

Farm coverage earns Kalamazoo Gazette writer state-level honor

Debunking the notion that city slickers won't ever understand life on the farm, Kalamazoo Gazette reporter Rosemary Parker has proven herself to be a valuable asset to west Michigan's agricultural community. And for that, the Otsego resident and Northville native is one of two media professionals receiving Michigan Farm Bureau's (MFB) 2007 Agricultural Communicator of the Year Award.

The award recognizes journalists and other media professionals for outstanding work helping to "tell the story of agriculture" by informing and educating the non-farming public about the state's second-largest industry. Parker was nominated for the award by the Kalamazoo County Farm Bureau, and selected by the MFB Information and Public Relations Division from a field of 16 candidates nominated by county Farm Bureaus across the state.

Parker will be formally recognized as MFB's Agricultural Communicator of the Year for print media on Nov. 29 at the MFB 88th Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids.

According to Kalamazoo County Farm Bureau President Scott Oswalt, Parker's positive approach to agriculture makes her easy and comfortable to work with, and therefore a trusted resource for local farmers. And he can attest to this with first-hand experience hosting Parker on his Vicksburg-area sheep farm.

"I think the biggest thing with Rosemary is the comfort level. We know she's got positive agriculture on her mind," Oswalt said. "She always tries to look at things from that direction, and you can just tell she's got a passion for what she's writing."

Parker's interest in agriculture began as a student in Michigan State University's agricultural communications program. She worked her way through school at a dairy nutrition lab and, after graduating in 1973, started her professional career as a publications editor for MSU Extension and the Agricultural Experiment Station. Parker turned to freelance work for several years before starting full-time with the Kalamazoo Gazette 20 years ago.

"I have no relationship to the industry other than personal interest," Parker said, referring to herself as the Gazette's "unofficial farm editor." She also edits Hometown Gazette, a regional weekly aimed at Allegan County readers.

"I've covered Allegan County and the outlying region almost all the 20 years I've been here," she said. "Agriculture's a really important industry here, and we like to make sure we cover it. The agriculture stories I do are usually the ones that have a broad interest and impact. Everybody should care about their food and what's happening with the production of it. We all eat."

Parker credits Farm Bureau, in part, to helping keep her in touch with current farm-related issues.

"I'm out at the other end of the grapevine, so Farm Bureau are the folks I call when I need contact with farmers. They put me in touch with the people I need to talk with to find out what's going on," she said.

MFB praises agricultural communication of WEYI TV meteorologist

Among the things gardeners and farmers have in common is a keen eye on the skies. Shedding light on that common ground for the benefit of viewers across the Saginaw Valley has earned WEYI 25 television meteorologist Mark Torregrossa a Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) Agricultural Communicator of the Year Award for 2007.

The Illinois native and Reese-area resident is one of two media professionals being honored for outstanding work helping to "tell the story of agriculture" by informing and educating the non-farming public about the state's second-largest industry. Torregrossa was nominated for the Agricultural Communicator of the Year Award by the Bay County Farm Bureau, and selected by the MFB Information and Public Relations Division from a field of 16 candidates nominated by county Farm Bureaus across the state.

He will be formally recognized as MFB's Agricultural Communicator of the Year for broadcast media on Nov. 29 at the MFB 88th Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids.

"Farmers in our area turn to Mark for an accurate forecast," said Bay County Farm Bureau President Terry Histed. "He keeps agriculture in mind when reporting the weather, and helps educate the non-farming community about farmers' reliance on the weather by relating his weather garden to a small farm. If it's time to spray for bugs, he explains to viewers that just like he sprays the garden, farmers deal with the same issues."

Torregrossa, however, doesn't hail from a farm. He grew up in suburban Chicago and, as a youngster, fell in love with weather.

"Since the fourth grade I wanted to be a TV meteorologist," said the popular on-air forecaster who's found a comfortable niche at WEYI, an NBC affiliate station covering a wide swath of mid-Michigan from the station's studio in Clio.

The fertile fields of the Saginaw Valley have much in common with the area surrounding Torregrossa's alma mater, Northern Illinois University, and the central Iowa neighborhood where he started his broadcast career. It was at a station in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he first learned that farmers were among the most devoted weather watchers in his audience.

"They're what I call the real hard-core users of weather," Torregrossa said. "They live and die by it. The rest of the world just has an icon on their computer screen."

Torregrossa makes the most of the intimate connection between meteorology and agriculture in his broadcasts with a "weather garden," in which he consistently ties the local weather scene to its real-world impact on food and fiber production. A master gardener himself, Torregrossa also owns his own lawn fertilization and weed control company.



November 2007



Farm Bureau joins groups to 'ax' new sales tax on services

The Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) is among 23 agricultural organizations and 39 diverse business groups that are calling on legislators to ax the state's new sales tax on services. If not repealed, MFB warns that the tax will be a hardship on farmers and put Michigan's \$60 billion agriculture industry at a severe competitive disadvantage.

"By picking and choosing certain services to tax without any public input and what appears to be very little rhyme or reason, the Legislature has created winners and losers. From our vantage point, agriculture is a loser," said Wayne H. Wood, president of MFB, the state's largest general farm organization.

"We recognize the reality of the state budget crisis, but we don't think our elected officials intended to put Michigan's agriculture industry in jeopardy when they passed the tax. After all, agriculture is the state's second largest industry, not to mention an industry sector that is actually growing in our state. That's why we're urging legislators to reconsider the tax's negative impacts, repeal it, ensure all Department budgets are as lean as can be and only then consider a more fair and broad-based alternative to solving the state's fiscal crisis," said Wood.

Storage of agricultural products

On Wednesday, MFB and 22 other agricultural organizations co-signed a letter to the Legislature and Gov. Granholm which spells out the agriculture industry's opposition to the new sales tax on services.

One of the industry's biggest concerns centers on the taxing of storage services, especially those of perishable agricultural commodities which require unique storage between harvest and the time of consumption. The storage tax impact on one fruit processor/handler is estimated at over \$250,000 alone.

"Many agricultural products ranging from apples to onions are consumed year-round and require year-round storage. The service tax, in all likelihood, could tax a commodity multiple times as it makes its way through the food chain: first as raw product, then partially processed product and finally finished product," said Tonia Ritter, manager of the MFB State Governmental Affairs Department.

Membership Standings

2006/07 10/19/07

	2006/07	10/19/07
Goal	199,120	20,110
Target	47,860	3,030



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Reminders

- CAG's have a new online resource available. The Loop, Discussion Topics and Questions and the Fun Page are all available to view and print by visiting www.michiganfarmbureau.com/cag.
- Any changes to your group can be made directly through your county administrative manager, including changes to discussion leaders. Discussion Leaders are designated to receive all materials.
- Any suggestions or ideas for future articles, discussion topics or fun pages can be e-mailed to mwenkel@michfb.com or sent to Michigan Farm Bureau, 7373 West Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917 Attention: Mike Wenkel

November

MFB Annual Meeting

December

New County Leadership Conference

January

AFBF Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA
Council of Presidents

Local farmers comprise MFB's Policy Development Committee

Twenty Farm Bureau leaders have begun the daunting task of consolidating hundreds of resolutions passed by county Farm Bureaus on state and national issues affecting agriculture into a more manageable slate for members to consider at the upcoming Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) 88th Annual Meeting.

Farmers hailing from across the state make up MFB's prominent state Policy Development Committee, which is charged with preparing proposed resolutions for annual meeting delegates to vote on in traditional MFB grassroots fashion.

Resolutions adopted at the annual meeting dealing with state issues will direct MFB action in 2008. Adopted resolutions dealing with national issues will be forwarded to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) for consideration at the AFBF annual meeting in January.

Policy Development Committee members are first nominated by their Farm Bureau district and then selected and appointed to the committee by the MFB Board of Directors. Appointees serve a two-year term on the committee.

"The role and responsibilities of members serving on the state Policy Development Committee cannot be overstated," said Sarah Black, director of the MFB Public Policy and Commodity Division. "The activities and efforts of Michigan Farm Bureau, including those at the state Capitol, are dictated by Michigan Farm Bureau member-developed policy, so the state Policy Development Committee is a crucial peg in Michigan Farm Bureau's time-tested grassroots policy development process."

In preparing for their service on the committee, members of the 2007 Policy Development Committee were briefed on emerging agricultural policy issues dealing with topics such as renewable energy, availability of agricultural labor, environmental challenges to industry growth, national farm policy, animal rights/welfare agendas, land use, forestry issues, tax reform, and animal health/diseases.

Farm Bureau survey finds quarterly retail food prices up slightly

Retail food prices at the supermarket increased slightly in the third quarter of 2007, according to the latest American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Marketbasket Survey. The informal survey shows the total cost of 16 basic grocery items in the third quarter of 2007 was \$44.03, up about 2 percent or \$1.08 from the second quarter of 2007.

Of the 16 items surveyed, eight increased, seven decreased and one stayed the same in average price compared to the 2007 second-quarter survey. Compared to one year ago, the overall cost for the marketbasket items showed an increase of about 7 percent.

For the second quarter in a row, regular whole milk showed the largest quarter-to-quarter price increase, up 48 cents to \$3.94 per gallon; followed by cheddar cheese, which rose 35 cents per pound to \$4.07.

Other items that increased in price were: Russet potatoes and corn oil up 23 cents each to \$2.57 for 5 pounds and \$3.01 for a 32-ounce bottle, respectively; bacon up 16 cents to \$3.60 per pound; vegetable oil, up 7 cents to \$2.73 per 32-ounce bottle; toasted oat cereal and Red Delicious apples, up 4 cents each to \$2.90 and \$1.49 for a 10-ounce box and 1 pound, respectively.

Pork chops showed the greatest decrease in price, down 24 cents to \$3.39 per pound. Other items that decreased in price were: sirloin tip roast, down 13 cents to \$3.86; ground chuck, eggs and white bread, down 4 cents each to \$2.81 per pound, \$1.51 per dozen and \$1.54 for a 20-ounce loaf, respectively; and flour and mayonnaise, down 1 cent each to \$1.91 for 5 pounds and \$3.42 for a 32-ounce jar, respectively.

"Dairy products continue to increase in price," said AFBF economist Jim Sartwelle. "Strong competition from overseas consumers for U.S. milk products has helped drive prices to current levels."

As retail grocery prices have gradually increased, the share of the average food dollar that America's farm families receive has dropped over time.

"In the mid-1970s, farmers received about one-third of consumer retail food expenditures on average. That figure has decreased steadily over time and is now just 22 percent, according to Agriculture Department statistics," Sartwelle said.

Using that percentage across-the-board, the farmer's share of this quarter's \$44.03 marketbasket total would be \$9.69.

According to USDA statistics, Americans spend just under 10 percent of their disposable income on food annually, the lowest average of any country in the world.

Agricultural organizations for service tax repeal

Julian Vail, LLC
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Michigan Apple Association
Michigan Asparagus Growers
Michigan Asparagus Growers, Inc.
Michigan Aquaculture Association
Michigan Bean Shippers Association
Michigan Blueberry Growers Advisory
Michigan Blueberry Growers Association
Michigan Cattlemen's Association
Michigan Christmas Tree Association
Michigan Cherry Marketing Institute Inc.
Michigan Corn Growers Association
Michigan Equine Partnership
Michigan Farm Bureau
Michigan Food Processors Association
Michigan Milk Producers Association
Michigan Pork Producers Association
Michigan Processing Apple Growers
Michigan Soybean Association
Michigan State Horticultural Society Committee
Michigan Vegetable Council
Potato Growers of Michigan
Founding members of the Ax the Tax coalition
Affiliated Building Service Contractors of Michigan
American Advertising Federation
American Institute of Architects - Michigan Chapter
Arboriculture Society of Michigan
Associated Builders and Contractors of Michigan
Burglar and Fire Alarm Association of Michigan
Council on State Taxation
Detroit Regional Chamber

Evans Distribution Systems
EWI & Associates, Inc.
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce
John Bailey and Associates, Inc.
Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce
Michigan Business and Professionals Association
Michigan Chapter of the American Society of Travel Agents
Michigan Apple Association
Michigan Association of Home Builders
Michigan Association of Insurance Agents
Michigan Association of Realtors
Michigan Association of Recreation Vehicles and Campgrounds
Michigan Chamber of Commerce
Michigan Contract Security Association
Michigan Council of Private Investigators
Michigan Dairy Foods Association
Michigan Farm Bureau
Michigan Green Industries Association
Michigan Grocers Association
Michigan Hotel, Motel and Resort Association
Michigan Manufactured Housing Association
Michigan Milk Producer's Association
Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association
Michigan Professional Bail Agents Association
Michigan Propane Gas Association
National Federation of Independent Businesses
Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce
Self Storage of Michigan
SEMCO Energy
Small Business Association of Michigan
Tree Care Industry Association

Did you know...MSU Library now offers digital archives of Michigan Farm News

Agriculture history buffs will be happy to hear that decades of agricultural news are being given a modern touch for long-term preservation thanks to joint efforts of the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) and Michigan State University (MSU) Library. For more than a year, archivists at the MSU Library have been digitally archiving complete bound volumes of Michigan Farm News, the official member publication of MFB, the state's largest general farm organization. Made possible from a grant through the Making of Modern Michigan Project, the task is well under way, and should eventually allow anyone to access PDF files of all Farm News bound issues with just a few mouse clicks. So far, the project has archived Michigan Farm News volumes dating from the 1940s through the 1970s, but more are being put online every day. Since September 1998, select stories from each Farm News issue have been posted to MFB's Web site and archived there. The MSU Library site, however, archives the complete issue. "The Michigan Farm News archives on the Michigan Farm Bureau Web site are not intended to be a complete source; rather they complement the newsprint version of the publication with selected stories. In contrast, the MSU Library site will house complete issues," said Paul Jackson, Michigan Farm News editor. In addition to Farm News, early copies of MFB's former member magazine, Rural Living, are also downloadable from the MSU Library site. Past issues of Michigan Farm News can be found on the MSU Library Web site at <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/collections/index.cfm?AuthorID=240>. Select stories from more recent issues of Michigan Farm News can be found on the MFB Web site at <http://www.michiganfarmbureau.com/farmnews/archive.php>.