

SANILAC COUNTY 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

171 N. Dawson St., Sandusky, MI 48471

810-648-2515

Website: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/sanilac/county-extension-office>

E-mail: msue.sanilac@county.msu.edu

Follow us on Facebook: MSU Extension, Sanilac County

- Karly Creguer – District 10 Director
- Mary Heiden – 4-H Program Coordinator
- Jerad Jaborek – Beef Feedlot Systems Educator
- Betty Jo Krosnicki – Supervising Educator



Karly Creguer
District 10 Director
oberski9@msu.edu

Message from the District Director

2025 was a year of reflection for MSU Extension. Due to federal funding cuts, we said goodbye to the SNAP-Ed program after recently celebrating 30 years of these efforts in Michigan. Staff delivering this nutrition and physical activity education played a pivotal role in teaching youth, families, and older adults to make healthier choices - impacts that will remain for years to come.

This devastating loss to our organization prompted us to reflect on the legacy we are leaving behind with all our programs. The lifelong skills youth are learning through 4-H programs to be ready for the future, improved yields and more efficient practices employed on farms, better budgeting practices to move toward homeownership, innovative ways for communities to enhance their assets to attract tourists and residents and, in turn, stimulate the local economy. Extension works alongside our neighbors and communities to help them address their unique needs and flourish now and into the future. It is my pleasure to share with you more ways we are doing so in the following pages.

Local Impact



1,729 participants from Sanilac County attending **281** programs



375 4-H enrolled youth



946 participants attending **44** programs hosted in Sanilac County



211 total volunteers



25 partnerships



1,302 youth reached by 4-H programming



375 client consultations



18,585 handouts and e-newsletters distributed

Ensuring Youth are Beyond Ready for Life



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In 2025, Sanilac County 4-H enjoyed a bustling and impactful year, while also laying the groundwork for exciting opportunities ahead in 2026.

January kicked off with the **Valentine Mission**, a countywide challenge encouraging 4-H clubs and individuals to create Valentine's cards and gifts for group homes, long-term care facilities, rehabilitation centers, and adult foster care homes. The heartfelt effort resulted in an impressive **327 handmade cards and gifts**, bringing joy and connection to adults throughout our community.

4-H members also spread cheer during the holiday season by **Christmas caroling** at long-term care facilities, nursing homes, and adult foster care homes, as well as creating festive Christmas cards for residents. These experiences reinforced the value of service, empathy, and community involvement among our youth.

Throughout the year, **over 1,300 youth** participated in a variety of educational programs that help them become Beyond Ready for life. They developed essential life skills through hands-on learning experiences in **woodworking, welding, leatherworking, sewing, stained glass, plant science, financial literacy, music, robotics, shooting sports, outdoor recreation**, and more.

Supporting these enriching opportunities are **over 200 screened adult volunteers** who dedicate their time, expertise, and passion to mentoring youth, ensuring safe, high-quality programming across the county. Their commitment is the backbone of Sanilac County 4-H, helping young people grow into confident, capable, and community-minded leaders.



Photo credit: MSU Extension

Empowering Youth to Make Healthy Choices

A partnership with Deckerville Community Schools continued to expand as Mary Gilbert, Community Nutrition Instructor, helped the Ag Science program expand their school garden.



Photo credit: MSU

With the help of two mini-grants, the garden space is now flourishing. Students wrote of their gratitude for the opportunity: *"With your help, we can now fully fund our raised bed project that will be a huge asset to our community."*

In addition to the garden project, Mary taught the students a hands-on 6-week series where they learned cooking skills and how to eat healthy on a budget.

A total of **50 youth and adults** participated in nutrition and physical activity programs in Sanilac County last year.

Officials Earn Citizen Planner Certification

The Citizen Planner Program offers land use education for locally appointed and elected planning officials and interested residents throughout Michigan. The program meets once a week for 6 weeks and teaches the fundamentals on roles, responsibilities and best practices for planning and zoning in Michigan.

This program was offered in partnership with the City of Sandusky, with **16** attendees not only from Sandusky but also nearby communities including Peck and officials from Sanilac County.



Building Knowledge in Michigan's Agriculture Sector



Photo credit: MSU Extension

Field Crops Programs

In 2025, the Field Crops Team had multiple programs open to participants across the Thumb Region both in person and online. Some of the larger in-person events included: **101** attendees at Thumb Ag Day in Ubyly, **30** at the wheat regional field day in the Sebewaing area, **85** at Crop and Pest Update in January in Bad Axe. We also had **9** trials as part of the On-Farm Soybean Research Program and 1 deer damage trial.

Other trials and plots:

- MSU Extension Sugarbeet Educator, Dave Wishowski had **8** sugarbeet trials across Huron, Tuscola and Sanilac counties.
- MSU Extension Wheat Specialist, Dennis Pennington, had **1** variety trial location in Sanilac County.
- The MSU Soybean Breeding Program had **1** variety trial location in Sanilac County.
- MSU Extension also had **1** dry bean trial location, totaling **5** trials resulting in approximately **550** plots in Sanilac County. Scott Bales, MSUE Dry Bean Specialist, spoke at the Dry Bean Plot Tour hosted by the Michigan Bean Commission in August that had **38** in attendance. In December, multiple specialists from MSU spoke at the Dry Bean Winter Meeting in Bad Axe with **110** people in attendance.

Beef Quality Assurance Training

Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) is a nationwide program that provides producers with science-based education on animal care, welfare, and beef safety. Producers can earn certification online or by attending in-person trainings.

In 2025, the MSU Extension Beef Team, in partnership with the Michigan Cattlemen's Association and Michigan Beef Industry Commission, held **8** Beef Quality Assurance trainings—three in the Thumb—with **37%** of attendees new to BQA and over **90%** reporting increased knowledge and planned on-farm changes.



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Beef x Dairy Feedlot Research

In 2025, Dr. Jerad Jaborek and colleagues completed their **third** Beef x Dairy feedlot research trial, evaluating performance and carcass traits compared to traditional beef and dairy cattle. Results were shared through multiple producer education events, conferences, and media outlets. Producers report this research has been especially valuable for making informed feedlot cattle purchasing decisions during a time of historically high feeder cattle prices.

Statewide Impact



\$244.2 billion annual impact of food and agriculture on Michigan's economy



170,438 total 4-H participants in Michigan



298,135 participants from across Michigan attending **7,997** programs



206,346,096 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters and handouts statewide



13,661 total volunteers in the state of Michigan



43,147 client consultations in Michigan

Building Stronger, Healthier Communities

MSU Extension Health programs promote physical and emotional well-being through research-based education on aging, chronic disease prevention and management, diabetes prevention, healthy communication, sleep, mental health, and stress management.

Two recent grants expanded District 10's reach. The first grant supported the six-week Walk With Ease program, engaging **46** participants. The second grant funded Tai Chi for Better Sleep and Mindfulness for Better Sleep, which reached **97** participants while addressing the link between pain, sleep, and opioid misuse in rural communities.

District 10 health educators Jacqui Rabine & Kris Swartzendruber reached:

- **218** participants in the 18-session Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention program, and **6** participants in the 8-session Matter of Balance program
- **185** participants in mental health programs
- **115** participants in disease self-management one-time presentations
- **411** participants in Mental Health First Aid
- **5** participants in the 6-session PATH (Personal Action Towards Health) programs



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Photo credit: Laurie Messing

MSU Extension's Food Safety programs provide education and outreach on research-based food safety best practices for consumers, childcare providers, volunteers, foodservice workers, and entrepreneurs so they can reduce the risk of foodborne illness by implementing safe food handling practices. Using in-person and online education formats, we provide programs and resources for safe handling and food preservation through our ServSafe, Safe Food=Healthy Kids, Preserving MI Harvest, Cottage Food Law programs and more.

In 2025, the Deckerville Schools Ag/Science program launched a school garden that produced vegetables, including tomatoes. The teacher partnered with Laurie Messing, Food Safety Educator, to offer Preserving MI Harvest Home Food Preservation classes, teaching students how to preserve their harvest. **Thirty** junior high and high school agriculture students participated in a two-part, hands-on program focused on preserving tomatoes. *"The students enjoyed the MSU programs and at parent teacher conferences parents shared that students brought home the Preserving fact sheets and were talking about what they had learned and done,"* shared Mrs. Zimmer, Ag teacher.



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- Over **600** county residents took part in a variety of our food safety educational outreach events.
- **200** participated in online or in-person Food Safety programs including ServSafe, Preserving MI Harvest and more.

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