



Discussion Topic

July 2008

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

QUESTIONS

- 1. How can your county Farm Bureau convince its members that the primary election is too important to skip? How can it help people either get to the polls or obtain an absentee ballot?**
- 2. How can farmers be sure a candidate understands agriculture? Is the county candidate evaluation process enough?**
- 3. Why is it important to actively promote the campaigns of candidates who are sympathetic to agriculture? Can one person make a difference at any governmental level?**

Get out the vote

With passion for political races cresting as America prepares to vote for president later this year, primary races sometimes are overlooked. But in many jurisdictions, the Aug. 5 primary is the more important election, according to Sarah Black, director of the Public Policy and Commodity Division at Michigan Farm Bureau.

"Often, the primary is the election," she said. "All politics are local, whether the race is on the local, state or national level. That's why involvement is the key."

Farm Bureau members, in the eyes of many political aspirants, are the epitome of an involved electorate. There are no official figures to prove it, but it's well-known that farmers vote at a higher percentage than the general populous. And when they support a candidate, they can be sure he or she understands agriculture, because the process all starts at the grassroots level with local candidate evaluation committees.

"When someone runs for office, they want their county and local support," Black said. "That creates a great opportunity for county Farm Bureaus to affect the race and to affect the candidate. Grassroots activity can change an election."

Activity may take many forms.

"The question every voter, and every local Farm Bureau needs to answer," Black said, "is how active will we be? Will we encourage people to register and vote, or go further and drive them to the polls if they can't make it themselves? Will we make sure people know the process for voting by absentee ballot? These things are all very important, because, especially in the local races, these are the people who will make the ordinances that affect farmers. Who will make the decision, for example, to set regulations for wind energy? Those are important decisions that make the vote and the activities that surround an election so crucial. We all want people making decisions who understand the issues important to agriculture. In many cases, how a county or an individual backs up his or her candidate of choice can have a huge impact on the future of the local community."

That's important to note, and more important every year, Black said, since fewer people are familiar with farming issues. The only way to be sure agriculture's voice is heard, she said, is to put into office people who share the same vision of agriculture as farmers – the people who form the grassroots of the county, state and nation.