

# ALCONA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

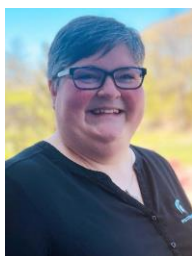
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*Thank you!*



**for supporting our millage in 2024!**



## 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 MSU Extension's District 4.

We are dedicated to 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 Alcona County.

### Impact



**1,918** participants from the county attending programs



**49** answered Ask Extension questions



**279** youth enrolled in 4-H



**102** volunteers serving in the county



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



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



**355** county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs



**8** sites of Nutrition and Physical Activity receiving PSE education impacting **508** people within the county



## Winter Pasture walk of Byelich Farms

In February 2024, Michigan State University Extension hosted an educational event at Byelich Family Farm, focusing on winter feeding strategies for beef farmers. Led by Kable Thurlow, Extension beef educator, the session highlighted how the Byelich family integrates bale grazing and bale unrolling to optimize cattle nutrition and improve soil health.

The Byelich Family Farm, established in 1975, has implemented research-backed grazing practices for decades. Attendees observed firsthand how these methods enhance efficiency while supporting sustainable agriculture. The event provided a platform for farmers to exchange ideas and gain practical insights to improve their own operations.



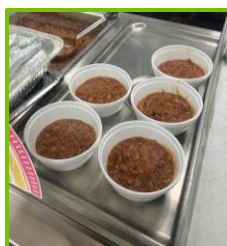
## Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program

Each year hundreds of volunteers collect valuable water quality and habitat data on inland lakes statewide through the MiCorps Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP). MSU Extension Educator Erick Elgin helps run this nearly 50-year-old program. One of the lakes in Alcona County participating in this program is Hubbard Lake. 2024 was Hubbard Lake's 30th year of participation (see figure for water quality trends through time). Hubbard Lake volunteers along with other lake leaders met virtually in the summer of 2024 to discuss water quality trends and what to do next to continue to steward Hubbard Lake into the future.

## Promoting health and nutrition through small changes

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) empowers individuals across the lifespan with knowledge and skills in nutrition, physical activity, and food budgeting. It promotes healthier choices, improves well-being, and supports long-term health by teaching practical strategies to maximize resources, prevent chronic disease and enhance overall quality of life.

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change work in relation to SNAP-Ed focuses on creating sustainable improvements in communities to support healthy eating and active living. Instead of just educating individuals, PSE approaches aim to modify policies, improve systems, and reshape environments to make healthier choices easier and more accessible for everyone.



*Try-Day Voting box (left) and chili (right) – both part of lunchroom efforts in Alcona Elementary School.*

In Alcona County, much of this work has focused on improving the school environment with making changes to breakfast and lunch menus, engaging kids in a Try-Day Friday where they can sample new foods, and initiating a backpack program to make sure that kids take home meals for the weekend. These programs were initiated by Michelle Luttrell – former Community Nutrition Instructor (CNI) – now working in SNAP Outreach for Veterans, continued by Danielle Jirasek, community nutrition instructor, now serving the county.

## 4-H Discovery Day

In June of 2024, **50** youth participated in a weeklong 4-H program at Alcona Community Schools, engaging in hands-on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities. The program featured exciting experiences such as exploring insects, a nature scavenger hunt and an egg drop challenge, sparking curiosity and creativity among participants.

Led by Michigan State University Extension's 4-H staff and volunteers, the program provided opportunities for youth to develop problem-solving skills and an appreciation for science and nature. Through interactive learning and teamwork, participants gained valuable knowledge while having fun.

The 4-H summer program continues to inspire young minds by making STEM education engaging and accessible.



**279** youth enrolled in  
4-H



**\$3,222.18** 4-H volunteer  
hour value



**95** volunteers

For a comprehensive look at the impact and progress of 4-H, please review our **2024 Alcona County 4-H Showcase**



## The value of partnerships:

Michigan State University (MSU) 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 and Michigan Sea Grant (MISG), as Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (NEMIGLSI) network leadership partners, support schools and students in fielding place-based stewardship education (PBE) projects in Alcona County. Sustained Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs) provided in support of these efforts via teacher education trainings for educators and community partners throughout year. Examples include: NEMIGLSI networking meeting, NEMIGLSI Eco Careers fair for middle schools, Lake Huron PBE Summer Teacher Institute, BWET marine debris, Vernal Pool Patrol training with many collaborative efforts such as the Center for Great Lakes Literacy (CGLL) Teaching Great Lakes Literacy program, providing educational resources (e.g., posters or publications), and more.

**Regionally – 1,803 total students** were engaged, through their learning, in Great Lakes and natural resources stewardship projects in nine northeast Michigan counties during 2023-2024 school year. These reflect students we engaged (or continued to engage) in PBE learning and stewardship during the Spring 2024.

**386 students (13 educators) from Alcona County** were directly supported in fielding PBE stewardship projects in their communities during Spring 2024 (Jan-June) portion of 2023-2024 school year.

## 14 projects over the last 10 years.



Learning about threatened and endangered species, removing invasive species, water quality monitoring of inland lakes, reducing marine debris, mitigating runoff through rain gardens, stewardship of Lake Huron, career exploration, energy and cost efficiency studies, learning about the history of the area in Negwegon State Park, raising three different species of fish in classrooms, watershed management and planning, enhancing the environment of local tourism assets (state parks) and creating a community garden with volunteers.

Place-based education connects learning to local communities, making lessons more relevant and engaging for youth. It fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and a deeper understanding of the environment and culture. By applying real-world experiences, students develop a stronger sense of place, civic responsibility and skills for future success.

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