



# Empowering Michiganders to Build Healthy Futures






At Michigan State University Extension, we know that when Michiganders are healthy and empowered, they transform their communities for the better.

Through education, community outreach, and evidence-based resources, we help individuals and families build the skills they need to take charge of their well-being. Whether it's teaching older adults how to stay active and independent, supporting parents in raising healthy eaters, or providing farmers with strategies to manage stress, our work is rooted in practical solutions that make a lasting impact.

Across our state and beyond, we see the power of health education in action every day. A child trying a new vegetable for the first time. A person in recovery from substance use disorder finding the tools and support to sustain their journey. These moments of transformation, both big and small, drive our mission.

Read on to learn more about the extraordinary work MSU Extension does in communities like yours every day.

## 2024 Fast Facts

-  **155** staff comprised MSU Extension's Health and Nutrition Institute.
-  **19,289** people participated in MSU Extension health programs in person, virtually, by telephone, or using self-directed toolkits.
-  **760** health programs were delivered by MSU Extension, either in person or virtually.
-  **72,303** children and adults participated in one of the 8,975 in-person nutrition and physical activity programs delivered by MSU Extension.
-  **1,672,069** views of food and health content on MSU Extension's website.
-  **34,795** people were subscribed to MSU Extension's quarterly health and nutrition email digests, which feature upcoming events, educational articles, seasonal recipes, videos, and more.

## Get Involved & Learn More

To learn more about MSU Extension's health and nutrition programming, visit our Food and Health website at [extension.msu.edu/health](https://extension.msu.edu/health), or contact Cheryl Eschbach, health and nutrition director, at [cheryl@msu.edu](mailto:cheryl@msu.edu).

To explore stories about our projects, programs, and staff, visit [extension.msu.edu/celebrateHNI](https://extension.msu.edu/celebrateHNI).

And whether you're looking for tips to better manage a chronic condition or advice on how to preserve your garden full of produce, you can get upcoming classes and events, educational articles, seasonal recipes, videos and more sent right to your inbox. Sign up for our quarterly seasonal news digests at [bit.ly/MSUEdigest](https://bit.ly/MSUEdigest).



## Our Impact, Their Words

While this report covers only a small snapshot of the impact that MSU Extension has had over the past year, the most meaningful testimonials come from our participants and partners themselves:

*“I am truly amazed at how much I have learned in this brief course and how much it has improved my sleep habits (and quality of sleep).”*

— Sleep Education for Everyone Program participant



*“Since my husband and I have very limited income, the coupons helped me to afford fresh fruits and vegetables that I would not have been able to obtain. Thank you for helping me eat healthier.”*

— Prescriptions for Health SNAP-Ed program participant



*“This class helped me heal my relationship with my brother.”*

— Participant in Mindfulness for Better Living’s Forgiving and Letting Go of the Past workshop



*“I am well experienced with home food preservation, but I don’t know it all. [MSU Extension] makes research and science-based information non-threatening, logical, safe and high quality.”*

— Preserving MI Harvest class participant



*“Over the years I have availed myself to the courses offered by Michigan State Extension (I have taken your Cottage Law session three times and many Apiary Program sessions) because they are some of the best in the country. Rest assured, I will probably be taking [this] session again.”*

— Participant in Selling Honey and Maple Syrup Safely class

*“For the first time, I gained clarity about the source of my pain and where it was originating from. I could have never done this without your guidance and support.*

*[M]y physician was also extremely grateful to MSU for offering this class, as well as to all of you for sharing your knowledge, time and commitment with helping me and so many others.”*

— Participant in Chronic Pain PATH program



*“By eating a different way and drinking more water, I’ve brought my A1C down to 6.9 and have lost 30 pounds!”*

— Participant in Cooking for One nutrition program



*“The programs [MSU Extension] offers that TCOA does not, specifically Tai Chi for Arthritis, and to a lesser extent, Stress Less for Mindfulness, meets a need that we can’t serve. Mental health and physical health are incredibly important for everyone, especially older adults, and these two programs help older adults stay healthy socially, mentally, and physically.”*

— Partner at the Tri-County Office on Aging



*“Thank you for teaching me Tai Chi. I did martial arts for 18 years until my shoulder was damaged. For the last 30 years, I truly did not feel I would ever do any type of martial arts. Tai Chi has changed that. Thanks again for changing my life.”*

— Participant in Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention



## Food Safety & Food Preservation

From families gathering to preserve their favorite seasonal produce to food entrepreneurs ensuring the safety of their products, Michiganders of all backgrounds gain a wealth of knowledge from MSU Extension's food preservation and food safety programming.

Our team of experienced food safety educators provides accessible, research-based education both virtually and in person, equipping individuals and businesses alike with the skills to safely handle, store, and preserve food — ultimately helping ensure a safer, more resilient food system for all.

### 2024 FAST FACTS



**9,808** people participated in MSU Extension's food safety and food preservation programming.

**435** programs and events were held by MSU Extension food safety and food preservation staff.

More than **200** consumer questions were answered by food safety experts on MSU Extension's Food Safety Hotline (1-877-643-9882).

### OTHER HIGHLIGHTS THIS YEAR INCLUDE...

#### “Moving Beyond” Cottage Food Law.

For years, MSU Extension's food safety educators have trained countless aspiring food entrepreneurs in Cottage Food Law, a 2010 law allowing state residents to legally produce and sell some foods from their home kitchens without needing access to a licensed commercial kitchen.

But the next step can be confusing. As businesses grow, questions arise fast about hiring employees, distributing products at local businesses, labeling best practices, and more.

To meet this growing need, in 2024, MSU Extension launched a new program called “Moving Beyond Cottage Food,” which prepares current or prospective vendors to take the next steps from burgeoning cottage food business to becoming fully licensed. Since it began, MSU Extension has trained 32 people in Moving Beyond Cottage Food Law.



MSU Extension staff share information about preserving food safely at the Alpena Farmers Market.

**Building food handlers' confidence in halal diets.** Research indicates that Muslims following halal dietary requirements (which refers to foods that follow Islamic dietary laws) experience higher rates of food insecurity, often stemming from a lack of awareness among food handlers and businesses, and lack of availability of ingredients.

To address a critical gap in knowledge about halal diets, in 2024, MSU Extension developed a free new training: Guidance for Food Handlers and the Management of Halal Food. This program provides food industry professionals with foundational knowledge to better serve underserved communities, particularly those facing food insecurity due to limited access to halal options.

Already, MSU Extension has trained almost 50 people in the program, which continues to receive positive feedback. As one participant said, “I'm proud that MSU [Extension] considered this training! Practically all workshops/trainings don't consider the Muslim diet.”



**Translating Michigan Fresh resources.** Michigan Fresh resources encourage people to explore the state's bounty of fresh, local, seasonal produce. To make these resources available to even more people, in 2024, MSU Extension educators updated and translated almost 50 digital fact sheets into Spanish and Arabic.

From ajo (garlic) to zanahorias (carrots), these free resources cover safety and storage tips, preservation methods, expected gardening yields, and more. Visit [canr.msu.edu/mi\\_fresh](https://canr.msu.edu/mi_fresh) for more information.



**Tackling food safety *and* food insecurity.**

Unsafe food should be the last thing people using a food pantry need to worry about. Pantry Food Safety—It's Your Job! is a free, self-paced, virtual course that teaches food pantry workers everything they need to know to keep their items safe, from sanitizing procedures to repackaging bulk foods.

Participants who complete all course requirements receive a certificate of completion. One hundred thirty people attended this MSU Extension pantry food safety training in 2024.



**Training the next generation of food workers to “ServSafe.”** In 2024, MSU Extension trained 1,065 people in ServSafe. This class prepares people for careers in the food industry while ensuring workers have a strong understanding of foodborne illnesses, safety standards, and proper training techniques. At the end of each program series, participants take a proctored exam.

**GET INVOLVED & LEARN MORE**

To learn more about MSU Extension's food safety programming, visit our Safe Food and Water website at [extension.msu.edu/foodsafety](https://extension.msu.edu/foodsafety). To learn more about MSU Extension's food preservation programming, visit our Food Preservation website at [extension.msu.edu/foodpreservation](https://extension.msu.edu/foodpreservation).



Students from the Athens High School Chemistry Club in Troy, Michigan, display jars of homemade strawberry jam after a hands-on food preservation lesson from MSU Extension. The jam-making session, held in the school's student-run restaurant kitchen, taught students the chemistry behind preserving food while producing 30 jars of jam using different types of pectin.



# Chronic Disease Management & Social-Emotional Health

Caring for our physical and emotional health can feel overwhelming, especially in the context of things like rising chronic disease rates, increasing mental health concerns, and barriers to healthcare access. MSU Extension plays a critical role in helping Michiganders face these challenges head on, by providing research-based education and practical tools.

Our program topics include aging, caregiver support, chronic disease and diabetes prevention and management, vaccine education, relationship communication, sleep hygiene, mental health and stress management, and more.

### 2024 FAST FACTS



**20,000+** people attended more than 120 community events held by the Michigan Vaccine Project team — who, in 2024, wrapped up a three-year project to educate Michiganders about immunization.

**\$349,201** grant received in September 2024 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture to fund a three-year project helping adults in rural Michigan avoid opioid misuse through pain management and sleep improvement.

**842** adults participated in a one-time educational diabetes prevention and management program in 2024; overall MSU Extension held 51 classes in 2024.

### OTHER HIGHLIGHTS THIS YEAR INCLUDE...

**Bringing mindfulness to everyone.** Research shows that mindfulness practices can help reduce stress, improve focus, and even support better sleep — all of which are key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

With work beginning in 2024 and completed in early 2025, MSU Extension revamped its **Mindfulness for Better Living website** to serve as a comprehensive resource library that makes mindfulness practices accessible, engaging, and practical for everyone. The site features free guided meditations, educational articles,



Participants and MSU Extension instructors of the Chronic Disease PATH program at the Senior Center in Scottville, Michigan.

and information on how to build a personalized mindfulness practice.

As MSU Extension health educator **Nicole Wethington** said, “Mindfulness is a powerful skill that can have a profound impact on mental and physical health. Anyone can practice mindfulness, and we wanted to provide tools to help people develop their mindfulness practice and feel the benefits.”



### Connecting communities to health virtually.

Launched in May 2022 — and supported by a USDA Rural Health and Safety Education Grant — MSU Extension’s innovative referral system ([extension.msu.edu/healthprograms](https://extension.msu.edu/healthprograms)) connects people to 11 free online health programs.

2024 marked another successful year for the health referral system, connecting over 400 people across more than 50 Michigan counties to the programs best suited for their needs in minutes. In August, an online programming calendar was launched as a companion tool to the referral system, and received almost 2,000 visits through the end of the year. The referral system was also recognized nationally with a marketing award from the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences.



**Helping farmers manage their stress.** Farming can be an incredibly unpredictable, dangerous, and stressful occupation, but MSU Extension’s team of more than 20 dedicated farm stress



MSU Extension educator Kai Gritter delivers a mindfulness training to help teach young professionals in West Olive, Michigan how to avoid burnout.

professionals provides innovative resources and support to the agriculture community — from teletherapy and financial services to free online education and community presentations.

In 2024, MSU Extension’s farm stress team held 45 educational presentations and meetings, reaching more than 1,700 individuals representing 172 farms. Thirteen farmers were referred to professional teletherapy services.

Additionally, MSU Extension began a new partnership with popular Michigan business Cherry Republic Inc. The business donated a portion of all sales during February 2024 to MSU Extension’s farm stress efforts, for a total contribution of \$18,000. In 2024, MSU Extension also established **an endowment** for the farm stress program to help support more services in the future.



**Reaching underserved adults where they are.** Dealing with chronic pain and disease can be complex and challenging, even more so for underserved adults, like those with disabilities or in Spanish-speaking/Latinx communities, where rates of chronic disease are higher. According to the **Michigan Center for Data and Analytics** nearly 600,000 Michiganders identify themselves as Hispanic or Latinx.

Education and support, however, can make all the difference in managing chronic diseases and conditions.

Supported by federal funding from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL) and beginning in 2023, MSU Extension launched Spanish-language versions of chronic disease and pain self-management programs (Camine Con Gusto, Tomando Control de su Salud, and Programa de Manejo Personal del Dolor Crónico). In 2024, MSU Extension created new Spanish marketing materials and trained two new health educators as bilingual Master Leaders.

Walk With Ease is another program launched under the ACL grant. This six-week, evidence-based walking program includes discussions on osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and fibromyalgia as well as managing pain and stiffness, and stretching and strengthening exercises. In 2024, more than 460 adults participated in Walk With Ease.

**GET INVOLVED & LEARN MORE**

To learn more about MSU Extension’s social-emotional health programming, visit our Healthy Relationships website at [extension.msu.edu/healthyrelationships](https://extension.msu.edu/healthyrelationships). To learn more about MSU Extension’s health programming for chronic disease and diabetes prevention and management, visit our Chronic Disease website at [extension.msu.edu/chronicdisease](https://extension.msu.edu/chronicdisease).



## Nutrition & Physical Activity

From planting vegetables in community gardens to improving mealtime habits in childcare centers, MSU Extension empowers people to feel healthier through sound nutrition and increased physical activity. All across the state, our team of passionate educators and instructors deliver innovative, evidence-based education and help implement healthy changes in communities.

Supported by the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed), MSU Extension is making a world of difference — one person, one meal, and one movement at a time.

### 2024 FAST FACTS



**115,483** adults and youth were reached through MSU Extension’s nutrition and physical activity educational efforts.

**92%** of young people in grades K-2 increased their fruit and vegetable consumption after participating in MSU Extension nutrition and physical activity education.

**185,000** people were reached through the MI Health Matters Facebook page, which hosts educational articles, videos, and other content promoting nutrition and physical activity.

**30** years of MSU Extension delivering SNAP-Ed was celebrated this year!

Young students show off the healthy fruit kebabs they made in an MSU Extension nutrition class.



## OTHER HIGHLIGHTS THIS YEAR INCLUDE...

**Inspiring people to “Move Their Way.”** From reducing the risk of developing chronic illnesses to building muscle strength, adding physical activity into our daily routines can help us lead healthier lives — no matter our age, ability, or skill level. With that in mind, MSU Extension has partnered with the Move Your Way® campaign to promote the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. This campaign is led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

As part of this partnership, MSU Extension launched a digital marketing campaign to promote its newly revamped **Physical Activity** website, which houses educational articles and instructional videos tailored for different age groups, from children to seniors. In 2024, the website received almost 27,000 visits, an increase of more than 3,200% from the year before.



**Changing policies, systems, and environments.** What if the environments where we lived, worked, and played made it simpler for us to choose healthy options? That concept is the driving force behind policy, systems, and environmental changes, or PSEs.

In 2024, MSU Extension helped implement over 724 PSE changes at 363 sites across Michigan, reaching more than 72,000 people. These innovative projects included everything from creating food clubs in public schools to establishing lactation stations in community spaces at public events.



At a shelter in Macomb County, women experiencing homelessness learn how to garden and prepare healthy meals for their children, thanks to outreach from MSU Extension nutrition and gardening educators.



MSU Extension community nutrition instructor Rachel Gillespie works with preschoolers as part of the Growing Healthy Eaters program.

**Growing healthy eaters.** Family childcare home providers play an essential role in promoting healthy eating habits and integrating locally grown food into meals for kids. MSU Extension’s Growing Healthy Eaters initiative helps many children in Michigan who face challenges accessing fresh, healthy foods by working with farmers to integrate locally grown food into childcare meals.

From 2022 to 2024, 125 childcare providers, 700 children, and 21 farmers participated in the project. Growing Healthy Eaters achieved significant improvements in childcare providers’ mealtime preparations for children. Providers reported serving a wider variety of vegetables

and whole grains while reducing pre-fried foods, and 21% increased the seasonal foods on their menus. Additionally, 74% of providers reported an improvement in knowledge in preparing or cooking locally grown fruits or vegetables.

**GET INVOLVED & LEARN MORE**

To learn more about MSU Extension’s nutrition programming, visit our Nutrition website at [extension.msu.edu/nutrition](https://extension.msu.edu/nutrition). To learn more about MSU Extension’s physical activity programming, visit our Physical Activity website at [extension.msu.edu/physicalactivity](https://extension.msu.edu/physicalactivity).

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