

MUSKEGON COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Message from the District Director



I'm pleased to share the results of another successful year of collaboration between Muskegon County and Michigan State University (MSU) Extension. Your continued support has allowed us to make a meaningful impact on youth, families, businesses, and communities. This year, MSU Extension delivered a wide range of research-based educational services—helping individuals lead healthier lives, assisting new and local businesses, expanding youth leadership and career exploration opportunities, supporting farmers with business management and mental health resources, and more.

Our staff live and work alongside county residents, building strong community connections and responding directly to local needs. We maintained our online presence through virtual courses, timely responses to questions on topics from gardening to food safety, increased social media outreach, and a wealth of research-backed resources on our website.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership. On behalf of the MSU Extension team serving Muskegon County, we appreciate your support and look forward to another year of working together—and hope to see you at an upcoming program.

James Kelly
District Director

Staff

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| • Florencia Colella – Farm Business Management | Frank Cox – Career Prep & Vol. Recruitment |
| • Naomi Hyso – Disease Prevention | Clara Priest – 4-H Program Coordinator |
| • Rachel Puckett – 4-H District Supervisor | Erica Reister – Food Safety Educator |
| • Clarence Rudat – Product Center, F.A.R.M. Manager | Jim Sheehan – Youth Mental Health First Aid |
| • Amanda Smith – Office Manager | Kaitlyn Sutton – Culinary Coordinator |
| • Wade Syers – Food Safety Specialist | James Kelly – District Director |

Overall Impact



3,250 people reached through activity in Muskegon County (programming, consultations, office visits, soil tests, tip-line calls)



2,457 participants from the county attending programs



196 client consultations



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



91 programs hosted in Muskegon County



106 Ask Extension questions answered



84 volunteers



60 community coalitions and partnerships within the county that MSU Extension employees are members of

Communications Outreach



86,095 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



48,303 Facebook views on the Muskegon County/4-H page



50 soil tests and other resources sold in Muskegon County

Youth DEVELOPMENT

1,294 youth participants

122 4-H youth enrollments

21 4-H Clubs

84 volunteers

\$48,647 value of 4-H volunteer time

New Club Development



The Muskegon County 4-H program saw meaningful growth in 2025 with the launch of a new chartered club, Muskegon County Boots & Bling 4-H Club. This addition brought two new Gold volunteers and nine new youth members, expanding opportunities for local young people to build skills and confidence. Boots & Bling transitioned from a Muskegon County Fair club to an official 4-H club after recognizing the added value 4-H provides—access to supportive mentoring, broader project areas, and leadership development. Club leaders embraced 4-H’s mission, strengthening youth programming and planning to expand project offerings even further. Youth in the club are already active in diverse project areas including beef, poultry, goats, horse & pony, rabbits/cavies, sheep, and swine. Boots & Bling will participate in the Muskegon County Fair as a 4-H club for the first time, increasing visibility for 4-H and creating new pathways for youth to engage, learn, and lead

Youth Determination



When the longtime Muskegon Marksmen 4-H Shooting Sports club unexpectedly went inactive this year, 18-year-old member Zachary Wall suddenly faced losing his final year in 4-H. Despite the setback—and with no certified shooting sports leader available in the county—Zach was determined to stay involved. With support from the Denim N Dust 4-H Club, Zach found a place to belong and continued pursuing his passion. He fully embraced the transition, competing at the Muskegon County Fair and the 4-H State Shooting Sports Competition, where he delivered an outstanding performance. Zach’s dedication paid off: he qualified for the National 4-H Shooting Sports Competition, an extraordinary accomplishment and a first-time opportunity to represent Muskegon County 4-H on a national stage. This story reflects the strength of 4-H youth, families, and volunteers—coming together to ensure a young person’s final 4-H year became one of his most successful.

Community Partnership focused Career Preparation



Muskegon Public Schools

MSU Extension and Muskegon Public Schools (MPS) continued to strengthen a long-term partnership that delivers high-impact learning aligned with the district's Ford Next Generation Learning transformation.

Through the 21st Century After-School Program, MSU Extension provided STEM enrichment, nutrition and healthy living education, and money-management lessons for students in grades K–12. Since 2013, 241 MPS students have participated in MSU Extension and 4-H programming, gaining leadership skills, college exposure, and global learning opportunities.



Recent highlights also include strong participation in 4-H Exploration Days, with students reporting increased confidence, early exposure to college life, and clarity in future career pathways. Testimonials from graduates and college students reflect how these experiences shaped decisions to pursue higher education and public service careers.



Last year's visit by the MSU President Guskiewicz elevated the district's Future Teachers Program. MPS high school students now earn early college credit, participate in MSU's two-week residential summer experience, and receive training in leadership, equity, and teaching practices. Students reported substantial personal growth, increased confidence, and stronger motivation to pursue careers in education.

Together, MSU Extension and MPS are expanding opportunity, deepening career-connected learning, and preparing Big Red students for success in college, careers, and life through consistent, meaningful engagement from elementary through high school.

Mental Health and Wellness



Classes from various Muskegon County school districts participated in an 8-hour Teen Mental Health First Aid Training, which improves participants' ability to identify and assist others with mental health challenges.

We were recently contacted by a teacher and coach who invited us into their classroom to teach Teen Mental Health First Aid. They shared that a student athlete had experienced a mental health crisis, and because of the training they participated in, they felt confident knowing how to respond. They told us they weren't sure how they would have handled the situation without the skills they gained through the program. They expressed deep gratitude for having the tools and confidence to support a young person in need.

Health and Nutrition Education



1,070 county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs



11 Sites receiving nutrition or physical activity policy, system, or environmental education in county



5,195 people impacted by the 21 nutrition or physical education policy, systems, and environmental changes implemented in the county



Food Safety and Preservation

Over 50 residents of Muskegon County completed their ServSafe Certification through MSU Extension, allowing them to meet public health standards for employment in food related industry. Additionally, residents participated in food preservation classes that taught safe food handling and preservation techniques to participants.



This January, MSU Extension partnered with Orchard View High School to deliver six hands-on cooking and nutrition classes for nearly 50 Food and Nutrition students. By adapting lessons to the teens' desire for independence and creativity, engagement grew rapidly. Students gained confidence in the kitchen, practiced teamwork, experimented with spices, and learned how to read nutrition labels to make informed food choices. Many requested recipe copies to try at home, extending the learning to their families. The program strengthened life skills, encouraged healthy decision-making, and inspired students to keep exploring cooking.



Chronic Health Education

From late October to early December, MSU Extension partnered with Services of Hope to offer a 6-week Tomando Control de su Salud workshop at Centro de Esperanza in Norton Shores. This evidence-based program equips Spanish-speaking adults and their caregivers with practical tools to manage chronic health conditions. Participants reported increased confidence and new skills to better manage daily symptoms. One participant shared, “Ahora me siento más segura manejando mi salud con las herramientas que aprendí.” (“Now I feel more confident managing my health with the tools I learned.”) This series strengthened local capacity for chronic disease self-management education and expanded access for Spanish-speaking communities in Muskegon County, laying the groundwork for ongoing outreach and future workshops.



Evidence-Based Wellness Support

MSU Extension’s suite of health programs—including Walk With Ease, Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention, sleep education, and Stress Less with Mindfulness—helps residents build healthier lifestyles through practical, research-based strategies. Together, these programs improve physical mobility, reduce chronic pain, lower fall risk, and increase daily activity. Participants also learn skills that strengthen mental well-being, such as stress-reduction techniques, mindfulness practices, and healthy sleep habits. By increasing confidence, promoting social connection, and empowering people to take control of their health, these programs support long-term physical and emotional wellness across Michigan communities. All of these programs were offered in Muskegon County in 2025.

Product Innovation Counselling and Food Agriculture Research Manufacturing (F.A.R.M.)

- 30 businesses served, representing 112 employees and \$2.3 million in sales
- 378 consulting and research hours provided
- 3 jobs created, 4 jobs retained

Environmental Stewardship



Advancing Steelhead Sustainability

Steelhead fishing plays a key role in Michigan’s river-based economies, supporting guides, tackle shops, restaurants, and small businesses—particularly in communities like Muskegon that draw anglers to the Muskegon River each spring. To help sustain this important fishery, MSU Extension and partners continued the Michigan River Steelhead Program, now in its fifth year, which uses the Great Lakes Angler Diary app to collect high-quality data that would otherwise cost nearly \$600,000 annually through traditional creel surveys. In 2025, 73 volunteer anglers recorded 3,320 steelhead across eight river systems.

On local waters, the Muskegon River saw a strong rebound in catch rates, driven by improved returns of post-COVID stocked fish—mirroring the statewide trend of 2025 catch rates rising 24% above baseline. These data provide critical insight for the Michigan DNR as they set stocking rates and manage fisheries on rivers like the Muskegon, where both wild and stocked steelhead contribute to the local angling economy. The program also strengthens public understanding and engagement: 86 participants reported increased knowledge of steelhead biology and management, and findings reached more than 17,000 people through reports, presentations, and media.

Government and Community Vitality



Muskegon County residents took the 2025 Citizen Planner training. It had a strong positive impact on participants, significantly increasing their planning knowledge, confidence, and ability to serve their communities effectively. Nearly all respondents reported substantial knowledge gains, over 93% felt more confident in their roles, and a similar share rated the program as valuable for their personal and professional growth. Participants also indicated they will apply what they learned by improving meeting preparation, fostering community involvement, and using planning concepts in real decision-making—showing that the program not only builds skills but also supports more informed, engaged local governance.



Crop Scout School

MSU Extension delivered a hands-on Crop Scout School for summer scouts from regional chemical distributors, building local capacity to support tree fruit and vegetable growers. Participants practiced identifying insect life stages, key pests, and diseases through both classroom instruction and field scouting in orchards and asparagus. All surveyed attendees reported increased pest-management knowledge, noting the value of practical, real-world training that leads to more accurate scouting and improved crop protection across west-central Michigan.



Beginning Farmer Field Day

Muskegon County farmers attended the MSU Extension full-day program called Beginning Farmer Field Day, at the West Central Michigan Research and Extension Center. The event connected new and aspiring farmers with practical, hands-on learning in soil health, produce safety, pest management, business planning, irrigation, and community food systems. Participants rotated through specialty crop stations and engaged directly with MSU Extension educators, MDARD, USDA agencies, and local partners. This collaborative program helps beginning farmers build essential skills, access resources, and adopt practices that support long-term farm success and environmental stewardship.



Integrated Pest Management

Michigan specialty crop growers face increasing pressure from rapid environmental change, invasive pests, regulatory shifts, and tight profit margins. To stay competitive, producers need timely, science-based Integrated Pest Management (IPM) resources tailored to fruit, vegetable, and other specialty crop systems. The MSU IPM Program continues to meet this need by delivering research-driven tools, real-time pest updates, and coordinated outreach that help growers improve decision-making and protect crop quality. Muskegon County farmers in attendance of these programs benefit from a program that strengthens their resilience and increases their profitability as specialty crop farmers.

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