

ALLEGAN COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Message from the District Director



The Allegan County MSU Extension Annual Report brings the MSU Extension mission to life for county commissioners and residents. The data and stories within show how education is impacting lives in Allegan County through an educational process that provides knowledge and resources to all. As you will see in this report, Allegan County and MSU Extension form an integrated partnership serving the needs of students, farmers, senior citizens, veterans, and anyone else seeking to better their lives through learning. Thank you for another great year of partnership and community impact! We appreciate your support in helping MSU Extension serve the residents of Allegan County.

Sincerely, Kai Gritter

Impact



1,495 participants from Allegan County attending programs.



176 total volunteers serving in Allegan County.



415 programs (across the state) attended by participants in Allegan County.



108 Participants in county agriculture programs.



320 youth enrolled in 4-H.



66 answered Ask Extension questions from Allegan County residents.



266 client consultations from Allegan County



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

Overall Impact



24 community partners



266 client consultations



44 programs hosted in Allegan County



713 participants attended programs hosted in Allegan County



1,614 contacts through social media, web activity, electronic newsletters, and handouts in Allegan County



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

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity

The City of Allegan is FIT!

Like most communities participating in MSU Extension's First Impressions Tourism (FIT) assessment program, the City of Allegan acted quickly on the results and feedback from its Fall 2022 community forum. As part of the FIT process, MSU Extension educators conduct follow-up conversations with communities to evaluate impacts and actions taken. FIT program lead Andy Northrop connected with Joel Dye, City Manager of Allegan, to document key outcomes. Highlights from that discussion are below:

Immediate Actions After FIT Assessment (Fall 2022):

- Accelerated **Downtown Streetscape Project** to finish in one construction season (instead of two).
- Hired a **new Chamber of Commerce director**.
- Local public schools began **construction of a new elementary school complex** and facility upgrades.
- Completed **wayfinding signage analysis** and developed schematic plans for new signage.
- County secured a **major grant for high-speed fiber installation** through downtown.
- Started **website redesign** to include a community calendar.

Improvements Achieved or Planned:

- Increased **beautification efforts**.
- Developed plans for **better signage**.
- Created a **community calendar**.
- Expanded **downtown recycling**.
- Initiated discussions with the **Arts Council** about adding more public art.

Community Impact:

- FIT forum enabled **community engagement** on positioning Allegan as a welcoming destination.
- City Manager described the program as **"a definite plus"** for identifying opportunities.





\$246.5 Billion annual impact of food and agriculture on Michigan’s economy



68 participants utilized Pesticide Applicator Trainings in Allegan

Soybean On-Farm Research



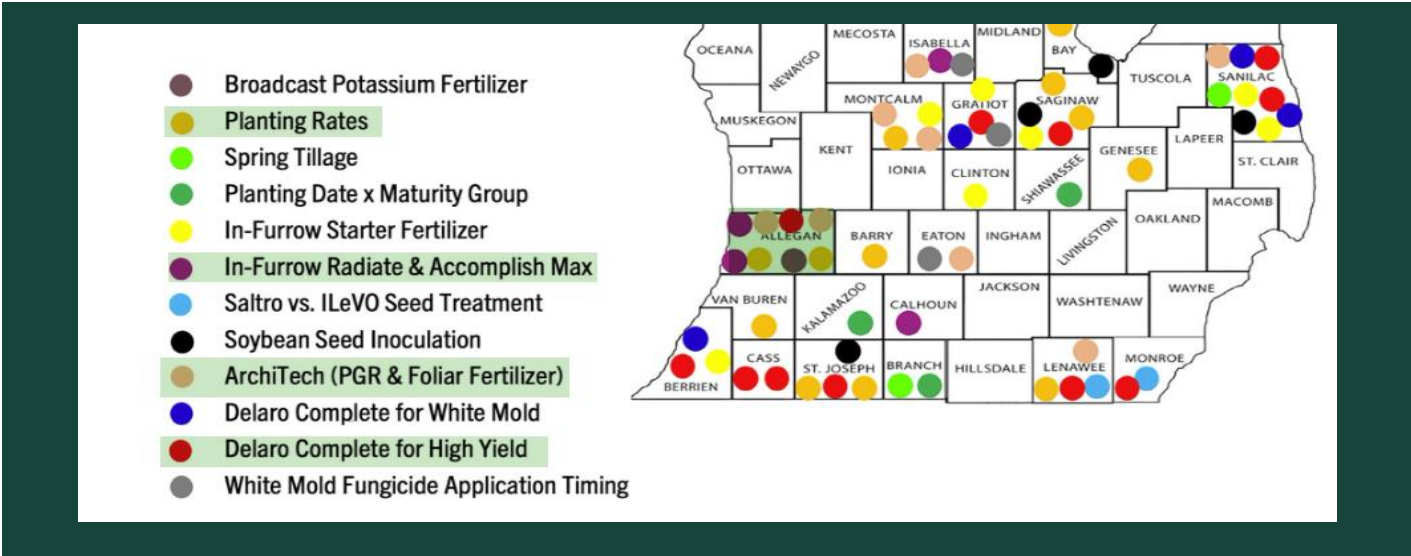
Eric Anderson has served as a field crops educator with MSU Extension in Southwest Michigan since 2015. Soybean production and management has been an important part of his on-farm research trials and educational programming throughout his career.

In 2024, Eric assumed the role of statewide soybean educator upon Mike Staton’s retirement, a position that is jointly funded by MSU Extension and the Michigan Soybean Checkoff. In this position he leads a statewide on-farm soybean research program and develops soybean educational materials and research reports to support Michigan soybean producers and agribusiness agronomists.

In 2024, data was successfully collected from 61 trials in collaboration with 49 farmer cooperators. Allegan County stood out, hosting 8 trials—second only to Sanilac County. Additionally, 11 Allegan farmers attended the research update held at Trestle Stop, demonstrating strong local engagement in the program.

Since 2011, MSU Extension has collaborated with the Michigan Soybean Committee (MSC) to conduct on-farm research trials designed to address key production challenges faced by Michigan soybean growers. Over time, more than 75 trials have been launched across the state, exploring 13 different research topics.

2024 On-Farm Trial Locations





48 Commercial & Farm Soil
Test samples processed



68 participants utilized Pesticide
Applicator Trainings in Allegan



64 Homeowner Soil Test
Samples processed



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

Allegan County Tree Farm Hosts Michigan Seedling Grower Association

The Michigan Seedling Grower Association is a coalition of small farms across Michigan that produce tree seedlings for Christmas tree farms, conservation efforts, and forestry initiatives. On August 29, 2024, the association held its annual grower meeting at Badger Evergreen Nursery in Allegan County, with approximately 30 attendees.

These participants represented a total of 465 acres of seedling production, **380** of which are located within Allegan County. Growers reported increased knowledge in several key areas as a result of the meeting:

- **Irrigation management** – 80%
- **Nutrient management** – 100%
- **Soil health and properties** – 80%
- **Nursery production survey insights** – 70%

Notably, 60% of surveyed attendees reported plans to implement changes on their farms within the next year based on insights gained from the event. These moments highlight the true value of our statewide partnerships with local farmers, creating opportunities to learn, adapt, and refine practices to drive improvement and success.



Youth Programming

 **699** 4-H youth participants

 **263** youth participants in programs hosted by Allegan County

 **147** 4-H volunteers

 **\$4,643.73** 4-H volunteer hour value

Pollinator Palooza!

Pollinator Palooza was a partnership with Allegan County 4-H and Fennville School's Summer Adventure Program. With this six week 4-H Spin club, students learned about Michigan Pollinators, raised & released Painted Lady Butterflies and made a pollinator garden. The school's campus provided an ideal environment that fostered all of your favorite pollinators!

Our 4-H Program Coordinator highlighted some of her favorite quotes from students:
"I love getting to be outside in nature"
"I like making the pollinator garden, I get to feel like a farmer"
"I had no idea that all of these foods needed pollinators"



What is a 4-H SPIN club? So glad you asked!

A 4-H SPIN club is a special interest club where five or more young people from at least two different families get together to learn about a topic of interest. The topics covered can be anything of interest to the youth: nature, heritage arts, science, engineering, gardening, technology, and more! Through their SPIN club experience, youth learn by doing as they build, create, explore, make, discover, test, plan, cut, estimate, experiment, experience, measure, draw and so much more!



Perfect Partners: Allegan County 4-H and the Allegan Public Library

4-H engagement can happen anywhere! Our 4-H Program Coordinator maintained a calendar of events at the Allegan Public Library. This outreach is the perfect introduction to 4-H and MSU Extension. Over six-weeks of programming, young people and their families discovered and created Leave Art, Australian Dot Painting, Corn Husk Dolls, Mancala, Native Plant Seed Bombs, and Solar Wood Burning.



Public Heath & Nutrition Programming

Over the past year, our team worked hard to provide programs that reflect our mission to help improve lives through education. Our Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) program staff, Abbey Stroop was intentional about building community partnerships throughout Allegan County.

These collaborations have been a beautiful extension of our SNAP-Ed programming, allowing us to amplify our efforts and reach more individuals and families. By combining our resources with the passion and expertise of this incredible community, we’ve created opportunities for optimal success and lasting impact.



Together, partners & coalitions help communities thrive—and make everyone feel better.

Partnerships:

- Allegan Senior Services
- Gun Lake Tribe
- Allegan County Community Foundation
- Ransom Public Library

Coalitions:

- Cooking session at the Senior Expo
- Family Fun Fridays at Gun Lake
- Community Information Exchange Network Exploration
- Books, Balls & Blocks

A slice of SNAP-Ed successes

At Renaissance Alternative High School in Plainwell, one student’s curiosity and interest in MSU Extension’s **Teen Cuisine** program grew into a clear career direction. After participating in the program, he shared that he’d begun working in a restaurant kitchen and confidently demonstrated new knife skills to classmates. By the final session, he was exploring culinary school options—proof that hands-on learning and supportive connections can inspire confidence, purpose, and pathways to lifelong success!

At The ARC of Allegan County, a day program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs), one participant’s quiet bravery stood out. Initially, she was afraid to use any kind of knife. Through our *adapted* **Cooking for One** sessions, she gradually learned to safely chop fruit with growing confidence. On the final day of class, the participant asked for a “safe knife” for Christmas—proof that courage and confidence can be built through education one small slice at a time!

Public Heath & Nutrition Programming



8 Policy, System and Environmental (PSE) changes within 4 sites in the county



508 Allegan county residents participated in health and nutrition programs



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



400 nutrition and physical activity participants attended programs hosted in Allegan County



470 statewide virtual programs related to Financial Education, Food Systems, Water and Environmental Quality, Government and Businesses



1,614 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts in Allegan County

Health & Wellbeing

In a continued effort to manage physical and mental health in 2024, residents found resources by taking part in several sessions. Research has shown that people who are more mindful are generally happier and report less anxiety, symptoms of depression, anger and worries. Some topics offered include:

- RELAX, Alternatives to Anger
- Sleep Education
- Brief Practices in Mindfulness
- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Mindful Walking
- Be Kind to Your Mind
- Keys to Embracing Aging
- Mindfully Feeding Infants/Toddlers
- Mindfulness for Children
- Teaching Kids Mindful Eating
- Walk With Ease
- Begin With A Breath
- Tai Chi for Arthritis and Diabetes
- Mental Health First Aid
- Chronic Pain PATH Toolkit
- Calming Down & Destressing
- Mindful Educators
- Mindful Eating
- Stress Less With Mindfulness
- Positive Attitude
- Caring for the Caregiver

Food Safety

In 2024, 9 Allegan County residents took classes and accessed resources from MSU Extension’s Food Safety Team. These classes covered a variety of topics that helped residents gain the knowledge and training to prevent food borne illnesses. Some examples of the classes attended are:

- Michigan Cottage Food Law
- Pantry Food Safety – It’s Your Job
- Safe Food = Healthy Kids
- ServSafe®
- Cooking for Crowds
- MDARD Everyday Food Safety
- Preserving MI Harvest – Various Topics
- Food Safety for Food Service Workers

- Allegan Senior Services
- First Baptist Church of Allegan
- Otsego Public Schools
- Community Action of Allegan County
- Fennville High School
- Allegan District Library
- Gun Lake Tribe
- Allegan County Community Foundation
- Glenn Schools
- Allegan County Fair
- Hamilton Schools
- Baraga Manor Apartments – Otsego
- East Saugatuck CRC

- [illegible]

- <https://www.canr.msu.edu/research/centers/>

Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Quentin Tyler, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.

Programs

4-H & Youth

- 4-H Clubs
- 4-H Spin Clubs
- 4-H Capitol Experience
- Leadership Education
- 4-H Exploration Days
- 4-H Shooting Sports
- International Exchanges
- Adulthood 101
- Career Preparation/Exploration/Development
- Cash Composition Contest & 4-H Money Smart Contests
- Skillathon
- Wild Spartans
- Summer Garden Programs

Food & Health

- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Cottage Food Law
- Food Preservation
- Food Safety Hotline
- Mindfulness Sessions
- Personal Action Toward Health (PATH)
- Powerful Tools for Caregivers
- ServSafe
- Sleep Education
- Tai Chi, Matter of Balance for Arthritis & Falls Prevention
- Walk With Ease
- Keys to Embracing Aging
- Wits Workouts
- Safe Food = Healthy Kids
- Cooking Matters
- Mental Health First Aid (Adult, Teen, Youth)
- Teen Cuisine
- Show Me Nutrition
- Grow It, Try It, Like It

Family

- Homeownership Education
- Money Management
- Parenting Education
- RELAX: Alternatives to Anger
- Social & Emotional Health of Young Children

Agriculture Related

- TelFarm
- Agritourism Education
- Beginning Farmer
- Beekeeping Programs & Education
- Cropland & Building Leasing
- Cultivating Local Farm Economics
- Estate & Farm Succession Planning
- Farm Business Organization & Structure
- Farm Financial Performance
- Farm Stress Management
- Field Crop Webinar Series
- Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market Expo (GLEXPPO)
- Heroes to Hives
- Integrated Crop & Pest Management
- Grain Bin & Manure Pit Safety
- MI Ag Ideas to Grow With Conference
- Michigan CSA Network
- Michigan Manure Summit
- On-Farm Educator Visits
- Renewable Energy & Energy Conservation Education
- Virtual Breakfasts
- Christmas Tree Production Education

Business & Community

- MSU Extension Product Center
- Making It In Michigan
- MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program
- New Commissioner Training
- Veterans Services

Lawn & Garden

- Ask Extension
- Lawn & Garden Hotline
- Foundations of Gardening/MSU Extension Master Gardener Program
- Smart Gardening
- Soil Testing

Natural Resources

- Clean Boats, Clean Waters
- Introduction to Lakes Online
- Michigan Birding
- Algae 101
- Michigan Master Naturalist
- Michigan Paddle Stewards
- Wild About: Conservation Webinar Series



District Directors

MSU Extension is structured into 14 districts. Programming and staffing occurs across district lines as dictated by community needs. The districts simply provide a mechanism for organizing and reporting on our relationships with community-based partners.

