



Discussion Topic

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

Cutting to the bare bone: Why is agriculture a big target?

Michigan's economy has gone into an even deeper hole since the political wrangling that caused a public outcry toward state lawmakers in 2007.

And now that an executive order has cut another 11 percent from the Michigan Department of Agriculture's (MDA) general fund spending -\$6.8 million total - many people in agriculture are scrambling to form a plan that would keep one of the few bright spots in Michigan's economy swimming within the swirling budget whitewater.

The cuts spelled out in the executive order damages food safety, disease tracking, prevention and eradication and causes great harm to the environment, experts say. But it isn't just farmers who will feel the pain from this budget.

"Whether or not people recognize it, MDA touches the lives of every single person every day in one way or another, whether it's inspecting the food we eat and milk we drink, measuring the gas we put in our car, or numerous other functions we take for granted," said Michigan Farm Bureau President Wayne H. Wood.

"Farm Bureau understands that today's harsh economy demands tightening the reins on government spending, but we fear the reductions proposed for MDA come at too risky of a price for consumers," Wood said, noting that the recent national peanut recall reinforces the importance of food safety inspections and other agricultural programs in people's lives.

To add insult to injury, MDA's budget has been hacked repeatedly over the last several years to the point where the department accounts for less than 1 percent of the state's total general fund.

"To put this in perspective, MDA's total budget - and I emphasize total - is less than the overtime paid for Michigan's Corrections Department," Wood said. "It's astonishing how a department which impacts every single Michigan resident every single day can be given such low priority when it comes to state funding. With this approach the state truly is biting the hand which feeds it."

Those statements by Wood were made before the recent executive order, which made things even worse for the MDA. With \$6.8 million less to spend, environmental programs took the biggest hit, with the possible exception of equine racing, which just might be driven out of the state this time.

There is some fight left in agriculture, though. Michigan Farm Bureau and other ag groups vow to battle against cuts to MDA's budget with the argument that it's shortsighted to cut the legs out from one of the few economic engines that seems to be on its feet in this state.

More about the budget cuts are on page one of this issue of Michigan Farm News.

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QUESTIONS

1. How can your county Farm Bureau stop the continuing erosion of programs vital for agriculture's future in Michigan? Letter-writing? Phone calls to lawmakers? What else?
2. If your county group could vote to cut five programs outside of ag's budget, what would they be? Also, list five programs within agriculture that could be cut.
3. Which programs funded by tax money are wasteful and should be cut before cuts to key programs? Make another list.