

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Our Staff:

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

Impact in St. Joseph County



2,225 participants from the county attended programs



Residents participated in **283** programs (across the State) and **51** programs (hosted in the county)



648 youth enrolled in 4-H



247 MSU Extension volunteers



984 county residents participated in health & nutrition programs



271 county residents participated in ag & agribusiness programs



24 answered Ask Extension questions



179 client consultations

4-H & Youth Development



Kayla Mitchell,
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
228 4-H Volunteers
648 4-H members
2,745 Youth participants

Michigan 4-H Exploration Days

A total of **18** youth from St. Joseph County had the valuable opportunity to experience campus life, explore potential careers, and connect with peers from diverse backgrounds across the state during Michigan 4-H Exploration Days at MSU. A highlight of the event was when St. Joseph County's own Katelyn T. received the Michigan 4-H State Junior Swine Award. Our group proudly supported her as she was recognized on stage.

In addition to educational sessions, participants enjoyed a variety of recreational activities that encouraged relaxation, exploration, and social interaction with youth from other counties.

The event was a resounding success, providing meaningful experiences and lasting memories!



St. Joseph County's 4-H youth, staff, and volunteer chaperones attended the 4-H Expo in June'24.

One participant said, "*it was SO hot, but I loved every minute of it!*" Most youth expressed a strong desire to return in 2025—a testament to the program's impact, the dedication of volunteers and the welcoming community fostered among the youth.

St. Joseph County Grange Fair – 4-H Highlights

The 2024 St. Joseph County Grange Fair was a great success for 4-H youth, volunteers, and supporters. Participation increased with **445** youth entering **690** classes—up 34 from 2023. Additionally, 22 new volunteers completed the MSU Extension Volunteer Selection Process, and a new horse club was launched to support youth with mental and physical challenges.

Notable achievements included local youth Keegan N. earning 'Overall Sweepstakes Showmanship Champion' and Kenzie H. receiving 'Reserve Champion.' The 4-H Youth Council distributed **567** awards, the Horse Council distributed 160, and the Livestock Association awarded hundreds of ribbons. Bella W. served as the "Voice of 4-H," delivering daily radio updates throughout the week. With the support of **203** leaders and countless volunteers, the fair showcased the strength and dedication of our 4-H community!



**Beyond
Ready**

4-H & Youth Development



MSU Extension staff, **Nicolle Ritchie** (above), and **Valorie Snyder** (right) ran soil and composting stations.

MSU Extension hosted a two-day **Conservation Tour for 4th graders** in May at the Covered Bridge Farm. In partnership with the St. Joseph County Conservation District and Parks & Recreation, **315** students from nine schools rotated through seven educational stations during the tour.

Topics included soil health, composting, wildlife, pollinators, and invasive species. Presenters were from MSU Extension, St. Joseph County's Veterans Affairs & Conservation District, Magnum K9 Pets and Crane Pond Game Reserve DNR.



Survey feedback highlighted student excitement about planting trees and learning from the conservation dog, and St. Joseph County teachers praised the event's organization afterwards.

One student excitedly shared, *"Maybe when I'm older I could make a public compost center!"*

Making friends and memories at Summer 4-H Camp!

Eight youth counselors helped plan and lead the Summer 4-H Camp that was held in June 2024. In partnership with Purdue Extension, the counselors attended a training in April where they connected with peers from Indiana, selected the camp theme, designed t-shirts, and planned camp activities.

A total of **43** youth aged 8–12 attended the three-day camp at Amigo Centre. 18 adult volunteers supported canoeing, fishing, crafts, nature hikes, fireside meals, archery and more!



Youth enjoying a variety of fun activities.

Camp favorites included GAGA Ball, 9-square, bead buddies, foosball, and basketball. The camp welcomed five non-4-H youth and seven participants from Branch County, offering a fun and welcoming space for youth to connect across counties.

Honor and Recognition

In November 2024, the St. Joseph 4-H Youth Council hosted their annual **4-H Leader/Donor Recognition Banquet** to thank volunteers and donors for their support and to recognize milestone years. The event welcomed **86** leaders and donors, with **18** teen leaders assisting by serving beverages and clearing tables. Highlights included youth-led musical entertainment, a slideshow of a 4-H International Exchange Program experience (to Norway), and awards for Scott Miracle ('Above & Beyond') and Hemel's Chevrolet, Inc. ('Meritorious').



Scott Miracle, receiving the 'Above & Beyond' Award

Agriculture & Agribusiness



Jonathan LaPorte (left) accept the Search for Excellence Award

Search for Excellence Award

One of Michigan State University Extension's core strengths is its diverse team of educators and specialists who collaborate across disciplines to meet the complex needs of Michigan communities. The Developing and Educating Managers and New Decision-makers (DEMaND) team exemplifies this by designing educational programs that support the multifaceted demands of running a farm business.

The DEMaND series was recently honored with the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) Search for Excellence Award in the 'Young, Beginning, or Small Farmers/Ranchers' category.



Lyndon Kelley (left) discussing Irrigation at a cooperater field in Three Rivers, MI

The DEMaND series is a collaborative effort involving MSU Extension's agriculture, food systems, and community development teams, with support from the MSU Product Center, Center for Regional Food Systems, Organic Farmer Training Program, and industry partners such as Michigan Farm Bureau and USDA Farm Service Agency. For more information, explore <https://www.canr.msu.edu/demand>

Field Crops Research Day

Collaborative on-farm research with growers, commodity groups, Michigan State University and MSU Extension has been an important part of establishing local best management practices throughout the years.

This field day gave **20** participants the opportunity to learn and review management practices established from past years of research and to view current research plots on planting rate, vole damage and irrigation.

Weigh Wagon for Southwest Michigan!

In 2024, **Eric Anderson**, MSU Extension Soybean Educator, used local donations and program funds towards purchasing and restoring a weigh wagon for St. Joseph County and other regional farmers to use. This equipment allows for accurate yield data collection, essential for calibrating combines and conducting on-farm research. A local seed representative noted that having an additional weigh wagon available during harvest was very helpful, as existing resources were already in high demand during that busy time of year.



Weigh Wagon, stored in a local farm close to the MSU Extension office in Centreville, MI

Having this weigh wagon available ensures farmers can collect reliable data, make informed decisions, and continue improving their operations through precision agriculture.

Agriculture & Agribusiness

Michiana Irrigated Corn and Soybean Conference

The 2024 Michiana Irrigated Corn and Soybean Conference took place on February 26 at the Blue Gate Theatre in Shipshewana, IN, with **127** attendees from 10 Michigan and 13 Indiana counties.

Presentations from MSU and Purdue experts covered topics including disease and weed management, insect population decline, irrigation scheduling, fertility, worker safety, and soybean best practices. The day closed with updates from Lyndon Kelley (MSU Extension/Purdue Extension) and Dr. Younsuk Dong (MSU). One participant shared that the *“meeting had a variety of information. All speakers and their subjects were informational.”*



Participants at the 2024 Michiana Irrigated Corn and Soybean Conference

Survey responses indicated an estimated impact on 42,976 acres, with projected savings or earnings of \$492,635 across those acres. Medium-term follow-up showed an actual impact on 16,135 acres and \$167,100 in savings. Farmers reported improvements like cyst testing on soybean and corn, altered fungicide timing, irrigation adjustments and equipment corrections.



Students measuring well drawdown level

Midwest Water Stewards Field Day

Midwest Water Stewards, a group funded by agricultural stakeholders, is dedicated to studying the impact of irrigation on local wells and stream levels. As part of their educational outreach, they hosted a field day in partnership with MSU Extension, for **32** St. Joseph County agriculture science students to explore real-world water use and monitoring practices.

In the morning, the group visited an irrigation well at Walther Farms, where they observed and measured the drawdown of the well while it was in operation. In the afternoon, they moved to nearby Crooked Creek to study streamflow conditions. Throughout the day, students reviewed and analyzed data from the past growing season to assess well drawdown, recovery rates, and potential impacts on streamflow.

Michiana Irrigation Association Annual Meeting

In December, the Michiana Irrigation Association, in partnership with MSU Extension, hosted its annual meeting in Shipshewana, IN. **Over 70** producers and industry specialists attended, focusing on water policy differences between Michigan and Indiana and their impact on irrigation expansion. Speakers included MSU Extension staff, EGLE staff, and representatives from DNR and Midwest Water Stewards. The Association's spring and fall newsletters featured five Extension articles on irrigation efficiency, policy, and economics. MSU Extension staff, Eric Anderson and Nicolle Ritchie, engaged local farmers by sharing a winter schedule of educational meetings, Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) credit sessions, and upcoming Extension events.

Agriculture & Agribusiness

Serving St. Joseph County and Beyond!

Hosting the **Great Lakes Expo (GLEXPO)** in Grand Rapids each year enables MSU Extension to address many challenges producers face by equipping stakeholders with the latest research, innovations and techniques. Farmer and grower livelihoods depend on maintaining productive and profitable operations and GLEXPO offers producers continuous learning so that farms can compete in an increasingly global market. St. Joseph County staff (Jon LaPorte and Lyndon Kelley) presented sessions during GLEXPO and a total of **13** St. Joseph County residents attended the event in 2024. According to one attendee, it is *"Great to have a mix of industry leaders and academic community insight as it provides a more robust and holistic perspective on emerging tech."*

The **Field Crops Virtual Breakfast Series** completed its seventh season in 2024. It continues to provide field crop producers and agribusinesses with pertinent, timely crop and pest management information. Since 2018, this series has had 19,377 live participants; nearly 22,000 YouTube video views; over 31,000 MSU Extension webpage views; 11,307 podcast views and 4,555 Facebook Live views! St. Joseph staff (Eric Anderson, Lyndon Kelley, and Nicolle Ritchie) served as session hosts in 2024. **Every major field crops growing region of Michigan has participants join in during the growing season.**

MSU Extension Educators collaborated to **revitalize pesticide education** for Michigan applicators seeking or holding a Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) certification. In partnership with Pesticide Safety and Education Program (PSEP) and MDARD, staff hosted 24 in-person review and testing sessions statewide. Over 30 educators supported **950** participants—52% private and 48% commercial (40% of whom were agriculture consultants)—with an 88% pass rate.

Community, Food & Environment

In 2024, **152** St. Joseph County residents engaged in **41** MSU Extension classes or events addressing the following program areas:

- Center for Lakes and Streams
- Community Food Systems
- Financial Homeownership Education
- Government and Community Vitality
- Natural Resources
- Product Center
- Sea Grant

MSU Extension Educators work with businesses, local governments and communities to improve local economies and the lives of Michigan residents. They provide programming aimed at protecting and sustainably managing our natural resources.

These program areas reflect MSU Extension's commitment to enriching lives by addressing critical issues and opportunities through research-based education. By bringing practical knowledge directly to the community, MSU Extension helps strengthen Michigan's prosperity and quality of life.

To access all Community, Food, and Environment programs and resources, go to <https://www.canr.msu.edu/community>

Health & Nutrition

Teaching Youth Healthy Eating Habits

MSU Extension offers a variety of nutrition and physical activity programs including *Cooking Matters*, a hands-on six-week series where participants learn how to eat healthy, cook, and grocery shop on a limited budget. This program is offered in the community for adults, families, and childcare providers. Another popular program is *Teen Cuisine*, which teaches students in grades 6-12 important life skills for eating smart, which will stay with them as they grow into adults.

Class series are provided throughout the community including but not limited to community centers, churches, health sites, schools and local MSU Extension offices. In Three Rivers, MI, MSU Extension Community Nutrition Instructors, Jane Toll and Valorie Snyder, taught *Teen Cuisine* and *Cooking Matters* classes to **over 200 Three Rivers Middle School** teens, totaling nearly 80 hours of instruction!



2024 Fast Facts

19,289 people participated in MSU Extension health programs, either in person, virtually, by telephone and self-directed toolkits.

760 health programs were delivered by MSU Extension, either in person or virtually.

72,303 children and adults participated in one of the 8,975 in-person nutrition and physical programs delivered by MSU Extension.

1,672,069 views on food and health content on MSU Extension’s website.

34,795 people were subscribed to MSU Extension’s quarterly health and nutrition email digests, which feature upcoming events, educational articles, seasonal recipes, videos and more.

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.

984 St. Joseph County residents participated in health and nutrition programs in 2024. Residents benefited from a variety of topics including:

- Food Safety (31)
- Health and wellbeing (49)
- Nutrition and Physical Activity (904)

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

or scan the QR code:



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.



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



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



133,306 total youth participants



12,861 total volunteers



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



67,320 participants in Community, Food and Environment Programs



1,876 Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent 96,653 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 to the right.



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