



Discussion Topic

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Election endorsement is truly a grassroots effort

Before long, Michigan Farm Bureau's Political Action Committee (Agri-Pac) will designate its "friends of agriculture" endorsements for the August primary elections, based on grass-roots efforts of county Farm Bureaus. Candidates who win and move on to the general election in November carry the endorsement with them.

The process is not taken lightly, said Doug Ewald, public policy and elections specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau. In fact, it's a rather exhaustive process.

"County Farm Bureau input is the most important part when it comes to our recommendations," he said. "County committees do their research and recommend the best candidates, and they spend a lot of time doing it. They know better than anyone else how a candidate or incumbent has performed on agricultural issues in their area, so we take their input very seriously."

Counties begin by taking into account an incumbent's voting record and support of Farm Bureau policy; or a new candidate's position on various agricultural issues. New candidates for office are measured by their recognition of ag's importance to the economy, involvement in or interest in ag issues and their solutions; and integrity and dedication to the campaign.

After the local recommendations are in, a day is set aside for meetings, after which the nine-member state Agri-Pac Committee may request candidate interviews if there are some gray areas left.

"For example," Ewald said, "we may have a legislator that fights us tooth and nail on every issue we deal with, but in the end may vote our way. Do we just go by his voting record? We may want to take another look, because voting record is just part of what gets factored in. The counties in his district know better than anyone else how his attitudes and positions have affected farmers there."

The county committees also measure the degree of special effort of an incumbent to introduce, support or oppose legislation in accordance with Farm Bureau's position, Ewald said. Also, special factors are considered, such as attendance at Farm Bureau-sponsored meetings, communication with farmers and Farm Bureau personnel.

So for people who strongly disagree with the Agri-Pac Committee's final recommendations, remember before you pick up the phone that a lot of effort and debate goes into it, and sometimes, the choices are not easy.

QUESTIONS

1. Who do you believe finds more value in a Farm Bureau Agri-Pac Committee election endorsement? The voter or the candidate? Why?
2. How can members of your Community Action Group help ensure candidates with a "Friend of Agriculture" endorsement are elected?
3. Farm Bureau-endorsed candidates win office with remarkable frequency. Do you feel that the "Friend of Agriculture" endorsement can make a difference to a candidate's election?