

# CHIPPEWA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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- Jan Sweet, Office Manager
- Cody McLaren, Community Nutrition Instructor
- Maggie Merchberger, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Elliot Nelson, Sea Grant Extension Educator
- Nick Cassel, Extension Educator UPRC & D
- Biidaaban Reinhardt, FRTEP Extension Educator
- Rachel Butzin, Extension Tribal Health Educator



MSU Extension continues to make a lasting impact across Alger, Chippewa, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette and Schoolcraft Counties. In 2024, we provided critical support to farmers, engaged over 1,500 youth in 4-H, and delivered nutrition education to more than 1,000 residents. We expanded leadership training for local officials, helped small businesses thrive, and partnered on conservation efforts to protect our natural resources.

This year, we also secured new office space in Mackinac County, strengthening our ability to serve the region. Our success is made possible through dedicated staff, volunteers, and community partnerships. Thank you for your support—we look forward to another year of growth and impact!

**Erin Daines**  
**District 2 Director, MSU Extension**



6 community coalitions within the county that MSU Extension employees are members



2,143 participants from the county attending programs.



27 answered Ask Extension questions



71 volunteers serving in the county, 60 of these being 4-H volunteers



143 youth enrolled in 4-H

## Overall Impact

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



22 policy, systems, and environmental changes with those PSE sites. 370 people impacted.



2,143 participants from the county attending programs.



53 client consultations



245 programs (across the state) attended by participants from this county.



29,264,562 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts. (STATEWIDE)



7 Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy System and Environmental sites receiving PSE education within the county.

## Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity

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



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



34 soil test samples processed, including 22 commercial and farm soil tests and 12 homeowner soil tests



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



39 participants in county agriculture programs.

## Overall Impact

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67 programs hosted in the county



109 participants in Agriculture and Agri-Business programs from the county.



2,020 participants attending programs hosted in the county



1,014 participants in Children and Youth programs from the county



355 participants in community, food & environmental programs from the county



682 participants in Health and Nutrition programs from the county



1,436 youth participants in programs from the county



16,899 e-newsletters and handouts in the county

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### Chippewa County 4-H Poultry and Rabbit Fitting and Showmanship Clinic

The first Poultry and Rabbit Fitting and Showmanship Clinic was held on May 18 at the Chippewa County Fairgrounds. During the clinic, 4-H youth learned how to fit and show their chickens and rabbits. This was a hands-on clinic taught by a poultry judge and an MSU Extension 4-H Program Coordinator. The 4-H youth learned how to properly show their chicken and rabbit for the upcoming fair season. Youth learn essential life skills through showmanship, such as responsibility, public speaking and good sportsmanship which can prepare them for success as adults.

*"Not only was it all well presented, but the passion of everyone there was contagious and makes my heart so happy that my son has found his way into such an amazing organization."*

*-quote from parent*



Left: Maggie Merchberger, 4-H Program Coordinator



Chippewa County 4-H Poultry and Rabbit Fitting and Showmanship Clinic



Elliot Nelson  
Extension Educator  
MI Sea Grant

## Aquaculture Teacher workshop greatly impacts educators from underserved communities

In January of 2024, Extension Educator Elliot Nelson coordinated and hosted an aquaponics teacher workshop to help teachers utilize project-based learning around a variety of Great Lakes and food security issues. Many recognize aquaponics as a way to increase STEM participation from student populations who traditionally struggle with STEM learning.

This workshop took 15 teachers through two days of intensive learning around aquaponics science, a curriculum that utilizes aquaponics, and working to find ways to integrate it into their existing curriculum. Nelson had a secondary goal for the workshop – creating a community for the educators in which they can collaborate together. Techniques learned can help make this curriculum accessible to educators who work with underserved populations.



MSU Extension's recent aquaponics education workshop exemplifies our commitment to equitable access, professional development and community impact. Many of the attendees came from Title 1 schools.

Recruitment efforts intentionally prioritized underserved communities, resulting in a majority-female participant group, with 50% of those reporting racial identity identifying as Black or Asian. We also offered personalized accommodations to a group of Black female educators from Nebraska and Iowa, including travel planning support, a local chauffeur, and flexibility as one participant needed to bring her child due to a lack of childcare.

Additionally, we invited the Michigan Center for Great Lakes Literacy to observe and record the event, ensuring future workshops can be delivered electronically and improved over time. To reduce financial barriers, we provided \$500 stipends to attendees to offset travel and other costs.

These efforts reflect MSU Extension's dedication to inclusive programming, responsive service, and long-term educational impact across Michigan and beyond.



According to Pre/Post Tests Participants...

- Doubled their understanding of the four major types of aquaculture systems
- Doubled their confidence in building and maintaining aquaponics systems in their classroom
- Had a 40% increase in confidence in utilizing Aquaponics for youth STEM education as part of their curriculum

*"Elliot, thank you for this information. The teacher workshop provided a wealth of knowledge and we will create some amazing learning experiences for our BIPOC youth."*

- Dr. LeDonna Griffin, Leaders to Legends LLC.



Cody McLaren  
Community Nutrition Instructor

## Thawing Foods with Science

The group had shared an interest in food safety and food preparation information in addition to the teen cuisine curriculum. Many of the participants are interested in getting entry level food service positions. To honor their requests, I provided a session long lesson on food safety. For the last part of my lesson, I like to include procedure for properly thawing foods. After a decade in my position, I feel that this topic is very relevant to home and commercial kitchen settings.

After explaining and providing the three current Serv-Safe acceptable methods of thawing frozen foods, a participant had a unique question. "why should I still put my frozen foods in cold water if they thaw just as well on the counter ?" After discussing the bacterial growth and cross-contamination hazards of thawing foods at room temperature on the counter, I also provided a great explanation why its safer and also faster.

The participant said "How could cold water thaw out meat faster than a warm room? I would use the microwave but i don't want to ruin my cut of meat, and I've been thawing it on the counter for years. I understand the cross-contamination and bacterial growth factor, but how could it be more efficient?"

I had the participants consider the science of thermo-conductivity. Since water (liquids) are very dense, dense objects transfer energy better than less dense air or gasses. I gave the same example that I use about sitting in a 60 degree room, compared to sitting in 60 degree water. The first scenario would be a little chilly with 60 degree air, within hours a person would be hypothermic in 60 degree water.

*"I've always wondered why they say to use cold water even though it seems like room temperature would thaw much faster. Now I realize that its not only much safer, its actually faster as well! I'm going to tell my family as well, my parents still thaw foods on the counter because they think its the fastest way." -participant quote*



Nick Cassel  
Extension Educator

## The Chippewa-Luce-Mackinac Conservation District partnership leads to habitat conservation

Nick was able to successfully obtain \$7,420.00 in grant funding from CLMCD, in a collaborative application, funded by MISGP, and dispersed to the Chippewa Luce Mackinac Conservation District, Upper Peninsula Resource, Conservation and Development, The Nature Conservancy, and Drummond Island Chamber of Commerce, to be utilized for habitat conservation measures across the Maxton Plains on the north side of Drummond Island.

# Bay Mills Indian Community One-Year First Impressions Tourism (FIT) Assessment Follow-up Shows Great Progress

The Bay Mills Indian Community participated in the First Impressions Tourism (FIT) program to assess and improve its tourism potential. One year later, the community reports significant progress and sustained engagement.

BMIC developed a comprehensive tourism action plan, hired a dedicated tourism staff member, and launched collaborative efforts to enhance recreation, infrastructure, and digital visibility. As a result, the community expanded trails, upgraded signage, improved parks, and secured funding for a tourism diversification plan. A new campground and kayak rentals increased outdoor recreation options.

FIT participation sparked lasting improvements and positioned BMIC for continued tourism growth. These efforts reflect a strong return-on-investment for tribal and external funders supporting community-led development.

## Key metrics

- 1 dedicated tourism and recreation staff position created
- 1 new river view campground developed
- 1 tourism diversification plan funded
- 1 expanded Spirit Stone Trail
- 1 tourism website in development

*"I hope other tribes participate in the program because it worked really well for us. It's a cool exercise to help through the admin process as well as other members of the community leadership team. Very cool program and happy with the results."*

*-Brianna Gunka, BMIC Planning Director*



Will Cronin  
Extension Educator



143 youth enrolled in 4-H



645 nutrition and physical activity participants hosted in-county.



\$1,895.40 4-H volunteer hour value



682 county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs.



133,306 total youth participants statewide



9,808 of people participating in Food Safety programs including ServSafe



12,861 total volunteers statewide

Gitigaan/Gtegan/Kitigaan (Garden) Kit Program

The Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) Spring Garden Kit Distribution program has a goal of strengthening food sovereignty and cultural connection across tribal communities, encompassing our partners across the U.P. and Michigan’s Northern Lower Peninsula: Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, and Hannahville Indian Community.

After six months of planning, FRTEP partners hosted six distribution events and shared garden kits with tribal households. A follow-up survey gathered feedback on cultural relevance and seasonal outcomes. As a result, participants expressed strong appreciation for the program and offered insights to improve future efforts. Feedback emphasized the importance of cultural teachings and community-driven food access.

This initiative supports tribal resilience, health, and cultural preservation through hands-on gardening and intertribal collaboration. It reflects a meaningful return on investment for partners advancing food sovereignty.

Key metrics

- 673 garden kits distributed
- 6 months of planning and coordination
- 6 event days held
- 4 tribal communities served

Participant Quotes:

*“This is my second year with a garden kit, and I have improved so much from the first year! My cherry tomatoes, green peppers, lettuce and carrots did amazing! I had some trouble growing my cucumbers, but I learned from my mistakes and will use that info for next season!”*

*“I have gardened all my life, but this was the first time with my grandchildren. I loved every minute of it. They were truly invested. When we made the Three Sisters soup and had to add the corn, one grandchild insisted we purchase corn from a local farmer so that everything in the soup was grown in our area.”*



Biidaaban Reinhardt  
Extension Educator

Figure 1



Figure 1 Jan  
Sweet, Office  
Manger

Figure 2



Figure 2 Plant  
Science  
Sampler  
Workshop,  
Sault Area High  
School

Figure 3



Figure 3 Plant  
Science  
Sampler  
Workshop,  
Sault Area High  
School

Figure 4



Figure 4  
Embryology  
lesson at  
Rudyard High  
School



Figure 5  
Embryology  
lesson at  
Rudyard High  
School

Figure 5



Figure 6 4-H  
Poultry and  
Rabbit Fitting  
and  
Showmanship  
Clinic

Figure 6

## Constitution Day

Constitution Day was held on September 20, 2024, at Lake Superior State University. over 400 students, accompanied by school administrators and teachers, from all over the Eastern Upper Peninsula learned about the voting system. They filled out a registration card and were able to vote for their favorite candy bar. Each group was able to give argument as to why their candy bar was worth the vote.



*"Thank you so much to everyone for your hard work with Constitution Day. This event literally could not have happened without your support and time. I also thought it was so fun to see students take charge on stage. As one of our volunteers said, 'The students certainly had the showboating part of politics down!'"*

*- partner*



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