



JANUARY 2026

4-H Family News

Mecosta County



I hope you all are having an amazing holiday, enjoying some time off work and school as well as time with family and friends!

To all our new Mecosta County 4-H members – **Welcome!** We are so happy you are here! The new year brings new opportunities and exciting programs and events. In this newsletter, you will find a lot of important information and updates.

Between newsletters, be sure to check out the [Mecosta County 4-H](#) and [Mecosta County 4-H Community](#) Facebook pages for important dates for upcoming programs and fair information.

As always, if you have any questions, please be sure to reach out – I'm here to help! Hope to see you all soon and best wishes for 2026!

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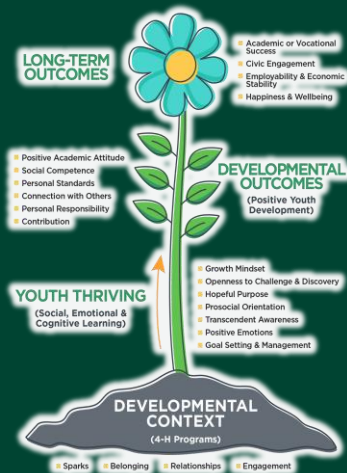
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STATEWIDE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

4-H Thriving Model of Positive Youth Development



Relationships are the foundation of a successful 4-H program! These relationships include building friendships with other members and leaders, building great working relationships and trust between program leaders and members, and adult leaders working together to organize great opportunities for youth.

We hope you can find others in the 4-H program in which you can build positive friendships and/or mentorships. Join us for any events and meetings to get to know everyone in the program.

Youth thriving is the first step in building youth who are #BeyondReady! Contact your local 4-H staff for more information.

January 13: Wild Spartans

Online

This month's session is "Nature's Detectives: How Insects Help Solve Crimes Against People, Animals and the Environment through Forensic Entomology." Tiny creatures can tell BIG stories about the world around us: explore creepy-crawly clues and learn how science and nature work together to solve puzzles. Ask questions through a live Q&A. This free virtual series is for youth ages 12-19.

www.canr.msu.edu/events/4-h-wild-spartans-january

January 13: Avoiding Money Mishaps

Online

In today's digital world, young people are increasingly targeted by fraudsters, scammers and predatory lenders. This interactive webinar will empower youth with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves and their personal information.

www.canr.msu.edu/events/avoiding-money-mishaps-jan13

January 21: Adulting 101 – Fraud Fighters: How to Stay Scam-Free

Online

From fake jobs offers to phishing texts, scammers are everywhere. This workshop breaks down the latest tricks and shows you how to guard your info, your credit, and your peace of mind.

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/events/adulting-101-2026>

January 24: 2026 State 4-H Rabbit and Cavy Show and Expo

Farm Bureau Pavilion, Lansing

4-H'ers exhibit rabbit and cavy projects and participate in educational knowledge contests: showmanship, skillathon, breed identification and rabbit hopping. **Register by January 14.**

www.canr.msu.edu/events/2026-state-4-h-rabbit-and-cavy-show-and-expo

January 26: Michigan 4-H Volunteer Webinar Series: Beyond Ready Basics

Every great 4-H experience has a few powerful ingredients—and volunteers play the biggest role in making them happen. Explore the four vital elements that help youth thrive: discovering sparks, feeling a sense of belonging, building developmental relationships, and staying meaningfully engaged.

www.canr.msu.edu/events/michigan-4-h-volunteer-webinar-beyond-ready-basics-bringing-the-vital-elements-to-life-in-your-4-h-club

February 7: 4-H Winterfest

Eagle Village Retreat Center, Hersey

4-H Winterfest is a hand-on learning camp for youth ages 8-12. Youth pick workshops and participate in team building activities. Come and have fun this winter! **Register by January 23.**

www.canr.msu.edu/events/2026-winterfest





STATEWIDE 4-H NEWS



Register for Michigan 4-H Capitol Experience!

At Michigan 4-H Capitol Experience, teens learn how to change the world for the better through engagement in Michigan's state government and public policy process. The program is scheduled for March 15-17, in Lansing.

The three-day event, open to high-school-aged youth, includes tours of the Michigan Capitol, interactions with state legislators, meetings with state agency staff, lobbyists and state-level experts and learning how policy is made. During the program, youth work in small teams to draft legislation on: agriculture; civil rights and youth advocacy; crime and law enforcement; education and teacher retention; environment and natural resources; health; and jobs, the economy and infrastructure.

The cost to attend is \$365, which includes lodging at the Okemos Conference Center. Please contact your local 4-H program coordinator to inquire about local funding opportunities. To learn more and/or find the link to register, visit www.canr.msu.edu/4_h_capitol_experience/.

Earn prizes with the Michigan 4-H Cash Composition Contest

Did you know youth are being targeted by scams too? That's this year's theme for the 2026 Michigan 4-H Cash Composition Contest! Michigan youth aged 9–19 are invited to participate through writing an essay on this year's question.

Top entries receive a \$100 gift card, thanks to contest sponsor, Extra Credit Union. MSU Extension will host two webinars to help with fraud awareness and essay writing. Essays are due by March 1. For contest details and essay submission information, visit: www.canr.msu.edu/4-h-money-smarts/money-smart-kids-contest.



Apply for the Michigan 4-H State Awards!

Michigan 4-H true leaders ages 10 and older have an opportunity to be recognized for the great work they do in 4-H and develop their career skills by completing a state award application. A Michigan 4-H State Award is the highest honor bestowed on a Michigan 4-H member and provides an opportunity to receive recognition for their engagement in rich learning experiences that result in outstanding knowledge and life-skill development.

State award applications are divided into four categories: Mark of Excellence contest (10-11 years), junior state award (12-15 years), senior state award (16-19 years) and group awards (13-19 years). An Achievement Award was added last year for 18–19-year-olds. Each application and selection process varies, dependent on the applicant's age.

More information about the Michigan 4-H State Award process and Mark of Excellence Contest can be found online at bit.ly/stateaward. Applications are due April 1. For more information, contact your 4-H program coordinator or email Betty Jo Krosnicki at nashbett@msu.edu or Janice Zerbe at rajzerj@msu.edu.



COUNTY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MSU Extension office is closed for the Holidays: December 25th – January 4th

Jr. Fairboard Meeting 7pm (MSU Extension office)	1-12-2026
Craft SPIN Club	1-19-2026
Paws and Pals club meeting (humans only)	1-21-2026
Winterfest (Eagle Village)	2-6-2026
Craft SPIN Club	2-19-2026
Craft SPIN Club	3-16-2026
Jr. Fairboard educational session (6pm MSU Extension office)	3-16-2026
Jr. Fairboard Meeting 7pm (MSU Extension office)	3-16-2026
Fair Entry deadline: swine, feeders, sheep & goats	4-1-2026
Feeder, Sheep and Goat Weigh-in (Fairgrounds)	4-11-2026
Swine registration deadline	4-13-2026
Craft SPIN Club	4-20-2026
Horse Record books deadline	6-1-2026
Pre-Fair Meeting 7pm (Fairgrounds)	6-29-2026
Record books, Community service/educational forms due	
Last day for Fair Entry registration for showing animals	
Jr. Fairboard educational session (6pm MSU Extension office)	5-18-2026
Jr. Fairboard Meeting 7pm (MSU Extension office)	5-18-2026
Mecosta County Fair	July 12-19, 2026





COUNTY 4-H NEWS



Festival of Lights Parade

We had a great time at the Downtown Big Rapids Festival of Lights Parade. Several 4-H families and volunteers designed & built our float. We bundled up to join almost 80 other floats in the parade in November.

Special thanks to Tiffany Spedowski & Mindy Leal for leading the project and the use of your truck and trailer. Thank you to the Kantz, Creighton, Hart, Strohkirsch, Thompson, Prescott and MacOwen families that joined us!

Check out our float:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@horsegirlmomma/video/7576072176994995511?r=1&t=ZT-91efuTf9mPO>

4-H Council Turkey Trot

Each year the Mecosta 4-H Council hosts fundraisers to support many Mecosta 4-H programs like the Proud Equestrian Therapy Riding Program (PEP), Senior scholarships and program fee scholarships for our county youth. We operate the successful dairy booth at the Mecosta County fair serving ice cream to our families and fair goers. This fall we hosted a Thanksgiving Day Turkey Trot Fundraiser. While mother nature was not friendly for our kick-off year, we had several dedicated turkey trotters, bundled up and ready to run!

Thank you to our 4-H Council for planning the event (Deb Niedzielski, Julie Strohkirsch, Tiffany Spedowski & Corey Thompson) and special thanks to the Thompson, Kantz and Strohkirsch families that came to help with the event.



4-H SPIN
Mecosta 4-H Special Interest Club

Crafty Clovers

Unleash your creativity with 4-H!

Join us each month for hands-on craft projects including: Paper flowers, String art, Painting, Fair mural project, Cards and more!

Open to youth ages 5-19

When: 3rd Monday of the month 4:30-5:30pm
Where: MSU Extension Office
14485 Northland Dr., Big Rapids

January 19th: String Art
February 16th: Feather Design
(Mural art project for the fair)
March 16th: Easter Art projects
April 20th: Paper Flowers

Come craft, create, and connect!
RSVP: Karen at ripkekar@msu.edu

Must RSVP for classes to ensure enough supplies are available.
(Some session may require a \$1-2 fee to cover needed supplies)

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY Extension

Monthly Crafting Club starts January 19th

Open to all ages.

Come to one session or attend them all! Please RSVP to Karen (text: 231-598-1036 or email: Ripkekar@msu.edu) the Friday prior to ensure we have enough supplies for everyone.

Opportunities for community service time for youth 14 and up.

The Michigan Beef Industry Commission will again be offering the Jr. Beef Ambassador program for 2026. (Program details can be found at the top of the application).

This program does require attendance at the kick-off event to be held March 14, 2026 or completion of the Masters of Beef Advocacy online training to participate.

Application:

<https://docs.google.com/.../1FAIpQLSefZxtEZ1szEl.../viewform>

THE MICHIGAN BEEF INDUSTRY COMMISSION IS EXCITED TO
CONTINUE OFFERING A YOUTH ADVOCATE OPPORTUNITY IN 2026

MICHIGAN

JR. BEEF AMBASSADOR

★★★★★

Applications are due by Friday, January 16th

MICHIGAN BEEF
INDUSTRY COMMISSION
Funded by Beef Farmers and Ranchers



Volunteer Corner

WELCOME...

New Volunteers & Club Leaders

- Katie Aris, Club Leader
Grant Center Pioneers
- Amanda Cornell, Club Leader
Back Road Country Kids
- Julie Creighton, Club Leader
Grant Center Pioneers
- Kaci Garver, Volunteer
Proud Equestrian Program
- Heather Hadder, Club Leader
Back Road Country Kids
- Amy Parker, Volunteer
ROC Program
- Travis Williams, Club Leader
Barnyard Bunch



Mecosta 4-H Council is looking for new youth and adult members

Mecosta County 4-H Council is made up of adult and youth volunteers. We meet approximately 6 times a year.

The Council is responsible for setting policies for the County 4-H Program, raising money for 4-H activities, helping out at events, participating in Mecosta County Fair activities, providing scholarships to 4-H members and reviewing fundraising requests.

For more information about joining the council contact Karen: Ripkekar@msu.edu

2026 Michigan 4-H Volunteer Winter/Spring Webinars

This webinar series will provide Michigan 4-H volunteers with a variety of learning opportunities to help them grow as an MSU and Michigan 4-H volunteer.

All webinars are FREE and take place at 12pm (noon) EST. Registration is required for each individual webinar! Recordings will be posted on the website for later viewing.

January 26, 2026

Beyond Ready Basics: Bringing the Vital Elements to Life in Your 4-H Club

Every great 4-H experience has a few powerful ingredients—and volunteers play the biggest role in making them happen. In this session, we'll explore the four Vital Elements that help youth thrive, discovering sparks, feeling a sense of belonging, building developmental relationships, and staying meaningfully engaged.

February 11, 2026

Building Belonging: Teambuilding Strategies for Stronger 4-H Experiences

Teambuilding isn't just an activity—it's a pathway to deeper belonging and higher engagement in 4-H. This webinar will show volunteers how simple team-building practices can help youth feel included, communicate effectively, work together, and grow their leadership skills.

March 25, 2026

From Sparks to Skills: Using AI Responsibly in 4-H

This webinar will help volunteers understand what AI is, how it impacts youth development, and how to use it responsibly within the 4-H program. We'll explore practical guidance from MSU Extension resources, discuss ethical considerations, and share tips for supporting youth as they navigate this evolving technology.

April 22, 2026

Let's Talk It Out: Handling Conflict with Ease

Conflict happens—even to the best volunteer groups. This laid-back session is all about learning how to handle tough conversations without the stress.

May 4, 2026

Supporting Youth Entrepreneurs: Your Role in 4-H Animal Projects

Learn how to support youth in making smart decisions that lead to growth using activities from MSU Extension's curriculum *Youth Business Success*.



For more information and to register, go to:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/volunteering/mi-4-h-volunteer-webinar-series>

Questions? Contact: Christine Heverly at: sisungch@msu.edu