



Thank you for another great programming year! We couldn't do our work for the residents of St. Joseph County without your continued partnership!  
Julie Pioch, District 13 Director  
piochj@msu.edu



*Canoeing alongside Camp Counselor Sydney Johnson was a highlight for our St. Joseph youngsters at the 4-H Summer Camp in June 2023!*

**St. Joseph County Based Staff**

- Eric Anderson- Field Crops
- Lyndon Kelley - Irrigation
- Kayla Mitchell - 4-H Program Coordinator
- Nicolle Ritchie - Agronomy
- Tonya Barrington - Secretary
- Charity Thompson - Secretary

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**248**  
EXTENSION PROGRAMS INCLUDED ST. JOSEPH COUNTY RESIDENTS

**2,533**  
COUNTY RESIDENTS ATTENDED EXTENSION PROGRAMS

**63**  
DIRECT CONSULTATIONS REPORTED

**12**  
PROGRAMS HELD IN THE COUNTY

**St. Joseph County General Fund Appropriations**

2021	\$215,499
2022	\$227,994
2023	\$236,324

**ST. JOSEPH COUNTY MSU EXTENSION WEBSITE**

**24,106 PAGE VIEWS**

**8,053 VISITORS**

**18% REGULAR CONSUMERS**

**659 4-H Youth Enrolled**

**212 Adult Volunteers**

**23 Community Clubs**

**1587 Total Youth Reached**



15 Residential Soil Tests  
4 Commercial Soil Tests



422 Youth Reached via SNAP Education



102 Southwest Michigan Extension Master Gardeners

**29 "ASK EXTENSION" Questions**

## Ag-Citing Experience Reaches 731 St. Joseph County Third Graders



The Ag-Citing Experience now in its 34th year, provides a unique educational experience for youth by showing them where their food comes from and how farmers raise the animals and crops. In total, 731 students in 31 classrooms from 13 schools (plus an estimated 150 parent chaperones and volunteers) attended in 2023.

## Volunteers make all the difference at the St. Joseph County Grange Fair

In 2023, Kayla Mitchell experienced her first St. Joseph County Fair as the new MSU Extension St. Joseph 4-H program coordinator.

“A lot of planning, collaborating, and learning goes into putting on a large week-long fair, from a hosting perspective and from the showman perspective,” Mitchell explains.

Due to changes in show times and increased participation in the dog project, we had to change the location of the livestock skill-a-thon from its past location. It wasn't until everything was set up that the volunteers realized the community tent (kindly offered to MSU Extension from the Fair Board of Directors) was too small to fit all 7 species' skill-a-thons plus the youth who needed to complete the tests. Instead of panicking, Mitchell said that volunteers leapt into action.

“They quickly improvised, moving tables outside the tent, posting signage for ease of navigating, and pointed youth in the correct direction. There were enough volunteers to provide additional reading and writing assistance to all youth, not just those who asked for help. This provided a welcoming environment to youth of all learning stages and showed true teamwork with on-the-spot problem solving,” Mitchell says.

“Our 4-H volunteers make the whole program come together and we depend on them to make this annual 4-H showcase experience come to life,” said Mitchell.

## 2023 Great Lakes Expo

The Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO, Michigan Greenhouse Growers EXPO (GLEXPO) and Lavender Conference is an annual event that draws thousands of farmers from Michigan and beyond to the DeVos Place Convention Center in Grand Rapids each December.

Attendees included fruit growers, vegetable growers, fruit and vegetable growers, and greenhouse growers with 14 attendees from St. Joseph County. In 2023, the multi-day event had nearly 3,200 attendees in more than 90 educational sessions and workshops with sessions on specialty crops, greenhouses and farm marketing.

MSU Extension's team of vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, and community food system educators and specialists organized 77 out of 96 recorded educational activities offered. The 2023 show offered 54 Michigan Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) credits, 47.5 Ohio RUP credits, and 100.5 Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) continuing education credits.

Organizers also put together two separate bus tours in conjunction with GLEXPO. The Farm Market Bus had 152 participants on three buses visiting six farm market and agritourism operations to the east and northeast of Grand Rapids. The Greenhouse Biological Control Essentials: Setting Yourself Up for Success Workshop and Bus Tour visited Walters Gardens in Zeeland.



**“I cannot say enough good things about this conference. The presence of University information and education (understandable for growers) combined with the industry resources is unmatched for the horticulture industry anywhere else.” ---GLEXPO Participant**





## MSU Extension Citizen Science Project in St. Joseph County

The Michigan Clean Water Corps (MiCorps) Volunteer Stream Cleanup Program (VSCP) provides small grants to local units of government to help implement trash cleanup of rivers, streams and creeks to improve the waters in Michigan. Local units of government are eligible to get the grants and often partner with nonprofit organizations or other volunteer groups to carry out the cleanups.

Each year, \$25,000 is made available in VSCP grant funding. The Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) appropriation for this program originates from fees collected from the sale of the state's Water Quality Protection license plates (2000 PA 74). Eligible organizations may apply for up to \$5,000 on their project. The grants require 25% local match of the total project cost. Grant funds are disbursed on a cost-reimbursement basis and only disbursed after satisfactory completion of the cleanup project and final reporting requirements.

Ten organizations received grants and completed Citizen Science projects in 2023 including the St. Joseph Conservation District where 15 St. Joseph County VSCP volunteers assisted in the cleanup project. A total of 22 county residents assisted in MiCorps programs last year.

MiCorps is a network of lake and stream volunteer monitoring programs in Michigan. Data collected by volunteers are used in their local communities and by EGLE for use in water resources management and protection programs.

Learn how to become a MiCorps volunteer and explore over 40 years of Michigan lake and stream data at [micorps.net](http://micorps.net).

## Health Programming Reaches Nearly 300 in Southwest Michigan

Being healthy means tending to our unique physical health needs, however that takes shape. Whether practicing tai chi in a sunny park or ensuring our immunizations are up to date, we can improve our physical health by managing chronic conditions, preventing injury and illness, and embracing joyful movement to the best of our individual abilities.

Social-emotional and mental health is also key. We can care for this part of our health in a multitude of ways, from practicing mindfulness to learning how to support someone in a mental health crisis. This allows us to cope with negative situations and feelings, foster strong and healthy relationships with others and ourselves, and live with purpose and meaning.

Good sleep, access to healthy foods, supportive relationships — what it means to be healthy is different to us all. That's why MSU Extension is here to support all the ways we can live healthier lives and build healthier communities, by bringing the vast knowledge and resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses.

In 2023, nearly 300 residents from Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties participated in health and food safety programming including Stress Less with Mindfulness, Personal Action Toward Health (PATH), RELAX: Alternatives to Anger, Home Food Preservation, Safe Food = Healthy Kids, the Michigan Vaccine Project, A Matter of Balance, and Sleep Education for Everyone (SLEEP) just to name a few.

***"It's so easy to feel stuck and tired with chronic illness. You have helped me to improve my life."  
— Chronic Pain PATH Participant***



## St. Joseph 4th Grade Conservation Tour for 384 Youth



On May 9, 2023, St. Joseph County 4-H hosted a conservation tour for all fourth graders in St. Joseph County. Youth were taught about planting trees, maintaining forests, the water cycle, pollinators, alien invaders, conservation dogs and wildlife appreciation.

The conservation tour was held in partnership with the St. Joseph County Conservation District and St. Joseph County Parks & Recreation at Covered Bridge Farm County Park. Presenters included the St. Joseph County Conservation District, St. Joseph County Veterans Affairs, True North Consulting Forestry, Magnum K9 Pets, and the Department of Natural Resources.

Participating districts included White Pigeon, Centreville, Three Rivers, Constantine, Burr Oak, Mendon, Nottawa, Lake Area Christian (Sturgis), and Immaculate Conception (Sturgis) which reached 384 youth in one day.

There were two rotations, morning and afternoon, with seven groups each moving to stations in 16-minute increments with 2-minute travel time. Based on surveys, youth enjoyed getting trees to plant at home and learning about the conservation dog and invasive species.

“I especially love that all the teachers (who filled out surveys) learned something new, too, even though most of them return every year,” Kayla Mitchell, St. Joseph County 4-H program coordinator says.

## Citizen Planner Program Helps Local Governments

*“Honestly our most recent zoning ordinance and master plan seem very good, but prior to the Citizen Planner course I didn’t appreciate what I was seeing.”*

*---Citizen Planner Participant*

The MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program provides in depth education and skills building for Michigan land use decision makers such as elected officials, planning commission members, zoning board of appeals members, local government staff, and other community leaders. In 2023, 72 attendees participated in the training from Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties.

Short term evaluations have consistently shown that Citizen Planner participants gain skills, knowledge, and confidence in fulfilling their important local government role. However, many of the issues covered in Citizen Planner like drafting and approving a master plan, adopting new policies, or amending local zoning ordinances take many months to fully implement for Michigan communities.

## ERAIL Trailer Used in Neighboring Branch County Pig Hauling Accident

On December 14, 2023, a livestock hauler with 120 pigs headed to market, overturned on a two-lane road in western Branch County. The driver was unhurt, but several pigs did not survive the crash.

While these types of events don’t happen frequently, when an accident involving animals does happen these unexpected events can quickly turn into chaotic and dangerous situations. The Branch County incident is an example of a situation that the MSU Extension Emergency Response to Accidents Involving Livestock (ERAIL) Team has trained and prepared for and worked to address.

In 2023, ERAIL trainings reached 116 participants from Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties.