



Discussion Topic

May 2007

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

QUESTIONS

1. How can your Community Action Group encourage members to get involved in the policy development process?
2. Why is the “grassroots” policy development so important for Michigan farmers? Is there a better way to involve farmers in the process?
3. How can you inform members about the process and earn their faith and trust in it?

Got a policy complaint? Get involved

It happens almost every year, right after the Michigan Farm Bureau policy book is distributed. Someone will call the Farm Bureau Center to complain about a new policy and, invariably, they’ll accuse Michigan Farm Bureau of trying to sneak something past the membership.

The one thing the accusers seem to have in common is that they don’t know how policy is made. They accuse staff of railroading something through or even believe the lobbyists, directors or even the president have a personal agenda.

The fact is, personal agendas can’t get very far when policy is made. It all starts with county committees, who spend many evenings in discussion about what to send to the State Annual Meeting. A state-wide policy development committee consisting of farmer-members also spends countless hours poring over county suggestions, and finally, more than 480 farmers who are state delegates spend the better part of three days discussing, arguing and amending old policies, proposed policies and national policies.

The process takes months to accomplish, and is never easy. Policies start at the grassroots level, are agonized over, worded carefully and discussed exhaustively, then approved or rejected by farmer members.

All of which leads to frustration when members seem oblivious to the process.

The answer is to ask them to get involved. Any regular member can propose a policy at the county level. Any member can volunteer to be on the county or state policy development committee - not to promote personal agendas, of course, but to promote ideas that solve problems faced by Michigan farmers, or to get ahead of issues before they become problems.

Getting involved is the perfect way that any regular member can change things. And it’s a very effective way for regular, hard-working farmers to influence government with common-sense ideas that have been thought through and approved by Farm Bureau members.