



# Discussion Topic

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## Constitutional change should be thought out carefully

Voters in this year's general election Nov. 7 will find five ballot initiatives in the voting booth, and three of them would change the Michigan State Constitution.

The gravity of that action should never be taken lightly, said Ron Nelson, Michigan Farm Bureau's manager of state governmental affairs.

"It's not easy to change the Constitution, and it's time-consuming," he said. "If we change things and then find an error and want to change it back, it can only be done by We the People. There's no fix by the legislature, so each issue should be considered carefully."

Involving environmental issues, civil rights and eminent domain, the three initiatives are important to farmers for a variety of reasons, but before making up your mind, said David VanderHaagen, chief legal counsel with Michigan Farm Bureau, consider the importance of the Constitution.

"The Constitution is the supreme law of the state," he said. "Neither the legislature nor the governor can veto the Constitution, nor will legislation enacted survive if found by the courts to be unconstitutional."

As the election nears, you can be sure that opponents of the initiatives will remind voters of the implications of changing the supreme law of the land, but that doesn't mean the Constitution should never be changed.

"But be careful about proposals that are cleverly packaged," VanderHaagen said. "The so-called civil rights initiative, for example, has seen considerable confusion surrounding it, so it's very important for voters to read and understand the ballot language before stepping into the voting booth. There are certain to be well-orchestrated campaigns to try to sway your opinion, but the choice is in the hands of each individual voter."

That's another reason educated voters are so valuable. People who know the issues will not be easily confused by language cleverly inserted that grants approval for a 'no' vote or rejection from a 'yes' vote.

Besides, VanderHaagen said, knowing the issues and making up your mind beforehand keeps the voting lines moving. But, again, be careful if something changes the Constitution.

"Once enacted," he said, "these laws tend to be long-lived, and are unlikely to be repealed."

### QUESTIONS

1. How do voters sort through ballot initiatives that may have confusing or misleading language?
2. How can community action groups be sure voters understand the issues they'll vote upon on Nov. 7?
3. What percentage of voters do you believe study ballot initiatives before stepping into the booth? If low, how can that be changed?