

CASS COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

120 N. Broadway St. Suite 116. Cassopolis, MI 49031
269-445-4438 | <https://www.canr.msu.edu/cass>

Our Staff:

- Terri Boulanger, Secretary
- Hilary Hunt, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Nora Lee, SNAP-Ed Community Nutrition Instructor



Message from the Interim District Director

Thank you for another great year of partnership and community impact! We appreciate your support in helping MSU Extension serve the residents of Cass County. Sincerely, Kai Gritter.

Impact in Cass County



1,193 participants from the county attended programs



656 youth enrolled in 4-H



179 client consultations



21 answered Ask Extension questions



Residents participated in **242** programs (across the State) and **57** programs (hosted in County)



179 MSU Extension volunteers



78 participants in county agriculture programs



24 county partnerships

Health & Nutrition: Nora Lee, Community Nutrition Instructor



In 2024, **630** Cass County students and adults learned how to make healthy choices during **40** fun and engaging nutrition and physical activity classes. By the end of one *Show Me Nutrition* series, a 4th student who often used to say “I don’t know” confidently named all five food groups and created a healthy meal.

In an adult life skills class, participants got to lead songs and exercises, which helped them feel confident and excited to learn. One participant, inspired by the *Healthy Choice Everybody* curricula, made healthier food choices and excitedly shared her success at the end of the six-week series.

“Mrs. Nora Lee isn't just any health teacher; she is a beacon of enthusiasm, knowledge and care. Her energy is contagious, and the students couldn't help but be drawn into the fascinating world of health and wellness. She crafted her lessons to be interactive and engaging, using games, group activities, and real-life examples to drive home important concepts. As a result, Mrs. Lee's health class became the highlight of the students' day.” ~Cass County ISD Teacher

These nutrition and physical activity programs help people of all ages build healthy habits, boost confidence, and enjoy learning together. In addition to direct education, **three** sites in the county received support through Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) education. **190** people were impacted by these changes. These changes have made healthy choices easier to accomplish.

4-H & Youth Development: Hilary Hunt, 4-H Program Coordinator

Children and families continued to benefit from a variety of programs, in partnership with dedicated 4-H volunteers and MSU Extension staff. Topics include:

- Career exploration and workforce development
- Child & family development
- Healthy living
- Leadership & civic engagement
- Science literacy

656 4-H members
1,461 4-H youth participants
\$5,307.12 Volunteer hour value



4-H Still exhibit workshop:
learning how to decorate cupcakes from a local baker

Over 4,000 Michigan youth completed the national Youth for the Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) certification, a program promoting food safety, animal well-being and character development. There were **102** in-person Instructor-led YQCA trainings offered, some of which were taught by Hilary Hunt, Cass County's 4-H PC.

This annual education initiative continues to strengthen youth knowledge and responsibility in animal agriculture.



Agriculture & Agribusiness:



Jonathan LaPorte (left), Farm Business Management Educator, coordinates the DEMaND series, and covers Cass County and other Southwest Michigan counties

MSU Extension's Developing and Educating Managers and New Decision-makers (DEMaND) Series was named the **2024 national winner of the Search for Excellence award** by the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA). This award honors outstanding Extension programs and recognized DEMaND team members Jonathan LaPorte, Frank Wardynski and Steven Whittington, who attended the annual luncheon. LaPorte also presented on the program during the event and received positive feedback, including one attendee who shared, *"Thank you SO MUCH for doing this. I thoroughly enjoy the information presented."*

The DEMaND Series helps new and small farmers build skills in farm business, finances, and decision-making. It is led by MSU Extension Educators and includes support from key agricultural partners.



Link to DEMaND website

Explore <https://www.canr.msu.edu/demand> for more information or scan the QR code.

Community, Food & Environment:

The Zoning Administrator Certificate (ZAC) program is an intensive training and networking experience, designed to meet the educational needs of this important local government role. In 2024, 59 participants from 34 counties in Michigan enrolled in the ZAC program with 57 receiving their Zoning Administrator Certificate including **four** from Cass County.

The ZAC Program continues to be a leading source for zoning administrator professional development in Michigan and even nationally. It also serves as a great way for Zoning Administrators from across the state to connect and share experiences with one another to build a professional network.

In addition to the education and hands on experience participants get, the ZAC Program works to build a network of zoning professionals who can lean on each other (and MSU Extension Educators) to be leaders in their communities.



Tyler Augst (top right) Government & Community Vitality Educator

"If you feel like you never got good training and don't know exactly what's required of a ZAC [Zoning Administrator], this course is invaluable." - 2024 ZAC Participant

MSU Extension's Statewide Impact

Helping people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge and resources of Michigan State University directly to individuals, communities and businesses.



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



29,264,562 contacts through social media, web activity, e-newsletters, and handouts



133,306 total youth participants



12,861 total volunteers



9,808 people participated in Food Safety programs including ServSafe®



67,320 Participants in Community, Food and Environment Programs



1,876 Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) spent 96,653 hours helping individuals and communities grow



In 2024, MSU Extension completed a comprehensive Strategic Direction Plan, which illustrates our vision for the future, outlining strengths to build on and opportunities to embrace. To read the full report, go to canr.msu.edu/od/directors_office/strategic-direction or scan the QR code.



Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Quentin Tyler, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.

