

# IONIA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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- William V. Hendrian, District 8 Director
- Shawn Frisbie, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Katie Ockert, Natural Resources Educator
- Karen Balice-Gregory, Support Staff



## Message from the District Director, Bill Hendrian

Ionia County MSU Extension provides Ionia County people with expertise, resources, and access to each of its broader institutes: Agriculture and Agrobusiness, Health and Nutrition, Community, Food, and the Environment, and Children and Youth (including 4-H). Staff located in Ionia, Montcalm, Gratiot, Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham counties all serve this area as a part of a statewide team of Extension professionals. People can come into any of our county offices and meet with local professionals or get connected to the appropriate regional expert, purchase soil test kits for their fields or gardens, find pesticide manuals critical for certification, have their pressure canner lid tested or ask questions. People contacted us via telephone, email, in person, or online. In fact, **29,264,562** contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts were made with MSU Extension statewide in 2024.

## Impact \_\_\_\_\_



Ionia County residents attended **222** programs (across the state).



**40** questions were submitted, and answers were received by Ionia County residents to Ask Extension.



**996** residents of Ionia County attended MSU Extension programs.



There were **146** volunteers from the local community.



There were **369** youth enrolled in 4-H for the 2023-2024 program year.



**\$4,106.70**, 4-H volunteer hour value

## Overall Impact

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



**4** policy, systems, and environmental changes with those PSE sites.



**996** participants from the county attending programs.



**787** client consultations



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



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



**261** participants in AABI programs  
**380** participants in CYI programs  
**150** participants in HNI programs  
**244** participants in CEFI programs



**304,810** e-newsletters, and handouts dispersed in Ionia County

## Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity

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**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 Businesses.



**\$72,722** in sales and 2 new employees hired by entrepreneurs helped by the MSU Product Center



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



**295** participants in county agriculture programs.



**36** commercial and farm soil test samples processed  
**30** homeowner soil test samples processed

## Public Health, Nutrition, and Youth Programming



788 youth participants in 4-H



1 Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy System and Environmental sites receiving PSE education within the county.



\$4,106.70 dollar value for 4-H volunteer hour value



86 nutrition and physical activity participants hosted in county.



133,306 total youth participants statewide



150 county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs.



12,861 total volunteers statewide



9,808 people participating in Food Safety programs including ServSafe



4-H is growing strong! Five months and multiple meetings with Ionia Free Fair resulted in the approval of the full 4-H division.

*"I'm so happy to see this happen, this is good for the community."  
– community member*



### Healthy Choices

One of MSU Extension Community Nutrition Instructor (CNI) Joanna Urban's, favorite learning topics is beverage choices – learning what is in the stuff we are drinking. One member from the Ionia Great Start Parent Coalition said,

*"I was drinking three or four cans of this soda each day. I had no idea how much sugar was in each can until we had that class about choosing healthy drinks. Then I counted the calories, and I was consuming about half of my daily calories just in the soda alone. I cut myself back to one can of soda a week, and my pants are already starting to fit better. Could we talk about what I think might be better alternatives?"*



### Healthy community goals

Residents of one housing community started container gardens for vegetables. Around this community, many plants began growing on patios and balconies, in pots, tubs and even in kiddie pools. Eventually, small produce began to appear on the leafy green plants. Some residents walked together or did aerobics and tracked their progress – a challenge to increase exercise and hold each other accountable. CNI Joanna Urban, started working with this community two years ago to help improve their lives through nutrition and physical activity education.

# MSU Extension Provides Information and Guidance to Farms During HPAI Outbreak

Sharing information and providing guidance on herd health, disease management, and biosecurity is a priority of Michigan State University (MSU) Extension. Ionia County's Extension Educator Katie Ockert, played a key role in the last year. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) was identified in Michigan poultry in late 2023. Infected cattle were also confirmed in 2024. Believing the source to be wild migratory birds, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encouraged farmers to increase biosecurity and to work with their veterinarian if their herd experienced signs of illness.

MSU Extension formed a team to address several topics including disease management and response, and biosecurity in cattle and poultry. Ockert was part of the team that worked together to create and share resources and information about current situations, signs of illness, biosecurity recommendations and additional pertinent information. The team responded to media and public inquiries about HPAI through interviews and direct contact with clientele. Additionally, educators hosted educational opportunities and on-farm training in multiple languages when needed. Strong partnerships, combined with the creation of solid, scientific-based recommendations, allowed for the team to fill a need for our MDARD partners who were busy addressing HPAI in cattle and poultry. Ockert contributed her expertise to the statewide team and also organized a local Ionia County program addressing "Backyard chicken biosecurity."

April 24, 6:30 p.m.  
Ionia Free Fair  
Administration Building

## PROTECTING YOUR FLOCK

Learn biosecurity practices that can help you reduce the risk of disease in your home flock.



USDA MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension



Natural Resources Educator, Katie Ockert also works with hunters and wildlife management



## Hunting game species - wildlife management

Educator Katie Ockert taught a course on hunting and conservation. Students explored the ethics of hunting, explored food insecurity, discussed opportunities and challenges of potentially utilizing deer in the state as a protein source and learned practical hunting skills. Three students who had limited to no hunting experience had the opportunity to participate in a Field to Fork program through the Michigan chapter of the National Deer Association.

One participant said, *"The class helped me to understand the importance of hunting and totally changed my view on hunting."*

# First Impressions Tourism Assessment (FIT)- Ionia, MI (USA) Compiled by Andy Northrop, MSU Extension

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community. FIT involves developing leaders, assessing the host community, sharing results in a forum open to all and providing suggestions to advance community-driven tourism. Overall, FIT helps participating communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.



**Post-Visit Reflections:**

What will you remember most six months from now?

- The Grand River
- Nice downtown
- The Fred Meijer bike trail
- Delicious coffee from Sozo
- Great outdoor recreation nearby
- Historical mansions East of town
- Brick streets and detailed brick work
- The completely deserted downtown area
- Blanchard House, specifically the sandstone
- Huge (unpainted) egg silos that serve as memorable landmarks

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension

First Impressions Tourism Assessment  
City of Ionia, MI

Summary of Results  
September 2024

Compiled by:  
Andy Northrop, Michigan State University Extension

Download the report at the link  
(<https://bit.ly/IoniaFITreport>)

The First Impressions (FI) program was developed in 1991 by the University of Wisconsin Extension to help communities learn about their existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of first-time visitors. The FIT program has been used to help communities across the U.S. and Canada inform economic initiatives or further develop community goals and has been modified over the years by various Extension services based on different needs. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension adapted this program via a multi-state grant provided by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development in 2014.

## Strengths

- Community active gov and community
- Great/attractive downtown
- Community investments
- Growing food scene
- Hispanic Community
- Historical infrastructure
- Visitors Guide
- Robust web-presence
- Outdoor Rec amenities
- Placemaking
- Agritourism opportunities
- 2019 master Plan

## Challenges

- Website Confusion
- Disconnect to Grand River
- Cycling infrastructure
- Inaccurate web information
- Poor communication
- Minimal Lodging options
- Downtown
- Short parking limits
- Accessible bathrooms
- Ionia Free Fair (Promo)

# County Partnerships & Coalitions:

- Hope Network/KMG Prestige
- Saranac Elementary School
- The Right Door
- Ionia Great Start Parent Coalition
- Ionia Great Start Readiness Parent Coalition
- Belding High School
- Belding Middle School
- Ionia Free Fair Board of Directors
- Ionia County 4-H Horse Leaders Committee
- Ionia County Food Policy Council
- Ionia County 4-H Dairy Goat Committee
- Ionia County 4-H Small Animal Committee
- Ionia County 4-Hstills Committee
- Ionia County 4-Hfood Booth
- Ionia County 4-H Large Animal Livestock Committee
- Ionia County 4-H Dairy Cow Committee
- Ionia County 4-H Advisory Council

## Clarksville Research Center

The Clarksville Research Center (CRC), located at 9302 Portland Rd, Clarksville, hosts research on small fruits and tree fruits as well as potatoes, chestnuts and a variety of other crops. Research at the 440-acre site includes variety development, fruit thinning and growth regulators, dwarf rootstocks for fruit trees, integrated pest management, organic production systems and new pruning practices to help make production more profitable, efficient and environmentally friendly.

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