

behind it.”

It didn't hurt that the project moved forward because of an energy conservation improvement bond from the Michigan Municipal Bond Authority, but from the beginning, Searles said, there was enthusiasm about the project.

“What's great about this,” Searles said, “is that the energy savings from the corn burner pays for the high school roof and lighting. We needed the upgrades, but we did it without having to get the taxpayers involved.”

Energy savings should allow the school to pay off the corn burner within 15 to 20 years, said John Kinsora, a Honeywell International Inc. engineer who helped Merrill Schools get the project underway. “The cost of it is about two-and-a-half times that of a traditional boiler, but that would never pay for itself with energy savings,” he said.

The corn system is quite simple, said Casey Enders, facilities manager for the school. It's started with pellets, which melt away as corn is fed into a remarkably small burning chamber. From then on, as long as corn is fed into the system, no other heat source is needed.

“There is a little more maintenance involved,” Enders said. “We have to clean the chamber once a day, but it's a very simple procedure where you just run a hook around the edge. What's left after the kernels burn are called clinkers.”

Those clinkers, which Kinsora said are nothing more than soluble potash, are augured into a trash can. Searles said the potash may be sold as a school fund-raiser.

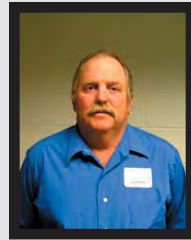
“We don't know what we'll do with it yet, but we may bag it and sell it as a fund-raiser, or we may put it on our own fields” which the school district rents to local farmers, he said.

At this point, with the first fire-up of the corn furnace only days away, bids have been taken for the 7,200 bushels of corn needed for the school year, Searles said. But no matter where the corn comes from, it's almost sure to be a local source, which is the other major appeal of the project besides cost savings.

“We're certainly very happy to be able to keep our fuel business local and not have to depend on foreign energy,” Searles said. “I think it's a positive thing for everyone in the community.”

## Farm Bureau honors Oceana member for service

Oceana County fruit and vegetable grower Tom Oomen has been recognized by Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) as the organization's Volunteer of the Month for September 2006.



With his brother Rick, Oomen operates Oomen Farms Limited, Inc., raising more than 1,000 acres of asparagus, carrots, squash, tart cherries and small grains near Crystal Valley. The business also encompasses a 1,000-head swine operation and an interest in a large processing and freezer cooperative.

Oomen has been an engaged volunteer in both his local and state-level Farm Bureau organizations. He recently finished several years of service on the Oceana County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, but remains active on local, state and national affairs committees, as well as MFB's state-level fruit and vegetable advisory committee. Oomen has made several trips to Washington D.C. to lobby on behalf of Michigan agriculture alongside Farm Bureau members from across the state. His most recent capital visit was in May of this year, when he took part in an emergency “fly-in” to counsel federal legislators on agriculture's need for a fair, manageable guest-worker program in any sweeping immigration reform.

“When something needs to be done, Tom will work to see that it gets done,” wrote his nominator for Volunteer of the Month honors, “even when it requires him to set aside his own interests to do it.”

Oomen has also been active with the Oceana County Farm Bureau Land Use Committee, and in 2004 served as a delegate representing his home county at MFB's State Annual Meeting.

Outside his Farm Bureau involvement, Oomen serves as an at-large director on the Michigan Asparagus Board, and with his brother has been honored as a grand marshal of the National Asparagus Festival Parade.

Oomen lives in Crystal Township with his wife Jill and their sons, Brock, Derek and Kyle.

The



## MAEAP action week

Contact state Reps. week of Oct. 30-Nov. 3

The state Legislature will return to session following the general election. Session is scheduled on Nov. 9 and Nov. 14. The Legislature will then recess for deer hunting and Thanksgiving, and return on Nov. 28 for approximately three weeks of session - providing time to move the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) legislation.

Contacting your state representative during the week of Oct. 30 to Nov. 3 and encouraging him or her to move House Bills 5711-5716, as reported from the House Agriculture Committee on June 21, is vital for the successful passage of the legislation.

Please make sure contacts are made with your state representative, stressing the legislation's proactive approach and its importance to the environment and Michigan agriculture.

Contact: Ron Nelson, Cell (517) 242-0764

## Support Friends of Agriculture!

There are plenty of opportunities for county Farm Bureaus to assist in getting Friends of Agriculture elected. Has your county Farm Bureau engaged in any of the activities listed below?

Sign Distribution

Many county Farm Bureau members live near main highways or freeways that are excellent locations to display signs for AgriPac-endorsed candidates. County Farm Bureaus can be very helpful, especially to local candidates, in distributing and putting up signs. Don't forget to engage your Community Action Groups, Young Farmer groups and Candidate Evaluation Committees. If you have a local or community college in your area, you might want to look into teaming up with a student group affiliated with the endorsed candidate's party. Some Young Farmer Committees have found this to be a good resource in helping to post signs, make phone calls reminding people to vote, etc.

Letters to the Editor

Several weeks ago county Farm Bureau presidents and Information Committee chairs received copies of sample and customized letters to the editor for publication in local newspapers. During election season, letters to the editor are one of the most highly read sections of a newspaper. This is a quick and easy way to express agriculture's support for a candidate endorsed as a Friend of Agriculture. If you need an additional copy, or help customizing your message, contact Jeremy C. Nagel at (800) 292-2680, ext. 6584.

November 2006



## Membership Standings

	2006	10/28/06
Goal	201,244	20,598
Target	47,655	3,029

**Don't forget to send in your set-up sheets to continue receiving materials. If you need a set-up sheet, contact your county FB office.**



7373 West Saginaw Hwy.  
Lansing, MI 48917  
(517) 323-7000

[www.michiganfarmbureau.com](http://www.michiganfarmbureau.com)

For questions, comments and suggestions, please contact Mike Wenkel at ext. 3232

### Reminders

There are still a limited amount of CAG coffee mugs and shoulder bags left in stock. Any group wishing to order them can contact Sarah Morrison at (800) 292-2680 ext. 3211. The items will be sent for the cost of shipping and handling.

Any suggestions or ideas for future articles, discussion topics or fun pages can be e-mailed to [smorris@michfb.com](mailto:smorris@michfb.com).

### Upcoming Discussion Topics:

**December:** Deer harvest, land access and special permits

**January:** Young People's Citizenship Seminar

**February:** Genetically Modified Organisms

### November

- State Annual Meeting
- Project RED - DeVos Place
- 
- 
- 

### December

- State Annual Meeting
- New County Leadership Conf.
- 
- 
- 

### January

- AFBF Annual Meeting & Conv.
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## Absentee Ballots

With a delayed fall harvest, many Farm Bureau members may find themselves working in the fields on Election Day. We want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to vote. Please use whatever opportunities you have (local newsletters, county offices, etc.) to distribute applications for absentee ballots. An application was inserted in the last issue of the Michigan Farm News, and is available online at the Michigan Secretary of State office, [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Absent-VoterBallot\\_105377\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Absent-VoterBallot_105377_7.pdf). You just fill out the form and mail or deliver it to your township clerk. Voters who will be out of town or unable to get to the polls on Nov. 7 have until 2 p.m. the Saturday before the election, Nov. 4, to pick up an absentee ballot.

## Get out the Vote

County Farm Bureaus can be very helpful in getting voters to the polls. Regional and county call centers need help making phone calls to remind people to vote. County Farm Bureaus should solicit volunteers from Community Action Groups and other committees to help make calls. County Farm Bureau offices can also help by reminding people to vote when they come into the office. In addition, county Farm Bureaus could call local radio stations and urge them to run public service announcements on Election Day reminding people to vote. County Farm Bureaus can also utilize the Michigan Farm Bureau database, iMIS, to send an e-mail to their members reminding them of the candidates endorsed as Friends of Agriculture and urging them to go to the polls.

Agriculture has much at stake in this election. We need to show our endorsed candidates that we will support them, and are dedicated to helping them get elected! It worked in the primary election, as over 90 percent of the AgriPac-endorsed candidates won!

For questions or more information on any of the above or other election needs, contact Sarah Black, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2040, or Doug Ewald, ext. 2042.

## Great Lakes fish farmers fear movement ban will destroy business

Michigan farmers who raise fish for human consumption and sport fishing say a ban placed this week on the interstate movement of fish from eight Great Lakes states is unnecessary and overzealous and threatens to put them out of business.

On Tuesday, the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) issued the restriction as an emergency order affecting Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, and 37 species of fish including trout, perch and bass. The emergency order also bans

the import of certain live fish from the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, Canada.

The movement restrictions are meant to prevent the spread of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) into fish farms, most often referred to as aquaculture facilities. VHS is a viral disease that can cause fish mortality but poses no threat to public health. The virus was first detected in wild fish in the Great Lakes in 2005. To date, the virus has not been found in an aquaculture facility located in the eight affected states.

A "significant portion" of the fish raised in Michigan is sold out of state, so the ban sends Michigan's aquaculture industry into a tailspin that is sure to upset regional markets, said Dan Vogler, chair of Michigan Farm Bureau's (MFB) Aquaculture and Fish Commodity Advisory Committee.

"We are essentially shut down," said Vogler, who operates the Harrietta Hills Trout Farm in Harrietta. "Our industry is based on small businesses like bait shops, and in one fell swoop with the stroke of the pen, APHIS has signed a death warrant for small businesses. For our industry this is equivalent to having a stem-to-stern storm come in that flattens the corn crop across an eight-state region - just decimates it."

Vogler says the ban is unfair because Michigan farm-raised fish that meet testing protocols for diseases like VHS are certified as "disease-free" under a recognized certification program run through Michigan State University.

To make matters worse, says Vogler, this strain of VHS has not been found in many of the species affected by the ban, yet the ban presumes all listed species are at risk of becoming infected.

"It's like comparing a pig to a cow," he said. "They're not the same."

In a July press release issued by the state Department of Natural Resources announcing the discovery of VHS in several fish species in Lake St. Clair, DNR officials said they did not know what the long-term effects of the virus will be in Michigan.

"One likely possibility is that VHS will act like many other viruses in the environment. Typically, viruses or bacteria infect fish, which may lead to disease in the fish if they are susceptible. Once the disease is expressed in these fish, a small percentage will die. The vast majority, however, will survive and will develop immunity to the viruses or bacteria that cause a disease," said Kelley Smith, chief of the DNR Fisheries Division.

For now, the movement restrictions will remain in effect until APHIS implements an interim rule establishing testing and certification criteria for susceptible species. APHIS officials are scheduled to begin discussions on the interim rule next week. It's estimated a rule might not be in place until spring 2007.

That's too long, says Vogler, especially when there is no indemnification program for business losses suffered as a result of the market disruption.

"If it takes six months, you won't have fish farms around in six months," he said. "The irony is my farm doesn't have the disease, but if I did, I'd get indemnity. I'd be better off having the disease."

MFB Livestock Specialist Ernie Birchmeier agrees that the emergency order, on the surface, appears to be a "knee-jerk" reaction.

"There is concern, especially since we already have testing protocols in place to keep Michigan farm-raised fish disease-free. The Michigan Farm Bureau is committed to supporting the state's aquaculture industry, and we intend to work with all stakeholders involved to come up with an interim rule in a timely manner that takes a reasonable approach to protecting fish species while also taking into account the livelihoods of aquaculture producers," said Birchmeier.

The emergency order comes less than a week after the National Agricultural Statistics Service issued results from the 2005 Census of Aquaculture that show aquaculture sales in Michigan increased from \$2.03 million in 1998 to \$2.40 million in 2005, an 18 percent increase. The count was the second nationwide aquaculture census conducted following the first aquaculture census in 1998.

"The census results were good news until Tuesday. Then everything changed," said Vogler.

According to the census, the number of Michigan farms producing food fish is 25; sport fish, 9; baitfish, 3; ornamental fish, 6; crustaceans, 1; and miscellaneous aquaculture, 3.

On the national level, sales of aquaculture products grew from \$978 million to nearly \$1.1 billion between 1998 and 2005. Food fish - including catfish, perch, salmon, hybrid striped bass, tilapia and trout - accounted for 62 percent of all U.S. aquaculture sales in 2005. The top ranking states for aquaculture sales are Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama and Louisiana.

## State's first school corn burner about to fire up

Casey Enders, facilities manager with Merrill Community Schools, shows the burn chamber of the middle school's new primary heat source. The corn burner is the first of its kind to heat a school in Michigan, and only the second in the nation.

Unless the faint smell of toast (or is it popcorn?) coming from Merrill Community Schools offends neighborhood noses, there seem to be no losers when a new heating system at the middle school gets cooking.

The school district recently became the first school in Michigan - and only the second in the nation - to install a corn-burning primary heating system, which will save the district an estimated \$10,000 per year on heating costs.

"The price of natural gas has increased nearly 40 percent," said John Searles, Merrill Community Schools' superintendent. "So we were looking for an alternative. We originally looked at solar and wind power, but the cost was prohibitive on solar, and we found that we don't have good wind patterns here. So then we explored biomass, which was a great thing for us to try because we're in the middle of farmland."

The kernel of the idea came when Searles was looking for alternative energy for his own house.

"I was looking for something that was self-sustaining like geothermal," he said. "And I came here after working at Kentwood Public Schools, where we had gone to some thermal heat quite successfully."

After investigating corn heat in agricultural applications in western Michigan greenhouses, Merrill schools decided to move forward with corn heat as part of a \$957,000 upgrade that included a new high school roof, a waste oil heater for the maintenance building, boiler tune-ups and new temperature controls, all designed by Honeywell Inc.

"The school board was behind this 100 percent the whole time," Searles said. "The board was very excited about doing something different, and the corn burner became viable, the board was really

## Did you know...

- **The largest pumpkin pie ever made was over five feet in diameter and weighed over 350 pounds. It used 80 pounds of cooked pumpkin, 36 pounds of sugar, 12 dozen eggs and took six hours to bake.**
- **In early colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the crust of pies, not the filling.**

- **Pumpkins were once recommended for removing freckles and curing snake bites.**
- **Pumpkins range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds.**