

IONIA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT

50 E Sprague Rd, Ionia, MI 48846 | (616)527-5357

- William V. Hendrian, District 8 Director
- Shawn Frisbie, 4-H Program Coordinator
- Katie Ockert, Natural Resources Educator
- Karen Balice-Gregory, Support Staff



Message from the Director

In 2025, Ionia County MSU Extension made impacts in agriculture and agribusiness education, health and nutrition programming, community vitality, food systems, and environmental planning, and children and youth programming and resources (including 4-H). What follows are the numbers that made up the programs and some short highlights and pictures that capture just a taste of the rich involvement our educators and instructors have in the local community that create the public value that is MSU Extension.

Impact



1356 residents of Ionia County attended MSU Extension programs.



Ionia County residents attended **288** statewide Extension programs



There were **379** youth enrolled in 4-H for the 2024-2025 program year.



There were **151** volunteers from the local community.

Overall Impact



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



305 participants in AABI programs
739 participants in CYI programs
161 participants in HNI programs
203 participants in CEFI programs



1356 participants from the county attending programs.



200 client consultations



38 Ionia County residents submitted questions and received answers from *Ask Extension*



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

Economic Development, Environmental Conservation, and Agricultural Productivity



72,517 participants in community, food, and environment programs from across Michigan



305 participants in county agriculture programs.



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



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



16 commercial and farm soil test samples sold
23 homeowner soil test samples sold



79 nutrition and physical activity participants hosted in county.



161 county residents who participated in health and nutrition programs.



11,944 people participating in Food Safety programs including ServSafe



1185 youth participants in 4-H



\$4,930.50 dollar value for 4-H volunteer hour value



133,301 total youth participants statewide



13,661 statewide volunteers



Small Changes, Make Big Impacts



Community Nutrition Instructor, Joanna Urban partnered with **The Right Door of Ionia** to deliver an impactful wellness program designed to help residents prevent obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. The session focused on practical, achievable lifestyle changes, including reducing saturated fats and added sugars, understanding how daily choices influence long-term health, and incorporating more movement into everyday routines. Joanna guided participants through evidence-based strategies in a supportive and approachable way, helping attendees feel confident about taking the next steps toward healthier living. A total of 37 community members attended this educational event

Seeds in Action



Michigan veteran families participating in MSU Extension’s **Seeds in Action** initiative used provided seed packets to grow produce at home. Their harvests supported healthy eating, reduced food waste, and encouraged community engagement. One family created a homemade seasoning blend from tomatoes and other vegetables, while another grew an abundant squash crop and donated excess produce to veterans; one squash earned second place at the Michigan State Fair. Program leaders note that these experiences show how gardening promotes nutrition, community connection, and over all well-being for veterans and their families

4-H Hunting and Conservation SPIN Club

Youth participants learned essential firearm safety skills, including safe handling, responsible transportation, and secure storage—foundational practices they can rely on for life. The program also introduced ethical hunting and conservation, helping youth understand wildlife management, fair chase principles, and the importance of protecting natural resources. Participants reported increased confidence in safe firearm use and gained insight into hunting's historical role and ethical food sourcing. All youth completed the Michigan Hunter Safety course, with 100% passing and scoring above 90%. They also enjoyed hands-on activities such as wildlife identification, the Panther Game, and virtual hunting simulations.



Ionia County 4-H Dairy Camp

The Ionia County Dairy Camp gave youth an unforgettable learning experience during their visit to the Critter Barn, where they met Executive Director Tony McCaul—an Ionia County 4-H alum and Michigan State University graduate. Tony shared the mission of the Critter Barn and explained how his years in 4-H helped shape the passion and purpose behind his career, noting that he wouldn't be doing—and loving—the work he does today without those early experiences. This year's camp proved especially meaningful, drawing an impressive 73 participants after opening registration to all Ionia County 4-H youth. Campers spent the week enjoying hands-on activities, crafts, laughter, and memorable interactions, including a visit from a veterinarian and a presentation from the local VFW on how to properly fold a flag. The highlight for many was the engaging and educational trip to the Critter Barn, which left a lasting impression and contributed to what organizers described as one of the most special camps yet.



Preserving Apples Workshop

On October 26, MSU Extension Educators, Shannon Stover and Katie Ockert led a hands-on apple preservation workshop at the MSU Extension Ionia office. The session welcomed 16 participants and included an overview of MSU Extension programs, a brief presentation on Michigan apple varieties, and instruction on safe preservation practices such as proper water-bath canning.

Participants worked in small groups to wash, peel, core, and slice apples in preparation for applesauce. They also practiced filling jars and took part in a simulated canning experience.

Each participant left with a jar of refrigerator applesauce packaged in an MSU Extension–branded potholder. The workshop offered a practical, engaging opportunity for community members to build food preservation skills using locally grown Michigan apples.



MSU Extension Virtual Breakfast Series

During the 2025 growing season, 79 Ionia County growers participated in MSU Extension’s **Virtual Breakfast series**, a free weekly online program designed to keep growers informed on timely agricultural issues and emerging research.

The series delivered practical, research-based guidance on a wide range of farm management topics, including weed control, market updates, nematode management, drone use, and cover crop integration—each chosen to address real-time challenges faced by Michigan growers.

By offering expert-led education in a convenient virtual format, the program allowed participants to access high-value information without leaving their farms, saving time during the busiest parts of the season. Growers benefited from direct interaction with MSU Extension specialists, opportunities for Q&A, and insights that supported informed decision-making on crop health, pest management, and overall productivity.

Agrivoltaics in Ionia County

Extension Educator, Charles Gould, pictured below, reviews slides with Ionia County and Township leaders about Agrivoltaics. All potential solar projects require some ground cover. The ground cover can be for pollinator habitat, turfgrass, pasture, or a crop. There are significant benefits in considering agricultural purposes when putting together a plan. Charles recommends getting an assessment done and considering all of the options before any project is considered. There are several successful examples of management decisions that combine agricultural activities as part of a solar plan. For example, Charles has worked with sheep producers to help them successfully graze solar sites in Michigan.

One producer formed a solar grazing committee within the Michigan Sheep Producers Association (MSPA) to educate its members and promote solar grazing.

Charles Gould provides relevant expertise in the areas of renewable energy and energy conservation to Michigan Farmers and Agribusinesses that help them be sustainable now and into the future.



Farm Depot's Pesticide Clinic

MSU Extension hosted a Pesticide Applicator Clinic at Ionia's Farm Depot in December 2025, with 148 participants attending the two-day event.

MSU Extension educators Nicole Ritchie, Madiline Celovsky, and Steve Whittington provided an overview of the EPA's

Bulletins Live! Two program, which is part of the Endangered Species Protection Program. This system provides field-specific pesticide use requirements designed to protect threatened and endangered species and their habitats.

Educators explained when pesticide applicators are required to use **Bulletins Live! Two** and demonstrated how to navigate the system to determine if a bulletin applies to a specific product or field. These requirements resulted from litigation involving the EPA and are tied to the regular review of pesticides, which occurs approximately every 10 to 15 years. When a pesticide is found to pose potential risks, manufacturers must include additional use restrictions through a bulletin.

Applicators are required to review their products annually to determine if bulletins apply and must follow both the pesticide label and any bulletin instructions. Printed bulletins must be available during application to remain in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The event primarily served agricultural producers and provided Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) credits. MSU Extension educators and Michigan State University faculty support this annual process to help applicators understand requirements and maintain compliance.



County Partnerships & Coalitions:

Ionia Great Start Collaborative
Ionia Free Fair Board of Directors
Ionia County 4-H Horse Leaders Committee
Ionia County Food Policy Council
Ionia County 4-H Dairy Goat Committee
Ionia County 4-H Small Animal Committee
Ionia County 4-H Stills Committee
Ionia County 4-H Food Booth
Ionia County 4-H Large Animal Livestock Committee
Ionia County 4-H Dairy Cow Committee
Ionia County 4-H Advisory Council

Clarksville Research Center

The Clarksville Research Center (CRC), located at 9302 Portland Rd, Clarksville, hosts research on small fruits and tree fruits as well as potatoes, chestnuts and a variety of other crops. Research at the 440-acre site includes variety development, fruit thinning and growth regulators, dwarf rootstocks for fruit trees, integrated pest management, organic production systems and new pruning practices to help make production more profitable, efficient and environmentally friendly.

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District Directors

MSU Extension is structured into 14 districts. Programming and staffing occurs across district lines as dictated by community needs. The districts simply provide a mechanism for organizing and reporting on our relationships with community-based partners.

