

October 16, 2025

Dear Manistee County, 4-H Families,

On September 16th, 2025, the Manistee Board of Commissioners adopted a county budget that does not include continued funding for the Manistee County Fair Board. While the full picture is still coming into focus, we want to be transparent about this development and its potential implications for 4-H participants and their families that exhibit at the Manistee County Fair.

First, we have confirmed with the Manistee Board of Commissioners that there will be a 2026 Manistee Fair, however it may look very different on the Fair side of things.

**Currently, we do not foresee any impacts to 4-H events for 2026,** however the situation is still developing. The Manistee 4-H Livestock Council will continue preparations as normal for 2026 until further notice.

The Commissioners have set up an ad hoc committee consisting of Commissioners McCraner, Machen, and Goodman to investigate ongoing concerns about the management of the Fair and its physical and financial resources. We expect the committee to issue their findings by February 2026. While the committee is doing their due diligence, we need to be patient while the ad hoc committee and county administration create recommendations for a new structure and operational guidelines for the Manistee Fair. This time will allow them to create a better fair experience for the community, 4-H, and our youth into the future.



#### MSU EXTENSION

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We recognize that this moment may bring feelings of uncertainty for some families. While we don't have all the answers today, we want to share the most updated information available and be transparent about youth participation options:

#### **What are my child's exhibition options for 2026?**

We encourage families to explore all 4-H exhibition options, including Manistee County Fair, and make decisions about their child's participation that are best for their family. To discuss potential alternative options or for help managing multiple registrations for exhibiting in the surrounding area, please reach out to 4-H Program Coordinator Ali Ballard at [olsonal8@msu.edu](mailto:olsonal8@msu.edu) to set up an in-person meeting for your family or Club.

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.

Michigan State University, U.S.  
Department of Agriculture and  
counties cooperating.

**When will we know more?**

We anticipate having more complete information in February 2026. We are committed to providing timely and transparent updates as soon as we can to our youth and families.

**What steps are leadership taking?**

We are:

- Working through internal processes to identify viable opportunities for youth participation in area exhibitions.
- Working diligently with Manistee 4-H Livestock Council and other local partners to provide solutions.
- Planning clear communications to keep you informed.

**What can I do right now?**

Take time to consider and review surrounding area fair/ exhibition participation options and investigate what might be a good alternative or back-up plan for your family or your club. Youth may register and exhibit at multiple fairs; however, they may only market their project at one. As the situation in Manistee continues to evolve, families are encouraged to contact staff to explore participation options. Please note that each fair may have its own rules and expectations, and families should be prepared to meet those requirements if they choose to participate elsewhere. Registrations at other fairs may be adjusted or withdrawn as needed.

We encourage everyone to extend patience and grace while we await additional information. Please know that we will continue to keep you informed and supported as this process unfolds. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to Manistee & Benzie 4-H.

*Allison Ballard*

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