

## Farmers make their voices heard in Lansing

There was a high level of agricultural activity in the Capital City on February 20th, as the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) held its annual member lobbying event, the Lansing Legislative Seminar, and several Farm Bureau members took part in a Senate committee hearing regarding water use legislation.



Pictured, left, members of the Monroe County Farm Bureau host Sen. Randy Richardville (R-Frenchtown Twp.) at the Lansing Legislative Seminar, where they help the senator better understand issues important to his agricultural constituents. Representing the county Farm Bureau from left to right are: Mary Janssens, Charles Helwig and John Delmotte.

Pictured right, St. Joseph County farmer Larry Walton testifies before the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee meeting concerning agricultural water use.

## State, county Farm Bureaus awarded grants to bolster ag education

**Contact:** Deb Schmucker, (800) 292-2680, ext. 3213

**LANSING, Feb. 14, 2008** - With funds obtained through a national-level agriculture education grant program, the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) and half a dozen county Farm Bureaus will be able to improve efforts to educate Michigan's young people about the state's vital food and fiber industry.

MFB and local Farm Bureaus representing farmers in the central Upper Peninsula and Branch, Gladwin, Kalkaska, Missaukee and Shiawassee counties have all been awarded mini-grants of up to \$500 from the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) White-Reinhardt Fund for Education to support agricultural education programs in K-12 classrooms.

At both the state and county levels, Farm Bureau's Promotion and Education program sends Farm Bureau volunteers into classrooms to teach youngsters about where their food comes from, who raises it, and how it gets from the farm into their lunchboxes. The White-Reinhardt Fund for Education helps Farm Bureaus initiate new programs or expand existing ones.

### Michigan Farm Bureau

MFB will put its grant toward the development of a new Agriculture in the Classroom lesson spotlighting fruit cultivation in the Lower Peninsula. Targeting first-grade students, the lesson will combine agriculture and geography - with some help from a superhero named Captain Food

Fabulous - to illustrate how the state's west coast is uniquely suited to growing a wide variety of fruits not normally found this far north.

### U.P.'s Hiawathaland Farm Bureau

Covering a wide swath of the central Upper Peninsula, the Hiawathaland Farm Bureau will use its grant to supply an educational video about farm stewardship to third-grade classes in 17 school districts in Delta, Alger and eastern Marquette counties. Titled "Every Day is Earth Day on the Farm," the video helps explain how necessary it is for farmers to take good care of the natural resources that their livelihoods depend on.

### Branch County Farm Bureau

The Branch County Farm Bureau's grant will go toward the purchase of educational materials to outfit a mobile exhibit trailer that its volunteers use to teach the public about current agricultural issues, such as farmland preservation, renewable energy, crop production and processing, groundwater stewardship and farm safety. Towed to local schools, the trailer conveniently brings agricultural education to a larger audience of young people without the need for expensive, hard-to-coordinate field trips.

### Gladwin County Farm Bureau

The Gladwin County Farm Bureau intends to re-stock the shelves of its "Red Barn" bookcases in local schools with updated books to bolster Agriculture in the Classroom lessons that Farm Bureau volunteers deliver to students. Targeting grades 3-6, the books will help add depth to the educational outreach, including career opportunities that agriculture provides to farmers and non-farmers alike.

### Kalkaska County Farm Bureau

White-Reinhardt grant funds in Kalkaska County will be used to build a comprehensive library of agriculture-related literature to show second-graders that their food comes from farms - not the grocery store. A selection of books, videos and other visual aids otherwise unavailable in the community will be provided to classrooms to augment structured lesson plans about agriculture.

### Missaukee County Farm Bureau

The Missaukee County Farm Bureau's grant will go toward funding its ambitious Project RED (Rural Education Day), an event which cycles hundreds of area fifth-graders through 16 hands-on learning stations devoted to agriculture-related topics from sheep shearing to butter production.

### Shiawassee County Farm Bureau

The Shiawassee County Farm Bureau will enhance its Agriculture in the Classroom efforts with a new egg incubator, brooder, lesson plans and other specialized equipment to better educate local young people about the poultry industry, including the life cycle of chickens and various poultry products.

For more information about Farm Bureau Promotion and Education efforts in your community, contact your county Farm Bureau office, or visit [www.miaqclassroom.org](http://www.miaqclassroom.org).

The



March 2008

## Farmers testify in support of water withdrawal assessment tool



**Contact:** Matt Smego, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2044

Michigan farmers put a face on the state's water withdrawal debate, as more than 50 Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) members crowded Wednesday's Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee meeting for the first public discussion on Senate bills concerning Great Lakes water management and conservation.

While MFB has not taken a formal position on the legislation, a handful of Farm Bureau members spoke to the general concepts of the bill package which calls for, among other things, utilizing a computerized water withdrawal assessment tool to determine whether a new or expanded water use runs the risk of dramatically decreasing flows to local streams and rivers and reducing fish populations in those bodies of water. Proponents of the risk assessment tool favor this scientific approach as opposed to restricting water use based on thresholds derived arbitrarily.

After seeing his corn fields dry up last summer due to drought, Mark Kies, a crop and beef farmer from Allen in Hillsdale County, told the committee that he is moving ahead with using irrigation wells on his farm and supports the idea of using the risk assessment tool to determine what effect the wells might have. Having access to water is vital for his farm, he said, because had it not been for the help of crop insurance, the losses associated with corn yielding just 15 bushels an acre last year "were almost unsustainable."

In his testimony, Larry Walton, a seed corn and crop farmer from Sturgis in St. Joseph County, reiterated the importance of agriculture maintaining access to water, particularly in southwest Michigan which has the largest amount of irrigated farmland in the state and is home to two of the world's largest seed corn facilities. The seed corn facilities, he said, are leading players in the life sciences industry, as they develop seeds that eventually will one day become food for humans and animals.

Walton said Michigan needs a water management approach that allows these companies and his local farm to expand and remain profitable and, at the same time, enables the state to conserve water resources in a responsible manner. The water withdrawal assessment tool is a step in the right direction, he said.

"I like the idea that there will be some time to implement it and that there'll be opportunities to make public comment on the tool once it's implemented," he said.



## Membership Standings

	2007/08	2/27/2008	
Goal	199,120	104,683	52.57%
Target	47,860	29,507	61.65%



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For questions, comments and suggestions, please contact Amy Pline at ext. 3211



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.michfb.com/cag](http://www.michfb.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 [apline@michfb.com](mailto:apline@michfb.com) or sent to Michigan Farm Bureau, 7373 West Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917 Attention: Amy Pline

### March

- 2-8 Ag Safety Awareness Program
- 4-5 Project TEAM Conference- Mt Pleasant
- 12-14 Washington Legislative Seminar
- 16-22 National Ag Week
- 18-19 FB Campaign Mgt Workshop
- 19 Ag Day at the Capitol

### April

- \*Deadline to qualify for
- Membership Chairman's Trip
- Canandaigua, New York

### May

- 14-16 County Staff Conference

Maintaining agriculture's reasonable use of water is just as vital in northwest Michigan, testified Todd Fox, a fruit and vegetable grower from Shelby in Oceana County.

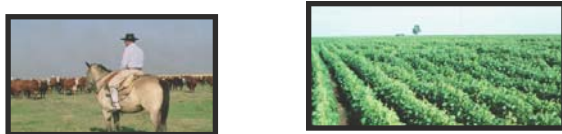
Fox told the committee that he uses trickle irrigation in his orchards, and many of his neighboring farmers rely on center pivot irrigation for vegetable production. Come harvest time, cherries require a considerable amount of water for cooling purposes, he said, while vegetable processors rely on large amounts of water for food processing.

Fox, a fourth generation farmer who'd like to see his son join the farm one day, emphasized that "grandfathering" these existing agricultural water uses is a necessity for the industry's survival and future.

"I'm very concerned that the existing (water) uses that are in agriculture are grandfathered and that these uses have the ability to go on," he testified.

In their testimony, the farmers also expressed support for Michigan's ratification of the Great Lakes Compact.

## Michigan farmers headed to Argentina for agricultural study tour



### March 1-10 trip will explore changing trends in beef, soybean production

**Contact:** Ernie Birchmeier, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2024  
**LANSING, Feb. 21, 2008** - What happens in Argentina doesn't stay in Argentina. Agricultural decisions there have ripple effects that can be felt all the way to Michigan, which is why a small group of Michigan farmers is headed to the South American country for an international agricultural study tour sponsored by the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB).

Twenty MFB members from across the state have been selected to embark on a 10-day tour of Argentina from March 1-10. Members include:

John Burk of Bay City, Bay County Farm Bureau  
George Brossman of Vandalia, Cass County Farm Bureau  
Jonathan White of Jones, Cass County Farm Bureau

Phil Jelinek of Davison, Genesee County Farm Bureau  
John Crumbaugh of Ithaca, Gratiot County Farm Bureau  
Jeff Oesterle of Mason, Ingham County Farm Bureau  
Thomas Zenz of Grass Lake, Jackson County Farm Bureau  
Regina Richardson of Vicksburg, Kalamazoo County Farm Bureau

Tim Kruthoff of Kent City, Kent County Farm Bureau  
Blaine Baker of Clayton, Lenawee County Farm Bureau  
Daniel Jenkins of Midland, Midland County Farm Bureau  
Brian Kreps of LaSalle, Monroe County Farm Bureau  
Frank Genovese of Oxford, Oakland County Farm Bureau  
Roger Victory of Hudsonville, Ottawa County Farm Bureau  
Ryan Schwehofer of St. Clair, St. Clair County Farm Bureau  
Wayne H. Wood of Marlette, MFB President  
Josh Wunsch of Traverse City, MFB Vice President  
Dave Armstrong, Vice President of East Lansing-based GreenStone Farm Credit Services

The group's itinerary revolves around visiting farms and agricultural businesses and meeting with agricultural leaders and government officials to better understand, among other things, how rising prices for grains are affecting Argentina's well-established soybean and beef industries.

Once the world's largest beef exporter, Argentina currently ranks fourth, and some predict that ranking will slide in coming years as more Argentinean farmers give up beef production and its high production costs in favor of growing more profitable crops such as soybeans, corn and wheat. Already, half of all cultivated farmland in Argentina is dedicated to soybeans, with the country supplying about half of the world's soybean meal and oil exports.

Unique to Argentina, livestock farmers are also up against export caps imposed as anti-inflation measures for their country. The caps have been successful in flooding the domestic market with cheap and affordable beef, but beef producers have consequently seen their profits fall while crop prices soar.

"It's a real interesting time in agriculture right now for everyone - not just farmers in America. Argentina provides a perfect case study into what happens when one staple commodity loses its luster, in this case beef, and another staple, soybeans, gains tremendous momentum. Who ultimately wins and loses in a transition like this? Farmers on this study tour will be at a vantage point to ask questions like this," said tour coordinator and MFB livestock and dairy specialist Ernie Birchmeier.

Several different tour stops will allow the group to also explore animal health issues and how animal diseases have impacted the country's agricultural trade. Over the years,

Argentina has wrestled with incidences of foot-and-mouth disease in cattle. As a result, the United States has imposed trade restrictions on the country.

"In regards to the discovery of animal diseases, it'll be interesting to learn what trade barriers Argentina faces as compared to the United States. Is it just as challenging for them to re-open markets with foreign trading partners?" said Birchmeier.

Also built into the itinerary are plenty of opportunities for the group to examine land use issues from several different perspectives.

At a stop in the pampas grasslands region, for instance, the delegation will visit a large custom operator who performs field work for local farmers on a contract basis, allowing the farmers to farm without making huge investments in owning their own farm machinery. While custom operators aren't uncommon in the United States - and are used quite a bit for hay production in Michigan - they are the norm in the pampas. And that, said Birchmeier, begs the question: Does the use of custom operators allow more Argentinean farmers to own land?

With most of Argentina's cattle grass-fed as opposed to grain-fed like in the United States, Birchmeier said it will be enlightening for the group to learn what the land and production costs are of Argentinean livestock farmers as compared to their American counterparts.

During their stay, the delegation also will have several opportunities to learn how Argentinean farmers view and use biotechnology such as genetically engineered crops.

"We often hear that South American countries do not farm as many genetically modified crops as the United States, but trips of this kind have proved otherwise," said Birchmeier. "This tour will give Michigan farmers the opportunity to learn firsthand to what extent bioengineered crops are being used in Argentina. It will also give us a chance to

learn how accepting Argentinean consumers have been of the technology."

In addition, the tour will cover renewable energy, including biodiesel production, and allow Michigan farmers to speak with their Argentinean counterparts about the common "food versus fuel" debate.

Tour-goers will gain insight on several other matters, including Argentina's no-till farming practices, dairy production, and fruit and vegetable marketing, along with the organizational structures of domestic farmers associations and unions and their government relations and lobbying activities.

### Participant selection and other trip details

Trip participants were chosen from nominations submitted by county Farm Bureaus based on their leadership within Farm Bureau and the greater agricultural community. The farmers selected represent a wide cross-section of Michigan's diverse agriculture industry.

Trip costs are being split between MFB, individual participants and the participants' county Farm Bureaus. Upon their return, participants are encouraged to share their findings with their county Farm Bureau and the greater community.

"The experience also allows participants to inject their newfound knowledge and observations into Farm Bureau policy discussions. They can better evaluate whether Farm Bureau policy needs to be adjusted based on what they learned abroad," said Birchmeier.

MFB routinely sponsors agricultural study tours, often with help from Michigan State University. Most recently, groups traveled to the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Poland in 2006; Australia in 2005; China in 2002; Mexico in 2001; and Brazil and Chile in 2000.

## Did you know... Michigan among top 10 states for value of fresh, processed vegetables

**Contact:** Ken Nye, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2020

The annual summary of Michigan vegetable production for the fresh market and processing sectors in 2007 has been completed by the Michigan Field Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The office found that Michigan growers produced 7.77 million hundredweight (cwt) of fresh market vegetables in 2007, down 10 percent from 2006. The total includes dual-purpose crops of asparagus, celery, bell peppers, pumpkins and squash. The value of fresh market vegetables, at the farm level, was \$149 million, down 8 percent from 2006. Michigan ranked ninth nationally in the value of fresh market vegetables for 2007.

Michigan farmers grew 375,170 tons of processing vegetables in 2007. The crops were valued at \$62 million, ranking Michigan fifth among states in processing vegetable value. However, Michigan was the top state in pickle production.

Nationally, fresh market vegetable and melon production for 24 selected crops totaled 494 million hundredweight in 2007, up 2 percent from last year. Harvested area covered 1.94 million acres, virtually unchanged from 2006. Value of the 2007 crop is estimated at \$10.9 billion, up 2 percent from a year ago. The three largest crops, in terms of production, are onions, head lettuce, and watermelons, which combined to account for 38 percent of the total production. Head lettuce, tomatoes, and onions claim the highest values, accounting for 32 percent of the total value when combined.

U.S. processing of eight selected vegetables totaled 17.8 million tons, up 12 percent from last year. Area harvested is estimated at 1.25 million acres, down slightly from a year ago. Processing crop value is estimated at \$1.60 billion, 20 percent above 2006. The three largest crops, in terms of production, are tomatoes, sweet corn, and snap beans, which combined to account for 92 percent of the total processing production. The three most valuable of the eight processed vegetables in 2007 are tomatoes, sweet corn, and cucumbers for pickles, accounting for 81 percent of the total value when combined.