



# Discussion Topic

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

## QUESTIONS

1. How can your county Farm Bureau find candidates to run for local office who will fight for agriculture's issues? List three suggestions.
2. Have term limits hurt or helped state government? Should local officials be term-limited?
3. Why don't more farmers get involved in local, state and national politics? How can they be encouraged?

## Can we all just get involved?

If you believe farm representation in state and national government is waning, you're right. Reflective of society as a whole, government has fewer voices for agriculture and more for the apathetic and anti-farming crowd.

"I believe that's a direct correlation to the decline in the number of farmers," said Sarah Black, director of the Public Policy and Commodity Division of Michigan Farm Bureau. "Farmers used to dominate township and county government, but now it seems to be the other way around, and agriculture is missing from the table."

With Farm Bureau policy encouraging farmers to get involved with local government, it's time for agriculture to speak in clear language, and that begins when an individual steps up, said Monte Bordner, a St. Joseph County cattleman and fifth-term county commissioner who has announced his intention to run for the Michigan House of Representatives.

"You have to be able to stand your ground, and you have to communicate fairly well," he said. "Communicating can be learned, and I found that there is a lot of support out there to help you learn. Michigan State University Extension has annual new commissioner training and Farm Bureau has a learning seminar for state-level candidates. But I believe that running a government is just like running a business – a big business. And after eight years, I'm still learning."

Bordner suggests that people who want to get involved – but don't know where to begin – start small, perhaps by pursuing an appointment to a local zoning board or planning commission, because there are rewards to the work.

"When you deal with issues surrounding substance abuse and the whole realm of family services, it's depressing, but there are good things, too," he said. "For example, St. Joseph County recently snagged Dexter Axle out of Indiana to move here, and L. Walther and Sons, Inc. farms are starting a \$17 million packing house in the county. Those are the funs ones."

Bordner said he would never pretend that serving in an elected position is all fun and satisfaction, particularly when the media gets involved, but Black said getting involved is more important than ever before.

"All politics and all issues are essentially local," she said, "and it's not safe to assume that issues can be solved at the state level. With term limits being what they are, agriculture needs rural people in the pipeline with some experience in government so farmers can be represented. If we have people without ag experience making decisions for farmers, we'll be in trouble."