



Discussion Topic

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A monthly resource for the Community Action Groups of Michigan Farm Bureau

QUESTIONS

1. The last day to register to vote in the Nov. 7 election is Oct. 10. What can your county do to increase voter registration and be sure agriculture's interests are given a fair shake?
2. How can your county encourage more young people to change their apathy about politics into excitement?
3. Do you believe agriculture should have a voice larger than other special interest groups? If so, how can that be accomplished? If not, why not?

Got the apolitical blues? The cure's in the voting booth

In a supposedly free nation where voting is many people's only political involvement, we can expect a relatively low voter turnout this November. For primary elections recently staged, even fewer people seem to care enough about the political process to cast their ballots.

And in a non-presidential election year such as this one, census figures indicate that fewer than half the voting-age population will step into the booth.

Their excuses, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, reveal either genuine disenchantment with politics and politicians, or apathy.

Twelve percent of registered voters who did not vote in the 2002 election told Census workers that they were not interested. 19.4 percent said they didn't vote because they were out of town (ever heard of absentee ballots?) or had "other" reasons.

The younger people are, the worse it gets. Only 19.3 percent of the population age 18 to 24 voted in 2002, the lowest of all age groups, according to census figures.

The good news for farmers, though, is that they have traditionally enjoyed political power disproportionate to their numbers, said Doug Ewald, public policy and election specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau.

Politicians know the value of the farm vote and seek it," he said. "Farm Bureau's 'Friend of Agriculture' endorsement is valuable to candidates because farmers vote, and there are not many other organizations that truly represent rural Michigan. Farm Bureau members who understand our endorsement process and realize the amount of time volunteers put into researching the candidates before they receive the Friend of Agriculture endorsement use the endorsement to determine who gets their vote."

Part of the effort to keep that political clout is accomplished every year at the Young People's Citizenship Seminar (YPCS), where high school juniors and seniors learn the importance of involvement.

"The whole purpose is to build youth's understanding of American democratic society," said Megan Wheaton, Michigan Farm Bureau's national lobbyist and chair of the YPCS committee. "It's a real chance for Farm Bureaus at the county level to change apathy into excitement, and counties who sponsor and encourage kids to attend can really influence that change. Every year, the seminar gives the kids a hands-on chance to vote or run for office or get involved in some other way. It gives them the chance to get involved in a process that's bigger than themselves."