickup Basketball Event –The Youth and Teen Mental Health First Aid Team organized an Annual Day of Wellness event, to honor World Mental Health Day. Within Genesee County, a unique event took place, combining mental health and sports. During this event, youth learned various mental skills such as visualization, mindfulness, and emotional regulation techniques, to improve their performance within the sport of basketball. A presentation took place prior, leading into the activity afterwards.

Darien Wilkerson, MSU Extension Healthy Living Emotional Wellness Educator, leading an Annual Day of Wellness Event in Genesee County

Teen Mental Health First Aid

Teen Mental Health First Aid (TMHFA) is a training course associated with the National Council of Mental Wellbeing, which takes high school age students throughout an 8-week training to learn how to identify and support a peer, experiencing a mental health crisis. Students get certified as Teen Mental Health First Aiders and keep a copy of their participant manuals at the end of their training experience.

Stress in the Workplace – Professional Development Presentation

This professional development opportunity was conducted for the staff members at Flint School of Performing Arts. The presentation consisted of various workplace stress reduction techniques and role play examples, which allowed participants to spot and identify burnout within themselves and their co-workers.



MSU Extension 4-H Youth Development – School and Community Based

The 4-H program in Genesee County has made a significant impact in schools and community organizations throughout the year, providing engaging and educational experiences for youth. Monthly programming at the Shelter of Flint has ensured that transient youth populations have access to the same enriching opportunities as their peers. These sessions have fostered learning and personal development, allowing all youth to gain valuable skills and experiences.

A key highlight of the year was the successful implementation of the 4-H embryology school enrichment program with the following schools: Beecher School District (Daily Elementary), Carman Ainsworth Camp Adventure Summer Camp, Flint Cultural Center Academy and Richfield Public School Academy. Over ten classrooms participated, reaching **800 youth in a single month**. This program allowed students to engage in hands-on learning about life cycles and agricultural sciences, sparking curiosity and interest in agricultural career fields.

4-H provided numerous in-school and after-school programs in Genesee County, focused on garden-to-table education and healthy eating. These initiatives helped youth understand the importance of nutrition, sustainability and food systems, empowering them with the knowledge to make healthier choices and appreciate where their food comes from.



Giant Ant Farm

Success Story - A first-grade teacher from a local school in Genesee County expressed interest in 4-H providing an ant farm experience due to her students' tendency to harm ants and other insects outdoors. An ant farm, complete with sand and a colony of red harvester ants, was provided for the classroom. Additional educational resources and the book "Hey, Little Ant" were also provided. The book encourages empathy, critical thinking and respect for all living beings, teaching valuable lessons and kindness and compassion. The teacher has shared that students are now much more cautious and respectful towards ants and other insects. In fact, they are asking to bring them into the classroom for observation, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for these tiny creatures.



Planting a Salsa Garden

Success Story -The Shelter of Flint and Genesee County 4-H collaborated to provide youth residing at the shelter a hands-on educational opportunity by planting and cultivating a salsa garden. The youth, ranging in age from elementary to high school, actively participated in every stage of the gardening process, from preparing the soil and planting the seeds to watering and weeding the garden. The project culminated in an exciting and educational cooking activity where the youth learned how to prepare fresh salsa using the ingredients they had grown. The experience of transforming their harvest into a delicious, homemade product was both rewarding and empowering for the young participants.



MSU Extension Genesee County Youth Commission

The Genesee County Youth Commission recruited a diverse group of nine youth, one from each county commissioner's district. Students learned about the county government. Youth Commissioners went through an issues identification process where they selected a topic that they felt was critical for action in Genesee County. The topic they chose was blight and litter. The Youth Commission met with experts from Keep Genesee County Beautiful, The Neighborhood Engagement Hub, Genesee County Land Bank, and Genesee Conservation District to learn more about their chosen issue. Based on the expert testimony and additional research, they developed a presentation for the Board of Commissioners.



Some quotes from participants:

"This program really enforces the importance of local government, voting, and making sure your political voice matters!"

"I will use this information to better educate my peers and try to use my voice to influence my community."

"I realized just how much impact individuals can have. It was this that also really helped me realize just how much change occurs through local government."



Flint River Environmental Stewardship

The Flint River Watershed Coalition and MSU Extension join with many other partners to test the Flint River and its tributaries. Students participate in hands-on, real-world science learning by testing water quality. Classroom mentors include environmental professionals from Genesee County Parks, the Drain Commissioner's Office, and General Motors who make career connections. NPDES Stormwater regulations require local units of government to gather data and promote public education. This program helps the Genesee County Drain Commissioner's Office. After gathering their data at the stream, students present their findings to peers and professionals during a student summit at Kettering University. In 2024, the program reached over **1,700 students**.

The Flint River Environmental Leaders are a group of young people emerged as leaders in the program. They took on household hazardous waste as their project and developed a public education program that educated hundreds of county residents.

MSU Extension Genesee County Health and Nutrition

Health and Nutrition provides nutrition education to children, youth, adults and families with limited financial resources.

WIC Produce Connection at the Flint Farmers Market

This program provides healthy and nutritious produce to Michigan WIC participants. The program encourages participants to shop at their local farmer’s markets for fresh produce and instructs participants on how to use their food assistance benefits to purchase fruits and vegetables. Over **242** families in Genesee County received at least \$30 from WIC to purchase MI-grown fresh fruits and veggies at farmers’ markets or roadside stands. Participants in the program attend a presentation at the Flint Farmer’s Market on how to maximize those dollars, and why and how to eat more fruits and vegetables.

86% of families reported learning new ways to incorporate fruits and vegetables into their meals and snacks, **92%** of families planned to buy fresh fruits and vegetables at their local farmer’s market, and **89%** reported that they plan to eat more fruits & veggies.



Teen Cuisine Supplements Nutrition Unit at Grand Blanc West Middle School

Approximately **70** students at Grand Blanc West Middle School participated in the Teen Cuisine nutrition education program as a supplement to the nutrition unit in their Family and Independent Living Class.

At the end of the program, the students presented a booklet of thank-you notes they had made that shared their favorite experiences and what they learned. Here are some of our favorite quotes:

“The lessons you gave about nutrition were very helpful and I learned the components of a healthy plate, proper handwashing, recipe reading, etc... My favorite recipe was the yogurt parfait.”

“Thank you, [educator] for devoting your time to coming here and teaching us about nutrition! We had so much fun cooking everything! My favorite thing we made was the parfaits or the veggie toasts. I also learned so much valuable information from you...”

“Thanks for letting us cook some healthy food. It was something we needed.”

Health and Nutrition Institute Health Team

The MSU Extension Health Team promotes overall well-being by highlighting the connections between physical, mental, social and emotional health. Through evidence-based programs, Extension educators continue to support communities with offerings such as *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention*, *Walk with Ease*, *Personal Action Towards Health (PATH)*, *Sleep Education for Everyone (SLEEP)*, and *Stress Less with Mindfulness*.

Program Highlights:

The *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention* program continues to thrive at local senior centers, with over **300 adults participating in an 18-session weekly program**. Recognizing its success, a weekly class has been established at a nearby senior center to allow participants to continue their practice. People from across the county have come together each week to focus on physical activity, balance improvement, and socializing.

The Health and Nutrition Institute received a **three-year grant** from the **USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture** to address the opioid crisis in rural Michigan by exploring the connections between **sleep, pain, and opioid use**. The project will focus on **public awareness campaigns, expanding access to health classes** (including *Tai Chi and Mindfulness for Better SLEEP* programs), **collaborating with healthcare providers** to connect individuals with sleep and pain management resources, and **training local volunteers and staff** to lead educational sessions.

The Arthritis Foundation *Walk with Ease* program is currently available in the community, helping individuals manage arthritis pain and improve overall health. This self-paced program supports participants in gradually building up to 30-minute walks at least three times a week. With a focus on enhancing balance, increasing confidence in walking, and reducing arthritis-related limitations, *Walk with Ease* continues to provide valuable support for those looking to stay active and healthy.

Tai Chi Program Success Story:

Participant quote: *"During January and February 2024, I took Tai Chi for Arthritis and/or for Fall Prevention four days a week (Monday - Thursday). It allowed me to go to Honduras to participate in a birdwatching trip, to walk in different habitats, navigate stony rocky trails and roads (some steep), and climb in and out of boats (with a helping hand). Most astonishing of all was climbing up and down stone stairs (think archeological sites) without handrails! Without Tai Chi (and two lovely trekking poles), I would not have been able to participate at all in about a third of the group activities and participate only marginally in another third."*

SLEEP Program Success Story:

"I just wanted to take a moment to thank you and MSU Extension for offering the SLEEP course. I am truly amazed at how much I have learned in this brief course and how much it has improved my sleep habits (and quality of sleep)..... I feel more refreshed and energized. I am thinking more clearly, my memory/attention span has improved, and my mood is definitely consistent, whereas I had more ups/downs prior to taking the SLEEP course."

Health Nutrition and Food Safety

MSU Extension Food Safety Educators work with local partners to provide educational sessions to the community on a variety of topics to prevent foodborne illnesses including food preservation, cottage food law, ServSafe®, safe food pantries, emergency preparedness and more.

In 2024, over 15 programs focusing on food preservation were offered in the Great Lakes Bay region, including three, 3-class series on Back to Basics of Food Preservation and over 60 participants. Hosted at local libraries and farmers markets, this series provided an introduction to water bath and pressure canning, freezing and dehydrating.



1,480 residents who participated in health and nutrition programs in **Genesee County**



35 people were certified in eight trainings in District 9



180 MSU Extension programs hosted in **Genesee County**



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

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension
FOOD SAFETY HOTLINE Operating Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Call 877-643-9882
Ask Extension <https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/ask-an-expert>

ServSafe® Manager Certification Training was offered in multiple locations throughout the region.

ServSafe® is a nationally recognized program that teaches food service workers how to prevent foodborne illnesses through topics such as cleaning and sanitizing, proper cooking temperatures, pest control, and hygiene. Over 35 people were certified in eight trainings in 2024.



Earn ServSafe certification with help from MSU Extension.

MSU Extension offers 8-hour ServSafe training, which is a national certification program.

This class is designed for anyone working in the foodservice industry, including non-profit organizations.

MSU Extension will be offering proctoring of the ServSafe Manager Certification Exam by appointment.



Contact your local MSU Extension Food Safety Educator for more information. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/servsafe/events>



Tara Sovis, food safety and ServSafe® educator for District 9, which includes Genesee County.



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