

BARRY COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Message from Kai Gritter, District Director

In 2025, MSU Extension delivered impactful education in Barry County through youth development, community health, and agriculture programs. Growth in 4-H participation, conservation education, volunteer engagement, and field-based learning reflected strong local partnerships. This work demonstrates Extension's role as a trusted resource. We thank our Barry County partners and stakeholders for their collaboration, confidence, and ongoing investment in community success.



1,021 Participants from the county attending programs



940 participants attending **33** programs hosted in the county



39 Answered 'Ask Extension' questions



276 Programs (across the state) attended by participants from this county



47 soil test samples processed for Barry County



324 Total volunteers



14 Community partnerships



801 Youth enrolled in 4-H



1,200 youth participants



45 county 4-H clubs



\$10,419.79

4-H volunteer hourly total value



317 total 4-H volunteers



Michigan 4-H State Horse Show

The 4-H State Horse Show is an annual event that brings together 4-H members from counties across Michigan. In 2025, the show took place at the MSU Pavilion from August 14-17. During the three-day show, members competed in classes such as English, dressage, Western, trail, jumping and gymkhana. Youth were selected by their county 4-H programs to participate in this event. A total of **15 Barry County youth** attended the 2025 State Horse Show!



Exploration Days

In 2025, **five Barry County youth** attended MSU Extension's 4-H Exploration Days event. Each year approximately 2,000 youth (ages 12-19) and chaperones from across Michigan attend. This fun, MSU pre-college program is designed to: increase responsibility, confidence, independence, accountability, problem-solving, decision-making and time management skills. It is also designed to increase communication, teamwork, citizenship, leadership skills, foster ability to meet new people and make new friends, develop and expand career and personal interests, increase college exploration and access to MSU campus and its resources, and develop social and academic skills needed for a successful transition to college and life as an adult. Exploration Days also gives youth opportunities to try new things that may not be available in their county.



How Fair Sparks 4-H Growth

After this year's fair, a family shared how much they enjoyed their first 4-H fair experience. The excitement and engagement they experienced inspired them to start planning projects for the next year, including exploring STEM opportunities like robotics. The parents were so motivated by their experience that the father decided to pursue becoming a leader in their local 4-H group to support science projects! This story highlights how fair experiences can introduce families to new animals, projects, and local opportunities they may not have known existed. Positive experiences in 4-H encourage continued participation, spark curiosity, and inspire families to become more involved, creating a ripple effect that brings new participants and leaders into the program.

The goal of the 4-H Youth Development model is for 4-H to "provide kids with community, mentors, and learning opportunities to develop the skills they need to create positive change in their lives." You need to look no further than the **amazing staff, youth, and families in the Barry County 4-H program!**



A Community Connection in Action



While hosting a youth S.T.E.A.M. program at the Hastings Library, [LilyRose Arriaga](#), our 4-H Program Coordinator (pictured above), had the opportunity to connect with engaged families. One mom, who had brought her children to every session, struck up a conversation, sharing that she had recently purchased chickens, and while it had been a fun and educational experience for her kids, they were feeling overwhelmed and unsure of where to turn for help.

Lily asked if she had ever heard of 4-H. She hadn't, which gave Lily the chance to share how 4-H provides hands-on learning opportunities in areas like agriculture, science, and community involvement. *"I told her specifically about the poultry project and how it connects youth and families with experienced leaders who have been raising and showing poultry for years. It seemed like a perfect fit for her family to both learn more and become more involved in the Barry County 4-H program."*



Lily shared her business card, and a few weeks later, the lady emailed, asking how to sign her kids up for 4-H, and looking for resources to help them learn more about how to care for their chickens. That simple conversation at the library turned into the beginning of what could be a long-lasting connection with 4-H and all the benefits it offers!

Four Senses, Endless Curiosity



In 2025, the YMCA Y Time Garden program introduced a "Four Senses" theme, with areas of the garden designed to engage taste, smell, sight, and touch. The garden was divided into sections featuring different plants and sensory experiences, allowing a total of **37 students** to explore and learn in ways that matched their individual interests. The students were highly engaged and enthusiastic about interacting with the garden, and the lead caregiver shared that she was *"impressed with how focused and curious the students were throughout the program."* By creating a multi-sensory, interactive space, the garden successfully captured students' attention and provided a meaningful, hands-on learning experience that encouraged exploration, curiosity, and appreciation for nature.

2025 Michigan 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl

Of the 67 4-H youth participants in the Michigan 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl, **12 were from Barry County!** The Michigan 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl Contest is where individuals and teams from across the state come to MSU to put their dairy industry and animal science knowledge to the test. The winning teams and high achieving individuals are recognized at the Michigan 4-H Youth Dairy Days awards banquet. The champion overall senior team from the contest is provided with the opportunity to represent Michigan 4-H at the National 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl at the North American International Livestock Exposition, held annually in Louisville, Kentucky.

 **88** client consultations

 **21** participants in Beekeeping or Pollinator programs

 **161** participants in county ag programs.

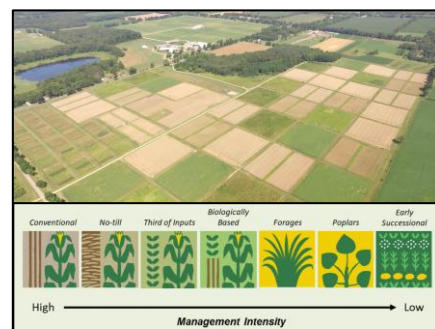


Kellogg Biological Station Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (KBS LTAR) Impacts

In January, **85 participants** joined the KBS LTAR for the second annual Winter Summit for Scientists and Stakeholders. The purpose of the Summit was to further explore priority research topics identified at the 2024 Summit, identify emergent synergies with the community, and strengthen relationships between scientists and stakeholders in the long-term ecological research (LTER) community. [Christine Charles](#) (pictured left) presented a summary of findings from long-term no-till use and discussed practice considerations.

No-till systems require management customizations (equipment, variety, later planting date, etc.) based on region and soil type.

- **Crop yields remain competitive** with conventional tillage and improve over time for key crops such as corn and soybeans.
- **Reduced fuel and labor costs** improve farm profitability over the long term despite initial equipment investments.
- **Improved soil health** through increased soil carbon, better water infiltration, and reduced erosion strengthens resilience to extreme weather.
- **Greatest benefits** are achieved by combining no-till with cover crops and sound nutrient management to support sustainable, productive agriculture.



Drone image of KBS LTER.
Photo Credit: Ruben Ulbirsch, KBS LTER



During the Annual Michigan Vernal Pool Partnership (MVPP) meeting, Peter Martin, a doctoral student at Michigan State University and the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station, presented “**Vernal Pool Damselflies in a Changing World.**” He explored Michigan’s vernal pool damselflies, their ecology and adaptations, and shared research on thermal ecology, highlighting how environmental conditions influence freshwater biodiversity and ecosystem resilience!

Fun Facts about the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station (KBS)

- **Established in 1988** and located in **Barry County** (3700 East Gull Lake Dr., Hickory Corners, MI).
- **3,873 acres of discovery:** KBS is a living laboratory with forests, wetlands, lakes, streams, and farmland.
- **MSU's largest off-campus education complex:** It is one of North America's premier inland field stations for ecological research.
- **Science for everyone:** KBS welcomes thousands of visitors each year through tours, educational programs, and volunteer opportunities.
- **Supporting educators:** The KBS K–12 Partnership connects teachers with scientists to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards.

For more information, explore <https://www.kbs.msu.edu>

Advancing Farmer-Led Innovation through the KBS LTAR Field Day!

In Michigan, there is a growing need for practical, research-based guidance on how to transition from conventional (business-as-usual) systems to more resilient, regenerative approaches. However, barriers remain, particularly around understanding economic tradeoffs, implementing new practices like cover crops or reduced tillage, and accessing long-term research data that reflects real-world conditions. MSU Extension co-hosts the KBS LTAR Field Day to address these challenges by connecting stakeholders to ongoing research and practical demonstrations. The goal is to improve awareness, build confidence in adopting conservation practices, and foster collaboration across farmers, researchers, agencies, and industry professionals.

In September, **140 participants** gathered for the third annual KBS LTAR Field Day. The event highlighted ongoing research comparing “Business-As-Usual” and “Aspirational” cropping systems and shared insights on profitability, soil health, cover crops, and precision technologies. Demonstrations on sprayer drones, rainfall simulation, and short-stature corn sparked discussions about innovation and resilience in agriculture. Presenters emphasized long-term sustainability through partnerships between farmers and researchers, with attendees noting the value of applying science-based practices to improve soil, water, and profitability.

Attendees valued talks and demonstrations on drone technology, cover crops, crop rotations, and profitability comparisons between systems. Participants also highlighted the value of long-term data, systems-level insights, and opportunities to network with peers and researchers. Attendees described the event as “*very beneficial and informational*,” and one farmer noted feeling “*energized and motivated to take next steps*” after attending. Others highlighted increased understanding of soil health, carbon cycling, and innovative practices such as narrow row systems and short-stature corn.



Christine Charles demonstrated water retention of different land-use soils using a Rainfall Simulator. On the left was soil from BAU (business-as-usual) plots, on the right was soil from ASP (aspirational) plots. Photo Credit, YJ Su.



Sprayer drone demonstration. Photo by Aerin Braunohler.



Participants walked or rode on a tractor on their way to the next talk. Photo by Beau Brockett.



Attendees receiving KBS LTAR agronomy updates from Brook Wilke. Photo by Katie Hepfinger.



Dairy Education

In 2025, **14 farmers from Barry County** utilized Dairy Education programs held by MSU Extension Dairy Educator [Martin Mangual](#) (pictured left). These programs included the West Michigan Dairy Educational Dinner and Farm Focus Group Excite Project at Sand Creek Dairy. The Dairy Education Dinner had 23 attendees representing dairy farmers, veterinarians, and agricultural consultants. Programming reached farmers from five counties in West Michigan directly impacting 92,542 lactating cows and 53,740 replacement animals (heifers and calves)! Additionally, attending consultants provided services to 15 additional herds, which indirectly impacts an estimated 5,000 animals.



The focus of the dinner was on optimizing your milking parlor, with presentations on dairy reproduction strategies, milk quality, and services provided by MSU Extension. All participants surveyed stated they increased their knowledge and planned on implementing changes based on what they learned. Following the event, MSU Extension received multiple follow-up requests seeking parlor evaluations, feed assessments, and worker development services. In addition, Martin also published numerous articles and podcast episodes. Martin also gave interviews and assisted farms with updated HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) information.

TelFarm – Farm Financial Analysis

Farm Business Educator [Jonathan LaPorte](#) (pictured right), worked with producers in Barry County to analyze their farm business. The TelFarm program provides accounting and financial analysis support to farmers across Michigan. These "Whole Farm" and "Enterprise" analysis reports outline the farm's financial situation and cost of production. It requires an updated year-end balance sheet and farm records for all cash transactions in the year. The analysis reconciles their cash transactions with balance sheet information to provide a "production year" viewpoint to make management decisions for their farm business. Part of this process includes check-in meetings and tax estimation. In Barry County, **3 farm operations (9 people)** took advantage of these services offered by MSU Extension.



Dig In!

Dig In is an online educational series of 10 classes for Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs). This is provided so that all EMGs can complete their 10-hour continuing education requirement without cost, from wherever they are located. In 2025, 1,591 people participated in this series in 2025, **9 of whom were from Barry County**.

MI Ag Ideas to Grow With

The 2025 *MI Ag Ideas to Grow With* virtual program was held from February 24 through March 7 and featured more than 40 free educational sessions, attracting over 1,300 participants. The event highlights a broad range of topics across the agricultural industry and provides educational opportunities for individuals interested in food and animal production. Session topics included Animal Agriculture, Beginning Farmer, Field Crop Production, Food Preservation, General Interest, Irrigation, Solar, and Vegetables. Recordings of the sessions are available online at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/miagideas/Recordings/2025-recordings>.

Public Health & Nutrition Programming



241 Nutrition and physical activity participants hosted in Barry County



2 sites received nutrition or Physical Activity Policy System and Environmental sites receiving PSE education within the county



328 Barry County residents participated in health and nutrition programs



6 policy, systems, & environmental changes with two PSE sites



186 Youth & Adults in Barry County who utilized SNAP-ED programs



500 residents were positively impacted with the nine policy, systems, and environmental changes with those PSE sites



"Garden Club" with Delton Kellogg Elementary

The Garden Club at Delton left a lasting impression on both students and staff. Each year, the garden continues to thrive, not just in size, but in community involvement. Students take pride of the work they put into planting, often returning the next year to see "their" lettuce growing again. This sense of ownership and connection keeps them coming back and inspires others to join in.

What started as a simple garden has grown into a shared space of learning, pride, and lasting memories.



Delton Grows Together

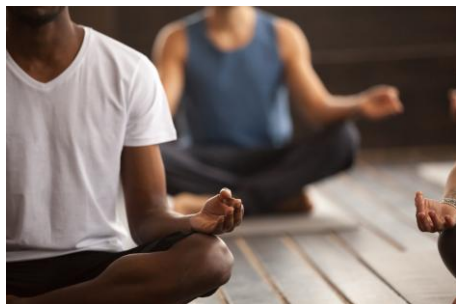
With a surplus of tomato seedlings from the Delton Community Garden, MSU Extension partnered with *The Shack*, a local clothing bank, to provide free tomato plants to area residents. Although *The Shack* rarely distributes food-related items, its commitment to supporting the Garden made this collaboration possible. Delton area families were empowered to grow fresh tomatoes at home, strengthening food access and demonstrating how local partnerships can cultivate healthier, more resilient communities.

SNAP-Ed funding cut in 2025

For 30 years, SNAP-Ed helped people build healthy eating habits and be more active on a limited budget. Following a federal decision to end funding, the program was discontinued after July 4, 2025. Through practical, hands-on education and local partnerships, our Barry County-based Community Nutrition Instructors helped people with limited resources build lifelong skills around nutrition, cooking, physical activity, and budgeting for healthy meals.



Health & Mindfulness



In a continued effort to manage physical and mental health in 2025, **61 Barry County residents** found resources and benefited by participating in several MSU Extension health programs. The sessions explored mindfulness basics such as breathing, moving, eating, walking, taming your busy mind and more. Research has shown that people who are more mindful are generally happier and report less anxiety, symptoms of depression, anger and worries. Some of the topics were:

- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Diabetes Personal Action Towards Health (PATH)
- Brief Practices in Mindfulness
- Keep Moving to Prevent Health Problems
- Sleep Education for Everyone Program (SLEEP)
- Tai Chi for Falls Prevention
- Building Resilience to Avoid Burnout
- Be Kind to Your Mind
- RELAX: Alternatives to Anger
- Teaching Kids Mindful Eating
- Mental Health First Aid
- Influenza Webinar



Food Safety

In 2025, **81 Barry 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 foodborne illnesses. Some examples of the classes attended were:

- ServSafe®
- Preserving Michigan's Harvest
- Selling MI Honey & Maple Syrup
- Serving up Food Safety
- Michigan Cottage Food Law
- Safe Food = Healthy Kids
- MDARD Everyday Food Safety Workshop
- Moving Beyond Cottage Food Law



Get Involved & Learn More!

Visit our [Food and Health website](https://canr.msu.edu/food_health) (canr.msu.edu/food_health)

Subscribe to our [curated email news digests](https://bit.ly/MSUEdigest) (bit.ly/MSUEdigest)
customized to your exact interests
Choose from 75+ topics!

Need a healthy recipe for dinner tonight?
Explore [recipes](#) by scanning the QR code

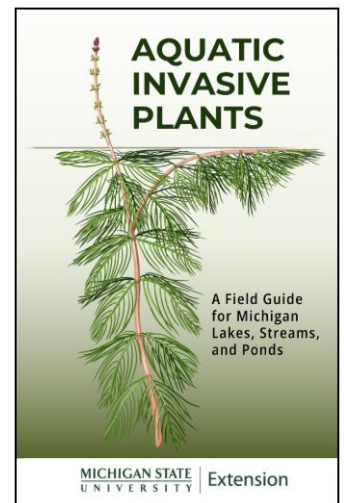


Michigan Clean Water Corps (MiCorps)

[MiCorps](#) is a network of lake and stream volunteer monitoring programs in Michigan. Data collected by volunteers are used in their local communities and by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) for use in water resources management and protection programs.

MSU Extension's **MiCorps Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP)** continued to strengthen water stewardship across Michigan, engaging more than 400 volunteers who monitored 337 lakes statewide. By collecting reliable water quality data, volunteers provide critical information that supports local and state resource management while increasing public awareness of water quality issues. Through training, collaboration, and community engagement, MiCorps empowers community members to protect Michigan's lakes and ensure these vital natural resources remain healthy for future generations.

A total of **74 Barry County residents** participated in the MiCorps CLMP programs facilitated by MSU Extension's Center for Lakes and Streams staff at various locations including the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute!



MSU Extension staff created this [downloadable](#) guidebook to help individuals identify aquatic invasive plants that they might encounter in or near lakes, streams, and ponds.

The MSU Product Center

The Michigan State University (MSU) Product Center is a statewide program of MSU Extension that supports the growth and success of Michigan's food, agriculture, and natural resource businesses. Through one-on-one counseling, educational programming, and technical assistance, the MSU Product Center helps entrepreneurs navigate business planning, product development, regulatory requirements, and market access. Serving startups and established businesses alike, the MSU Product Center connects clients with industry expertise, research-based resources, and strategic partners to foster innovation, increase economic impact, and strengthen local and regional food systems across Michigan. A total of **23 Barry County residents** were supported in 2025.



The following are a sample of the online courses offered by the MSU Product Center:

- Free Instructional Video on Writing Standard Operating Procedures
- Free Course on How to Start a Food Truck Business available in both English and Spanish
- Meat Processing Online Course
- Sanitation for Small Food Establishments
- Free Course on Grant Writing for Food and Farming Businesses
- And many more at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/productcenter/> (Click the "Classes" button)

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
- Adulting 101
- Career Preparation/Exploration/Development
- Cash Composition Contest & 4-H Money Smart Contests
- Skillathon
- Wild Spartans
- Summer Garden Programs
- World Food Prize
- Cloverbud Camps
- National 4-H Congress

Food & Health

- Changing Negative Self-Talk
- Cottage Food Law
- Food Preservation
- Food Safety Hotline
- Mindfulness Sessions
- Selling MI Honey & Maple Syrup
- Person 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
- Mental Health First Aid (Adult, Teen, Youth)
- Michigan Substance Use, Prevention, Education and Recovery (MiSUPER)

Family

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

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
- 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
- Breakfast on the Farm
- Farm to Institution
- Virtual Coffee Break Podcast

Business & Community

- MSU Extension Product Center
- MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program
- New Commissioner Training
- Fiscally Ready Communities
- Veterans Outreach

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
- Michigan Conservation Stewards
- Septic System Program
- Natural Shoreline Education

Overall Impact

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

 **33** programs hosted in the
county

 **940** participants attending
programs hosted in the county

 **88** client consultations

 **2** sites received nutrition or
Physical Activity Policy System and
Environmental sites receiving PSE
education within the county

 **6** policy, systems, & environmental
changes with two PSE sites

 **500** residents were positively
impacted with the nine policy,
systems, and environmental
changes with those PSE sites

 **43,324** contacts through
county e-newsletters, web activity,
social media and handouts

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity

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

 **21** participants in Beekeeping
or Pollinator programs

 **161** participants in
county agriculture
programs.

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

 **47** soil test samples
processed for Barry County

 **39** Answered 'Ask Extension'
questions

Partnerships

- B. Healthy Barry County
- Barry County Commission on Aging
- Barry County United Way
- Beacon Pointe Richland
- Central Elementary School
- Corewell Health Pennock
- Delton Crooked Lake
- Delton Kellogg Community Garden
- Delton Kellogg Schools
- Grand Ravine Senior Housing
- Hastings Public Library
- Hastings Public Library – Youth Section
- Holtyn Wellness
- Northeastern Elementary School
- Pierce Cedar Creek Institute
- Southeastern Elementary School
- The Village of Sage Grove
- Tops of Bar
- Y Time Childcare

Coalitions

- B Healthy Coalition
- Barry Community Resource Network (BCRN)
- Barry County Resource Network (BCRN)
- B Healthy Food Council
- Goat Developmental Committee
- Great Start Collaborative
- Horse Developmental Committee
- Livestock Developmental Committee
- Mill St. Market Governance Board
- Nashville Community Garden
- Pennock Gardens Creation
- Poultry Developmental Committee
- Rabbit and Cavy Developmental Committee
- Spartan Wellness Collective

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