



# Discussion Topic

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

## QUESTIONS

1. How can your county get more farmers involved in speaking one-on-one with politicians?
2. Why, in your opinion, do people resist speaking to their elected officials face-to-face? How can local Farm Bureaus change that?
3. How can your county Farm Bureau be sure that people who complain about politicians get out and vote, at the very least, or attend events such as the ones mentioned here?

## Filling spaces between campaign promises

It may be hard to believe that the 2008 national election is almost a year away, since the campaigning began more than a year ago. And if you're already sick and tired of hearing the empty promises that fill campaign war chests and make hollow headlines, think of the politicians. They've committed to this race so early, it will almost certainly be difficult to hold the public's rapt attention through the closing minutes.

But as candidates go through their motions, ever mindful (until after the election) of each and every voter, Farm Bureau members have the opportunity to fill the empty spaces with real political influence.

No, not just by voting, but by taking action to influence politicians who aren't yet campaigning.

"The recent Michigan budget fiasco should remind us all that political action should start at the grassroots level, where Farm Bureau members reside," said Doug Ewald, public policy and elections specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau. "And we have three events coming this spring that gives members the opportunity to take action, influence legislators and help bring farm-style common sense to the political process."

The first event is the Lansing Legislative Seminar, an annual event where state politicians meet over hors d'oeuvres at the Lansing Center with farmers who have something to say. Scheduled for Feb. 20, the event often serves as an educational event for politicians who have vague or faulty impressions of agriculture and its importance to the state's economy.

Secondly, the Washington Legislative Seminar, set for March 12-14 in Washington, D.C., offers Farm Bureau members the chance to bring national issues that effect them at home to elected officials, and remind them, as the late U.S. Rep. Paul Henry said, that their job is to "represent the people to Washington, not Washington to the people."

The third event in which farmers can influence political action is the March 19 Ag Day at the Capitol, a showcase for Michigan agricultural products that draws large crowds, including politicians who come to sample the fare and stay to speak to constituents.

"These all are wonderful opportunities that aren't available to people who just sit back and let government do things to them," Ewald said. "Farm Bureau members are influential because they vote, but also because they aren't afraid to speak with their elected officials. And if farmers are being attacked by anti-farming groups, these events are a great chance to polish agriculture's image with good old-fashioned common sense and plain talk."

For information about any of the three events, contact your local county Farm Bureau office.