

# ANTRIM COUNTY

## 2024-2025

### ANNUAL REPORT

#### Stay Connected!

Phone: 231.533.8818

Email: [msue.antrim@county.msu.edu](mailto:msue.antrim@county.msu.edu)

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## Message from the District Director

I'm excited to share the results of another successful year of partnership between Antrim County and Michigan State University (MSU) Extension. Thanks to your ongoing support, we've been able to make a meaningful impact on the lives of youth, families, businesses, and communities throughout the county.

MSU Extension continues to offer a wide array of research-based educational outreach to our residents. Over the past year, we've empowered individuals and families to lead healthier lives, supported local and new businesses, provided opportunities for youth leadership development and career exploration, assisted farmers with business management and mental health support, and so much more. Our team lives and works alongside county residents, building strong community relationships and staying responsive to local needs.

We remain committed to delivering our programs in personalized formats and locations that are convenient and accessible to our participants. This ongoing success is possible because of our strong partnership with you. On behalf of the MSU Extension team serving Antrim County, thank you for another outstanding year. We look forward to your continued support and hope you will join us in our upcoming programs.

*Jennifer Berkey*  
District 3 Director

## Impact



212

Programs accessed by residents



1,679

Reached through programming



20,900

Reached by social media

# AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



AgBioResearch  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## NWMHRC BUS TOUR

The Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center (NWMHRC) was proud to be a stop on the inaugural Michigan State University Spartan Bus Tour on October 22, 2024. The tour was hosted by MSU President Kevin Guskiewicz, a neuroscientist and concussion research leader who joined MSU in March 2024. He came to us from the University of North Carolina, and in keeping with a tradition he started there, he hosted a bus trip through a slice of Michigan for 60 MSU faculty and staff.

NWMHRC was honored to be selected as a stop to share the latest in tree fruit research with the group.

Heather Leach led a lab tour and shared updates on the entomology research she is conducting in NW Michigan. Erin Lauwers, IPM Educator, led a wagon tour and explained various research trials that are going on in the field. Board members Mark

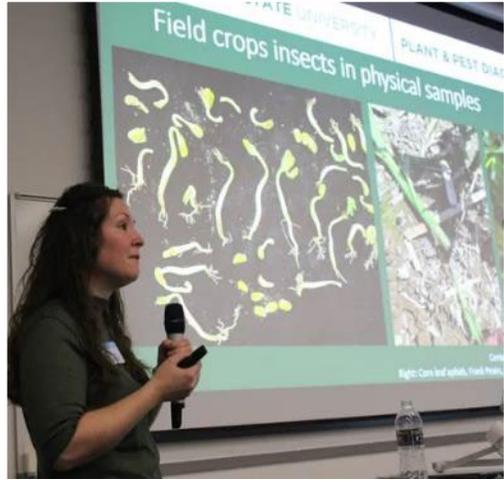
Miezio and Bruce Veliquette offered valuable insights into the complexities of cherry production, helping connect visitors, many new to agriculture, with the region's unique challenges. Both of our board members did a terrific job, and their messages were engaging, insightful, and delivered from the heart. Their information really resonated with the group, and there was a plethora of interesting and engaging questions from the audience.

Thanks to everyone that contributed to make our bus tour stop a success! It was a fantastic opportunity to share the impactful work happening in Northwest Michigan with the broader MSU community.

## INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT UPDATES

These updates feature timely discussions of pest challenges and management options dictated by

weather and pest biology. Attendees are encouraged to bring examples of pests and damage found on the farm for identification and discussion. Additionally, we host invited speakers from local organizations and Michigan State University. Updates were held bi-weekly in Grand Traverse, Antrim and Benzie Counties. A virtual option was also available during Wednesday meetings.



# AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



*Year-end tax estimate meetings provided farmers with the opportunity to save nearly **\$54,000**, allowing for investment back into the farm business to help build farm resilience*



## FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Farm Business Management Educator Chris Bardenhagen works with area farmers on succession planning, financial management, and cost of production budgeting—both at the individual level and across the broader industry. In 2024, Chris assisted nine area farms with Telfarm program outreach, helping to determine end-of-year tax strategies and annual balance sheet analysis. Farmers who participate in the program gain a greater understanding of their farm’s financial strengths and weaknesses, and how they can improve upon their financial standing.

These farms represent about \$5 million in sales in 2024. Despite a challenging year for many farms, year-end tax estimate meetings provided farmers with the opportunity to save nearly \$54,000. Strategizing on year-end taxes goes beyond saving money—it can also support investments and upgrades in

equipment and infrastructure, boosting the farm’s long-term resilience.

Succession planning was another key focus this year. Chris worked closely with more than 10 families as they navigated important decisions about transferring their farms—a topic that continues to gain interest among producers. He also helped organize a well-attended seminar in partnership with Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, drawing in more than 40 attendees. The workshop featured presentations on the structure of the planning process, legal instruments including trusts, and critical considerations necessary for advancing a farm succession plan. Related topics included the use of conservation easements in estate planning and the role of Michigan Farm Link in connecting land-seeking farmers with landowners. Succession planning tools and resources help farm families to make informed choices to successfully transfer business knowledge, responsibilities,

and assets to the next generation of farmers.

In 2024, Chris also continued work on cost of production studies that provide tools to area growers. This year work was done to develop cost budgets for peaches, apples, and blueberries, and work began on a new cost study for chestnuts—a promising crop for former tart cherry sites.

Through his efforts, Chris provides essential resources that help farmers strengthen their businesses, plan for the future, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving agricultural landscape.



**9** area farms  
representing nearly  
**\$5 million** in revenue in  
2024

# AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



2024 saw an increase of **1,130 participants**, representing a **131% increase**



## FARM STRESS & AGRABILITY

Michigan AgrAbility empowers individuals in the agricultural industry to continue working despite injury, illness, or disability. The program's mission is to enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities, so that they, their families, and their communities continue to succeed in rural America. In 2024, the program served 212 clients and reached 7,725 people through workshops and trainings, with 428 direct interactions across the state.

Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) supported clients by providing \$368,590 in funding for assistive technology projects, benefiting 23 farm clients. Community partnerships also played a vital role—Alpha Gamma Rho's (AGR) Tau Chapter at MSU contributed \$37,000 in 2024, surpassing \$150,000 in total donations since 2013. Its February Beef Preview event continues to be a major fundraiser, directly supporting technology solutions for small farms and independent growers.

AgrAbility also collaborated with MSU's College of Engineering for Design Day. In Spring 2024, students

created a portable swarm trap hive lifter for a disabled veteran beekeeper and Heroes to Hives instructor. In the fall, they developed a mechanized kneeler cart for a client with severe foot pain to tend rows of low growing plants, which won the Edison Award for Best Design Project. Free downloadable design plans for both projects are available at [www.canr.msu.edu/agrability](http://www.canr.msu.edu/agrability).

In July, AgrAbility hosted a Regional Training Workshop in Ann Arbor with national staff and 44 participants from across the U.S. and beyond. This hands-on event strengthened the broader AgrAbility network and promoted greater understanding of assistive technology in agriculture.

Managing Farm Stress

 **45 programs**

 **1,992 participants**

### Managing Farm Stress at MSU Extension

Farming is inherently demanding. From job-related injuries to volatile commodity prices, Michigan's agricultural community faces

significant stress. Whether stemming from financial pressures or everyday hardships, MSU Extension is here to help.

In 2024, our Managing Farm Stress team delivered 45 programs reaching 1,992 people—more than double any year outside of 2023. This marks a 131% increase from 2022, highlighting the program's growing reach and effectiveness.

A major milestone this year was the creation of the MSU Farm Stress Endowment, approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2024. With seed funding from Cherry Republic, this endowment ensures long-term support for Michigan's agricultural community.

We also continue to offer free counseling with farm-informed therapists and financial assistance for those in Michigan Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. Learn more or access support at: [https://www.canr.msu.edu/managing\\_farm\\_stress/teletherapy-program](https://www.canr.msu.edu/managing_farm_stress/teletherapy-program)

Farming is tough, but you don't have to do it alone. MSU Extension stands by our farmers and is ready to support you.

# AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



NORTHWEST MICHIGAN ORCHARD & VINEYARD SHOW

## VITICULTURE OUTREACH

MSU Extension continues to drive progress in advancing Michigan’s wine and grape industry, particularly in Northwest Michigan. Through educational programs, direct vineyard support, and research-driven initiatives, MSU Extension empowers growers and winemakers to enhance sustainability, productivity, and quality. In 2024, MSU Extension led key initiatives to improve vineyard management, elevate wine quality and address pressing industry challenges.

## EDUCATION & INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

MSU Extension organized and co-hosted numerous programs for winegrape growers, including workshops, conferences, and field days focused on climate adaptability, pest and disease management, and sustainable practices. These events featured expert speakers from across the country, providing hands-on training and the latest research insights. A highlight of the year was the Northwest Michigan Orchard and Vineyard Show, where leading industry experts shared best practices and innovations in vineyard management.

## DIRECT SUPPORT FOR GROWERS

Extension staff provided 22 in-person site visits across Northwest Michigan, offering customized vineyard assessments and recommendations. Additionally, 16 scouting reports were delivered during the growing season, offering real-time updates on vine health, pest outbreaks, and weather trends, helping growers make informed decisions.

## DIGITAL RESOURCES

In 2024, MSU Extension broadened its digital outreach, publishing a range of educational articles, videos, and scouting reports to support growers statewide. These resources offered practical, research-based guidance on vineyard management, fungal disease prevention and soil health. By leveraging digital platforms, MSU Extension ensured timely, relevant information delivery—empowering growers to make informed decisions and fostering collaboration across Michigan’s winegrape industry.

## DIRT TO GLASS™ 2024

Dirt to Glass™ remains a premier statewide event for Michigan’s viticulture and enology industry, held

annually in Traverse City. Organized in partnership by MSU Extension, AgBioResearch, and Intentional Agriculture, this conference aims to elevate fruit and wine quality, bolster sustainability, and position Michigan as a nationally competitive wine region.

The conference brings together leading experts from around the world to share research, expertise, and practical insights that inspire and inform local growers and winemakers. By showcasing successful strategies from international leaders, Dirt to Glass™ offers attendees valuable tools and approaches that can be tailored to Michigan’s unique terroirs.

Since its launch, Dirt to Glass™ has become an essential platform for collaboration, education, and innovation within Michigan’s grape and wine community. The 2024 conference welcomed 186 attendees and featured 18 speakers, including 11 local, 5 national, and 2 international presenters. Planning is already in full swing for the 2025 event in late August.



DIRT TO GLASS

# AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



**309** Extension Master Gardener Hours volunteered, valued at **\$10,348**

*These hours were dedicated to educating residents and preserving the natural resources of Antrim County*



## EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER

In Antrim County, Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Volunteers contributed 309 hours of service, valued at \$10,348\* to enhance environmental stewardship, strengthen community education, and promote sustainable gardening practices. These volunteer-led initiatives supported public spaces, engaged residents in hands-on learning, and contributed to healthier ecosystems across the county.

A key initiative took place at Glacial Hills Natural Area, where EMG volunteers led weekly invasive species removal efforts from April through November. Target species included garlic mustard, wild parsnip, bull thistle and Japanese barberry. Removing these invasive species promotes the return of native plants vital to wildlife habitat. Participants and visitors were also educated on the role of native species in ecosystem health and biodiversity.

At Grass River Natural Area and the

Torch Conservation Center, volunteers maintained native plant and pollinator gardens and offered programming to engage the public on the importance of pollinators and flowering plants. In Elk Rapids and Bellaire, volunteers educated visitors and community members in environmentally-friendly gardening practices that protect water quality. Notably, at Elk Rapids' NatureFest, Master Gardener Volunteers and MSU Extension staff hosted a *Smart Gardening* outreach table where attendees created native wildflower seed balls to plant at home—combining fun with hands-on education.



A highlight of the year was the installation of a new pollinator demonstration garden at the Antrim County Government Center. Designed and installed in partnership with county staff, the garden features native Michigan plants to support bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Interpretive signage helps educate visitors about the role of pollinators and how they can support them through thoughtful plant choices.

Through hands-on projects and community engagement, MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers continue to make meaningful contributions to environmental stewardship and public education in Antrim County.

If you're passionate about plants, community service, and environmental stewardship, consider becoming an MSU Extension Master Gardener. Visit [www.canr.msu.edu/master\\_gardener\\_volunteer\\_program/](http://www.canr.msu.edu/master_gardener_volunteer_program/) to learn how you can get involved and make a difference in our communities.



# 4-H PROGRAM

*"It's very eye opening to go learn about potential careers as a senior that isn't very sure what career I want yet"*

*-Drake Koepke (Bellaire H.S. Senior Seminar)*



## 4-H PROGRAMMING

### LEADERSHIP-BEHIND THE SCENES: ANTRIM COUNTY

In 2024, Antrim County 4-H partnered with Bellaire High School educator Dr. Tiffany Sutter to deliver the *Behind-the-Scenes* program to the Class of 2025. Over the course of 12 weeks, nine students engaged in hands-on visits to 11 county departments and agencies, gaining valuable insight into the roles and functions of local government.

### DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

- **Administration/Planning:** Students met with the County Administrator and Human Resources Director to learn about their roles in managing the county's workforce, budgeting, and strategic planning for the County's future.
- **Antrim Conservation District:** The Antrim Conservation District (ACD) promotes responsible land and water use through sustainable conservation practices that protect natural resources. During their visit, students had the unique

opportunity to wade into the Cedar River to search for aquatic invertebrates—key indicators of stream health that help assess water quality.

- **Parks & Recreation:** Students toured Barnes Park, from the campground to the beachfront, gaining insight into the work involved in maintaining and managing the county's public recreation areas.
- **Emergency Services:** This department focuses on planning and coordinating responses to low-probability, high-impact events. Students learned about the wide range of scenarios, from natural disasters to public events, that fall under the scope of Emergency Services.
- **Sheriff/911 Center:** Students met with the Under Sheriff and Deputies to learn about the department's various services, including 911 response, civil processing, FOIA requests, handgun permits, and road, marine, and snow patrol. They also toured the jail, courthouse and 911 Center.

- **Grass River Natural Area:** GRNA serves as a protected outdoor living laboratory for exploration and learning. During their visit, students hiked through the forest and swamplands, identifying native plants, birds, and wildlife along the way. Their journey culminated with a visit to the river, where they gained further insights into the local ecosystem.
- **County Clerk:** Students met with the County Clerk to learn about the crucial role the office plays in maintaining official records and overseeing county elections. They also had the opportunity to visit the vault, where they viewed historical county record books, gaining insight into the preservation of important documents.
- **Antrim County Airport:** At the county airport, students met with the Airport Manager to learn about the operations and management of aviation services. They also toured the facility, gaining firsthand knowledge of the logistics involved in maintaining an airport and supporting both private and commercial flights.

# 4-H PROGRAM



## BELLAIRE H.S. SENIOR SEMINAR

- **County Prosecutor:** Students met with the Judge and County Prosecutor for an invaluable Q & A session, gaining insight into the judicial and legal processes. They also attended Circuit Court proceedings, where they observed real-life trials and sentencings in action.
- **Dams Operator:** During their meeting with the Dams Operator, students learned how dam systems are managed to control water levels, prevent flooding, and support environmental conservation. They also explored the Hydroelectric Dam in Elk Rapids and learned about the safety responsibilities involved in operating this critical infrastructure.

government operates and serves the community.

The Behind the Scenes: Antrim County program allowed students to connect their classroom learning in civics and government to real-world applications through meaningful, face-to-face interactions. The Antrim County 4-H Program looks forward to continuing this impactful partnership and hopes to expand it to include additional school districts in the future.



## PROGRAM IMPACT

Behind the Scenes: Antrim County provided Senior Seminar students with a unique opportunity to engage directly with elected and appointed officials while gaining firsthand insight into the functions of local government. Since civics education at Bellaire High School primarily focuses on the federal level, these experiences offered valuable perspective on how county

sustainability, reduced waste, and encouraged upcycling while offering a fun, creative outlet for residents. With strong community support – including a donation of 150 shirts from Short’s Brewing Company’s Bellaire Pub – the program thrived.

In collaboration with Bellaire and Mancelona High Schools, students created totes while learning about sustainability and local food insecurity. Guided by Communities in Schools Director Amy Derrer, Mancelona students created totes for the *Iron Vault*, a school-based store that improves access to food and clothing. Bellaire High School students in Mrs. Sutter’s 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes crafted bags for the *Little Free Food Library*, a new food pantry in Elk Rapids. Members of A Backyard Bunch 4-H Club also made and donated totes for the same pantry, further showcasing youth leadership and service.

## T-SHIRTS FOR TOTES CAMPAIGN

Antrim County MSU Extension 4-H introduced the *T-Shirts for Totes* program to the community, transforming gently used or discarded t-shirts into reusable bags. This hands-on initiative promoted

By repurposing t-shirts into bags for local pantries, the program fosters eco-conscious practices while helping redirect resources toward food access, creating a more sustainable, community-focused model of support.

# 4-H PROGRAM



## 2024 MARKET LIVESTOCK PROGRAMS

The most popular program for Antrim County 4-H youth in 2024 was the Market Livestock Project, which culminated in participation at the Antrim County and Northwestern Michigan Fairs. To prepare, youth were required to gain a solid understanding of the business, science, and management involved in raising market animals. Each participant documented their learning and goals in a comprehensive project workbook, which included breed research, feed and expense records, weight tracking, and efficiency calculations.

Leading up to the fair, members were expected to attend a project planning meeting, participate in livestock workshops or clinics, and contribute to fairground preparations through organized work bees. During the fair, 4-H youth took on additional responsibilities such as guest services and grounds maintenance—demonstrating both their commitment to the program and their growing leadership skills.

Youth from our clubs were successful in showmanship and market categories at the Antrim County and Northwestern Michigan Fairs.

**2 Steer, 9 Sheep, 2 Goats, 3 Swine, 2 Rabbits and 2 Ducks**  
*Placed as Grand Champion, Reserve Champion, or First Place in Market and Showmanship at the Antrim County Fair*

## SUMMER READING PROGRAM

In 2024, Antrim County 4-H proudly partnered with the Bellaire Public Library for its annual Summer Reading Program, offering youth a fun and educational experience that blended literacy with hands-on learning. As part of the program, Antrim County 4-H staff and volunteers joined one of the weekly reading sessions, where they read a book about canoeing—introducing children to the joys of outdoor adventure and the importance of water safety and exploration.

Following the reading, participants engaged in creative, water-themed crafts that reinforced the story’s message while encouraging self-expression, fine motor skill development, and a stronger connection to nature. The event sparked curiosity, promoted reading, and created a welcoming space for learning outside the classroom.

This collaboration reflects 4-H’s mission to support positive youth development through experiential learning. By engaging with the Summer Reading Program, 4-H helped promote literacy, foster a love of reading, and strengthen community ties. Families left with smiles, stories and handmade crafts – making it a memorable and enriching summer experience.

Building on this success, Antrim County 4-H is excited to expand the program in the coming year by partnering with additional area libraries. By bringing more interactive reading experiences to local communities, we aim to inspire even more youth to explore books, creativity, and lifelong learning.

# SNAP-ED PROGRAM



**\$4,500 SNAP-Ed grant dollars awarded to Antrim County, only available through SNAP-Ed entities**

**\$1,500**  
Cherryland Middle PASS Program- Elk Rapids



**\$1,500**  
Moms & Tots Center- Ellsworth



## SNAP-ED PROGRAMMING HYDROPONICS SYSTEM AT CHERRYLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

The PASS (Individualized Transition Readiness Education) Program at Cherryland Middle School in Elk Rapids wanted to incorporate gardening and cooking into the curriculum. The classroom, led by Special Education Teacher Julie Greene, is a self-contained specialized classroom for 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> graders. The program focuses on providing individualized instruction and hands-on learning opportunities that prepare students for life beyond high school. As part of the classroom’s post-high school transition readiness goals, the curriculum emphasizes practical life skills such as personal health, nutrition, and food preparation.

The students in this program thrive on interactive education like gardening and cooking but faced barriers

including a short growing season, maintenance and time. The PASS program was the perfect program to apply for the SNAP-Ed Mini Grant, a grant offered only through SNAP-Ed employees like MSU Extension Community Nutrition Instructor Lanae Bump.

Through coaching, MSUE was able to apply for and was awarded a \$1,500 SNAP-Ed Mini Grant—fully funding the purchase of a hydroponics system for the PASS Program! Program teacher Julie has students almost entirely responsible for maintenance of the hydroponics system. Students have learned how to:

- Test pH levels
- Make meals for the class including produce harvested
- Adjust pH levels
- Plant seedlings into the hydroponics system
- Harvest different varieties of leafy greens, edible flowers, herbs and peppers

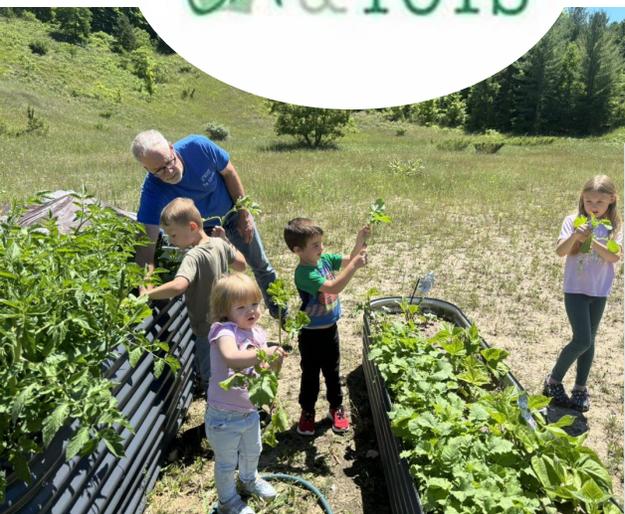
- Prepare the varieties of produce harvested

Students have even picked edible flowers to deliver to teachers on their birthdays. Here is what their teacher has to say about the impacts of this hydroponics system in the classroom:

“Several students have food issues and have made noticeable differences once they started cooking in class. Many are trying foods for the first time. Parents say that it is making a huge difference, and students are thriving because they are invested in the food they grow. The joy and confidence that gardening and being in this class has brought is huge!”

-Julie Greene  
PASS Program Teacher

# SNAP-ED PROGRAM



 **10 pounds** of produce donated to Ellsworth Food Pantry including:

- Lettuce
- Carrots
- Radishes
- Tomatoes

## MOMS & TOTS CENTER

Moms & Tots Center along with Good Samaritan Family Services (The Good Sam) were also awarded Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change (PSE) Mini Grants to support their community-focused initiatives. Each site received grant application assistance through MSU Extension’s Community Nutrition Instructor, Lanae Bump, and coaching on how to use funds appropriately and serve their audiences in the best possible way. They each were awarded \$1,500, totaling \$3,000 that will impact, but not be limited to, the Ellsworth community.

Moms & Tots Center was awarded \$1,500 to build a community learning garden. The funds were used to purchase four durable raised beds and gardening tools. MSU Extension was also able to connect Manna Food Project to this project to cover remaining needs. Manna was able to donate hundreds of produce seed packets that went towards starting the garden, went home to families participating in the garden project and towards Good Samaritan Family

Services as an offering in their food pantry. Additionally, Manna’s partner, Bill’s Farm Market, contributed over four yards of soil—a donation that significantly reduced costs for Moms & Tots and made the project more accessible and sustainable.

The garden provided a space for families to engage in hands-on learning and gardening opportunities, impacting more than 90 individuals. Children as young as one year old participated in various gardening projects, fostering early exposure to healthy habits and nature. As families visited Moms & Tots, they had the opportunity to help plant seeds into the new raised beds, help care for the garden, and harvest plants as produce came in throughout the season.

The harvested produce was featured at several family-friendly events hosted by Moms & Tots, including Taco and Game Nights, which served over 30 participants. Any remaining produce—more than 10 pounds in total—was donated to Good Samaritan Family Services, extending the garden’s benefits even further into the community.

Good Samaritan Family Services used their grant funds to purchase compost bins. While food pantries do their best to avoid any amount of food waste, The Good Sam saw an opportunity to turn any unavoidable expired food into nutrient-rich compost. This compost will be shared with Moms & Tots for use in their community garden and offered to families at the pantry for use in their home gardens! The compost bins were installed in the fall of 2024 and will have compost ready to go for the spring of 2025.



# ELK RAPIDS NEWS

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75c



## “A little extra help”

BY BARR MOGHER  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

There's a new library in town, but it won't be loaning books. In fact, it won't be loaning anything. The Little Free Food Library (LFFL) will give away non-perishable, healthy food to anyone who needs a little extra help. There will be no application to fill out, no questions asked, and no one scrutinizing the choices "shoppers" make.

"It's dignified access to food," said Glen Crowell, a Rapid City resident who founded the local nonprofit Do a Little Good in 2018. "That's the long and short of it."

Three years ago, Crowell served on a University of Michigan research panel to study food insecurity in Michigan. The statewide survey sought to discover why those in need were not necessarily taking advantage of sources of free food.

"There's a surplus of food available, and the needs are great, so why aren't people getting the food they need?" Crowell said.

While the survey revealed various answers to that question and a multitude of complicating factors, Crowell said her takeaway was focused: "People in need are often simply unable to get to food pantries and other distribution sites during the hours of operation due to work schedules and/or transportation issues. When the hours arrive of the success of a 24-hour food 'sharing shack' in the parking lot of a church outside Kalamazoo, Crowell knew what her next project would be.

She joined forces with a group of like-minded



The Elk Rapids Food Coalition representatives include Aaron Hill (Assistant Director at Elk Rapids District Library), Larisa Rump (Community Relations Director at MSU Extension), Glen Crowell (President, Do a Little Good), Pamela Williams (Director, Elk Rapids District Library), Gary Charanowich (Mayor, City of Elk Rapids), and other community members.



individuals representing local nonprofits, service organizations, businesses, and churches in the spring of 2023 to form the Elk Rapids Food Coalition to design, build, stock, and operate the LFFL. They raised \$15,000 to purchase the custom-built, 14-foot by 20-foot structure and another \$8,000 to add electricity, insulation, heat, and air conditioning. A site on the Elk Rapids District Library property on Carmo Highway was prepared in November, and the LFFL building was set in place in December.

The Elk Rapids Food Coalition says the 247-uramanned food pantry will be ready to open late spring or early summer to begin providing supplemental food products "to anyone of any age and any income level without shame or judgment." They add that "renter and owner-carriers will ensure the safety of pantry users and the security of the community asset."

Funding from coalition members and community donations plus goods provided from area food rescue organizations will keep the LFFL stocked with nutritious non-perishable food. The LFFL plans to add coolers and

SERVING THE ELK RAPIDS ALDEN KEWADIN RAPID CITY EASTPORT TORCH RIVER BRIDGE WILLIAMSBURG ACME AREAS



# SNAP-ED PROGRAM



## ELK RAPIDS DISTRICT LIBRARY

## LITTLE FREE FOOD LIBRARY

The Elk Rapids Food Coalition is breaking ground with the launch of a revolutionary new food pantry. This collaborative team is made up of local food pantries, Do a Little Good, MSU Extension and the Elk Rapids District Library. Together, this coalition was able to develop a plan and build a 14-by-20-foot supplemental food pantry that will be open 24/7—providing safe, reliable access to food at any time, day or night.

Many residents of rural communities have reported difficulties accessing food, as documented in food access studies. The hours of rural pantries are often limited, usually interfering with working hours, while stigma or fear of judgment in tight-knit communities can further discourage use. This new pantry model offers a dignified, self-access approach—available any time of day—allowing residents to obtain food whenever they need it. To ensure the safety of both residents and the food supply, the pantry will be

monitored by livestream cameras. These measures will also help guard against liability concerns and keep an eye out for the occasional wildlife that wander our Northern Michigan communities.

Over the past year, the coalition secured over \$23,000 through grants and fundraising to build, stock and manage the pantry. Once open, the pantry will start off with shelf-stable items and occasional fresh produce, with plans of adding freezers and refrigerators for dairy and meat products within the next few years. Looking ahead, the coalition also aims to incorporate edible landscaping, partner with community gardens and participate in community events to further support local food access and engagement.

In December of 2024, the Little Free Food Library broke ground at the future site of the Elk Rapids District Library. The pantry is targeted to be open by the end of 2025, permitting weather and site construction. In the meantime, coalition members are working hard to secure continued

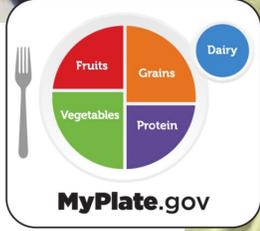
funding, development of pantry best practices, creating a non-invasive survey to track participation, and continue building community support.

## SNAP-ED SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

MSU Extension has continued to deliver impactful SNAP-Ed programming, reaching students through a variety of curriculum. Educational sessions have been implemented at several school sites, including Mancelona High School, Mancelona Middle School, John R. Rodger Elementary, and Ellsworth Elementary School. These programs run for 6 to 12 weeks, offering a series of interactive lessons focused on nutrition, physical activity, and basic cooking skills.

Students learn everything from the USDA MyPlate food groups, to food safety to food resource management on a budget! These lessons are designed to be age-appropriate and engaging, encouraging students to build practical, lifelong skills. Whether

# SNAP-ED PROGRAM



they're learning how to read a nutrition label, prepare a simple, balanced meal, or understand portion sizes, students walk away with tools they can use to make healthier choices for themselves and their families.

By partnering with schools across the county, MSU Extension helps create a strong foundation for long-term wellness and food literacy—empowering the next generation to take charge of their health and well-being. The continued presence of SNAP-Ed programming in Antrim County reflects a sustained commitment to promoting healthier communities through education and outreach.

## MANCELONA SCHOOLS

Mancelona Middle School partnered with MSU Extension to host a dynamic summer program in 2024 focused on empowering students with essential kitchen skills. Seventeen students participated in the program, where they learned how to safely prepare afterschool snacks and simple meals on their own—without relying on parental assistance. The program emphasized

hands-on learning, food safety, and basic nutrition, helping students build confidence and independence in the kitchen. This impactful initiative garnered media attention and was featured in a professionally produced video highlighting the program's success and student experiences. You can watch the video here: <https://cisnwm.org/#>.

Mancelona High School continued its longstanding partnership with MSU Extension to provide SNAP-Ed nutrition and cooking education in the LifeSkills classroom for the sixth consecutive year. This year, the program expanded to include new nutrition-focused activities aimed at promoting healthy habits throughout the school day.



**248** students participated in Healthy Hydration Day

One notable change stemmed from a school policy allowing only water in classrooms—originally implemented

to prevent stains on the newly installed floors. Through collaboration and coaching with MSU Extension, the policy evolved into a positive health initiative that promotes better hydration and healthier beverage choices.

To support this effort, the LifeSkills classroom installed a water refill station, making it easier for students to stay hydrated throughout the day without classroom disruptions. MSU Extension also partnered with Communities in Schools to host a Healthy Hydration Day for all 248 students. Each student received a reusable water bottle and sampled fruit and herb infused water with ingredients like lemon and mint. Posters and hydration recipes were shared around the school, and some restrooms still display “pCharts”, showing hydration levels based on urine color.

What began as a maintenance measure has turned into a school-wide effort to encourage healthier habits—and students now see the water-only rule not as a restriction, but as encouragement to stay hydrated and make healthier choices throughout the day!

# PRODUCT CENTER

## PRODUCT CENTER IMPACTS

- 12 Businesses
- 41 Counseling Hours
- \$16,003 total sales growth in 2024
- Over \$21.8 million in annual sales (combined)
- 319 total employees (combined)
- 2 jobs retained
- 1 new license secured



## MSU PRODUCT CENTER BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The Michigan State University Product Center supports entrepreneurs in Northwest Michigan who are launching or growing businesses in food and agriculture. From farm-based products to value-added goods, the center provides expert guidance through business planning, market research and feasibility analysis.

Through its Traverse City-based innovation counselor, the Product Center offers personalized guidance to help local entrepreneurs turn ideas into viable products and services. In 2024 alone, staff worked with 12 entrepreneurs in Antrim County, delivering 41 hours of direct client support.

By fostering local business development, the Product Center plays a key role in strengthening the regional economy and building a resilient, community-based food system.

## EXPLORING COOPERATIVE SOLUTIONS IN A CHALLENGING MARKET

Farmers across Michigan are navigating mounting pressures—from

rising input and marketing costs to volatile commodity prices and broader affordability challenges. These conditions make it harder for individuals and small businesses to thrive independently.

Cooperative business structures offer a powerful alternative. For farmers, co-ops can lower costs and strengthen market access through shared efforts. For individuals, they can provide collaborative solutions to sourcing goods and services that might otherwise be out of reach. When used effectively, cooperatives create flexible, community-driven responses to economic challenges.

To help farmers explore this model, MSU Extension partnered with the Crosshatch Center for Art & Ecology to present “Co-ops 101” an event introducing cooperative principals and the steps to co-op development. Held in Traverse City on March 2, 2024, “Co-ops 101” brought together entrepreneurs and cooperative experts in a hybrid virtual and in-person format. Presenters Dr. Chris Bardenhagen and Parker Jones, MBA, offered in-depth insights on legal due diligence and business planning, complemented by community-based perspectives from Daniel Marbury of the Crosshatch Center. The event demonstrated how technical expertise and local knowledge can

work together to support sustainable, regional economic growth.

By equipping people with the tools to assess and implement cooperative strategies, this program supports informed decision-making and builds momentum for resilient, people-centered economies.



## CONNECTING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE

Held May 30-31, 2024 in Cadillac, the annual Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) Conference brought together 111 attendees from across the state, including 21 from MSU Extension District 3, to explore strategies for building resilient local economies.

Designed to support chambers of commerce, downtown development authorities, municipal leaders, and economic development professionals, the conference focused on practical approaches for strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems through community collaboration and place-based innovation.

# PRODUCT CENTER



*“This was a phenomenal summit. The organizers did a great job of bringing so many voices and perspectives to the table from many key facets of this multidimensional industry.”*

-Agritourism Summit attendee

## AGRITOURISM SUMMIT

MSU Extension, in partnership with local leaders, proudly hosted the first-ever Agritourism Summit on May 7-8, 2024. This exciting event brought together farmers, elected officials, and community members from across Michigan to explore how supporting on-farm tourism and small businesses can strengthen rural communities. Through presentations, tours, and discussions, the summit showcased how agritourism can create jobs, attract visitors, and build stronger connections between agriculture and the public. It also emphasized the role of agritourism in preserving farmland, celebrating local culture, and boosting the long-term success of rural communities.

The two-day event kicked off with a guided bus tour through the Grand Traverse region, where 65 participants visited several agritourism spots, including Jacob’s Farm, Leelanau Cheese, Tandem Cider, and Nine Bean Rows. The tour concluded with a celebratory soiree at the Farm Club in Leelanau County, where attendees enjoyed locally grown food and spent the evening building relationships and sharing ideas.

On May 8, the Agritourism Summit convened 165 participants from 32 Michigan counties at the Hagerty Center in Traverse City. The day was filled with panel discussions that featured a wide range of speakers, including local farmers, city officials, and experts from MSU Extension. Panelists openly shared their real-life experiences—the good and the challenging—giving attendees a deeper understanding of how agritourism really works. Within MSU Extension, teams from the Community, Food & Environment Institute (CFEI), the Agriculture and Agribusiness Institute (AABI), and the Health and Nutrition Institute (HNI) worked closely together to make the event a success.

*“The tour of the various farms was eye opening. Size didn’t matter-being creative, willing to take a leap of faith, and working within agritourism made the difference.”*

-Agritourism Summit attendee

Presentations addressed critical topics such as farm stress, entrepreneurship, rural economics, the Michigan Right to Farm Act, and the evolving landscape of local policy and regulation.

Evaluation results reflected the summit’s strong impact:

- **85%** of participants reported a better understanding of the needs of farmers, elected officials, or others working in agritourism
- **88%** felt their knowledge was enhanced in ways that will help them be more effective in their roles
- **91%** said they plan to apply what they learned to future decision-making

Following the success and excitement of the first summit, MSU Extension is thrilled to announce that the next Agritourism Summit will be held in Antrim County in 2026! Plans are already in progress to engage local partners, showcase regional agritourism businesses, and strengthen collaboration between farmers, policymakers, and community leaders.

What's behind the decline in northern Michigan's whitefish population?



by Trevor Roubadeaux | Mon, August 5th 2024 at 9:33 AM  
Updated Mon, August 5th 2024 at 6:47 PM



**MARK BREEDERLAND**  
MICHIGAN SEA GRANT EXTENSION PROGRAM EDUCATOR



GOVT / SEAGRANT



BEBOT & PIXIE DRONE

NEW COMMISSIONER SCHOOL

New Commissioner School 2024 offered foundational training for both newly elected and experienced county commissioners, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to govern effectively. This comprehensive program provided participants with a deeper understanding of the complexities of county governance, clarified the roles and responsibilities of commissioners, and offered practical insights into county finance, budgeting, and strategic decision-making. In addition, attendees explored best practices for collaboration, communication, and policy development to better serve their communities.

The 2024 New Commissioner School was designed with flexibility in mind, offering a hybrid learning format. Participants could choose between self-paced online modules or live webinars held throughout November. These virtual sessions were followed by full-day, in-person workshops held in December, providing an opportunity for

hands-on learning, peer networking, and engagement with subject matter experts.

SEA GRANT

In 2024, the Michigan Sea Grant Extension program continued its mission to deliver high-impact outreach and education, supporting Great Lakes stewardship across coastal communities—including Antrim County and the surrounding region. With its mission to bring science to the shoreline, Michigan Sea Grant led a variety of initiatives focused on environmental resilience, water quality, and sustainable use of Great Lakes resources.

A key highlight of the year was the Freshwater Summit, held in October of 2024, where over 85 people gathered for a full day of presentations and dialogue on critical regional water issues. Topics included Grand Traverse Bay fisheries and ongoing Lake Whitefish restoration, updates on the FishPass project at Union Street Dam, and a broader view of Great Lakes ecosystem challenges. The event provided a

valuable opportunity for local leaders, researchers, and residents to engage with cutting-edge science and policy developments.

Sea Grant also advanced its work on shoreline stewardship and marina sustainability, including support for the Clean Marinas Program. This included the use of innovative tools like the PixieDrone and BeBot beach robot, which help remove macroplastics from beaches before they break down into harmful microplastics. These efforts directly support cleaner, healthier recreational and working waterfronts.

In addition to public events and field work, Sea Grant Extension professionals were a trusted resource for local residents, answering questions on a wide range of topics—from invasive species and boat wash stations to fluctuating lake levels, erosion, fisheries trends, and resilient shoreline development. These efforts ensure that Great Lakes communities, including those in Antrim County, have access to the best available science and practical guidance to support sustainable, thriving shorelines.

## STAFF HOUSED IN ANTRIM COUNTY

NAME	ROLE	PHONE	EMAIL
Jennifer Berkey	District Director	231-922-4821	berkeyj@msu.edu
Kristy Oosterhouse	4-H Supervising & Staff Development Educator	231-533-8818	oosterh6@msu.edu
Lanae Bump	Community Nutrition Instructor	231-533-8818	hannalan@msu.edu
Katherine Rogers	Office Manager	231-533-8818	katherine.rogers@affiliate.msu.edu
Coriane Laird-Fleet	Support Staff	231-533-8818	coriane.lairdfleet@affiliate.msu.edu

## MSU EXTENSION STAFF SERVING ANTRIM COUNTY

Chris Bardenhagen	Farm Business Management	231-256-9888	bardenh1@msu.edu
Terra Bogart	Nutrition & Physical Activity	231-922-4630	bogartte@msu.edu
Mark Breederland	Sea Grant & Coastal Communities Devt.	231-922-4628	breederl@msu.edu
Sam Bailey	Community Prosperity	231-582-6482	baile485@msu.edu
Julie Crick	Forestry & Natural Resources	989-275-7179	crickjul@msu.edu
Christina Curell	Cover Crop & Soil Health	231-745-2732	curellc@msu.edu
Mary Dunckel	Agriculture Literacy	989-354-9875	dunckelm@msu.edu
Phillip Durst	Beef	989-345-0692	durstp@msu.edu
Sarah Eichberger	Nutrition & Physical Activity	231-922-4836	eichber2@msu.edu
David Emmel	Community Prosperity	231-582-6482	david@northernlakes.net
Charles Gould	Bioenergy & Conservation	616-994-4547	gouldm@msu.edu
Kevin Gould	Food & Animal Systems	616-527-5357	gouldk@msu.edu
Tom Guthrie	Pork/Equine	517-788-4292	guthril9@msu.edu
Parker Jones	Product Center Innovation Counseling	231-922-4621	jonesp28@msu.edu
Philip Kaatz	Forage/Commercial Agriculture	810-667-0341	kaatz@msu.edu
Heidi Lindberg	Greenhouse & Nursery	616-994-4701	wollaege@msu.edu
Erin Lizotte	Integrated Pest Management	231-944-6504	taylo548@msu.edu
Kara Lynch	Food Safety	989-317-4079	lynchka4@msu.edu
Michael Metzger	Small Ruminants & Foragers	517-788-4292	metzgerm@msu.edu
Esmail Nasrollahiazar	Wine Grapes	231-256-9888	nasroll2@msu.edu
Dennis Pennington	Wheat Systems	269-832-0497	pennin34@msu.edu
Emily Proctor	Tribal Governance	231-439-8927	proctor8@msu.edu
Bethany Prykucki	Leadership & Community Engagement	231-258-3320	prykucki@msu.edu
Mary Reilly	Government & Public Policy, Land Use	231-889-4277	reillym8@msu.edu
Remington Rice	Health & Farm Stress Educator	231-882-0025	riceremi@msu.edu
Nikki Rothwell	Commercial Fruit	231-946-1510	rothwell3@msu.edu
J Robert Serrine	Community Food Systems/Hops	231-256-9888	serrine@msu.edu
Michael Staton	Soybeans	269-673-0370	staton@msu.edu
Nate Walton	Home Horticulture/Master Gardener	231-256-9888	waltonn2@msu.edu
Benjamin Werling	Vegetable Crop Production	231-873-2129	werlingb@msu.edu
Wendy Wieland	Product Center Innovation Counselling	231-348-1770	wieland5@msu.edu
Samantha Wolfe	Agriculture & Occupational Health	231-882-0025	wolfesa4@msu.edu
Casey Zangaro	Swine	989-872-5292	zangaroc@msu.edu