

The

# LOOP

June 2008



## House water legislation could jeopardize growth of state's locally grown, processed food sector

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

LANSING, May 22, 2008 - Legislation regulating new and increased water withdrawals passed by the House of Representatives on Wednesday may guarantee that Michigan's cold streams have slightly more fish in them than a Senate proposal favored by agriculture, but the tradeoff for consumers could be less locally grown and processed food on the dinner table.



"House Bill 5065 has the potential to impact more than 4,200 farms in Michigan by restricting their future access to water, a resource that remains essential to growing crops and raising animals for food products," said Michigan Farm Bureau Legislative Counsel Matt Smego.

"Michigan's Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council has recognized that a large amount of water can be removed from cold streams before fish populations are harmed," he said. "We acknowledge that there should be additional considerations for cold streams; however, the House proposal will greatly restrict the amount of water resource that can be used for food production in some areas."

In the end, Smego said the difference between House and Senate legislation on this issue is that Senate Bill 860, as passed by the Senate last week, acknowledges that "Michigan has a great water resource that should be used efficiently to balance the economic, social and environmental demands, whereas the House version trends toward policies that would be considered in an area that is water scarce."

## Membership Standings

2007/08      5/28/2008

Goal	199,120	149,486	83.77%
Target	47,860	40,091	75.07%



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

### A LOOK AHEAD ...

#### June

- 3-4 AFBF Midwest Commodity Conf  
Sioux City, Iowa
- 23-27 Young People's Citizenship Seminar, Northwood Univ
- 27-29 Membership Chairman's Trip  
Canandaigua, New York

#### July

- 3-4 Fourth of July Holiday.
- 14-16 AFBF Council of Presidents Meeting - Washington, D.C.
- 15-17 Ag Expo - MSU
- 20-23 AFBF Midwest Legislative Conf Rapid City, South Dakota

#### August

- 13 State Young Farmer Golf Outing - Centennial Acres, Sunfield
- 19-22 AFBF Staff Institute  
Indianapolis, Indiana

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### MICHIGAN CROP WEATHER:

In general, cool soils hindered germination and the emergence of planted crops for the week ending May 18, the Michigan Field Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service reported. Breaking from that trend, though, was corn. As corn planting was wrapping up, early planted fields had emerged. Soybeans were being planted, and some were just beginning to emerge. Meanwhile, sugar beets, for the most part, were emerged. Winter wheat generally looked good, although there were some reports of powdery mildew due to damp conditions. Alfalfa benefited from the weather with stands of 12 to 18 inches. Light frost damage was reported. Barley planting was behind average for this time of year.

In the fruit orchards, below-normal temperatures kept insect activity low. Despite the cool weather, growing degree day totals were still five to six days ahead of average. Tart cherries were in early bloom in the northwest. Strawberries were in bloom in the southwest and east. Blueberries were in early to full bloom. Freeze damage to juice and early-season wine grapes in the southwest was quite varied. Late-season wine grapes escaped damage.



Despite a light frost towards the end of the week, the NASS- Michigan Field Office reported no damage to vegetation. Asparagus harvest continued at a slow pace due to weather, and spears were sandy because of the recent rains. Celery planting continued on schedule. Squash and cucumbers were being directly seeded. Carrot planting was mostly finished with a few processors stretching out their planting dates longer than usual.

The USDA-NASS-Michigan Field Office can be reached at (517) 324-5300. This information is also available online at <http://www.nass.usda.gov/mi>.



## **Congress did Michigan right in looking beyond 'farm' in farm bill Most of bill benefits greater public by way of food stamps, school lunches, etc.**

Contact: Ryan Findlay, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2025

LANSING, May 15, 2008 - Michigan is a state that can't afford not to have The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, more commonly known as the farm bill, so Farm Bureau is proud that 15 of the 17 members of Michigan's Congressional delegation voted in favor of the legislation for three important reasons unique to this state.

First and foremost, 73 percent of the so-called "farm bill" will go to pay for federal food and nutrition programs that feed low-income Americans, school children and the elderly - not to farmers as is popular belief. This is huge for an economically depressed state like Michigan where there's been a 53 percent rise in the number of households receiving government food assistance in the last five years, and one in eight Michigan residents now receives government-issued food stamps. At a time when many families are struggling with rising food costs that are beyond the agriculture industry's control, this legislation helps ensure that people won't go hungry.

Second, there's no denying the fact that agriculture is vital to Michigan's economy. Agriculture and its supporting industries employ one in four residents and contribute about \$63.7 billion to Michigan's economy annually, making the sector Michigan's second largest industry. This legislation provides a framework designed to help farmers in Michigan and throughout the nation ride out volatile market swings so that the United States maintains its domestic agricultural base and Americans aren't reliant on foreign countries for food.

Third, as the Great Lakes State, Michigan places a high priority on protecting its natural resources, and The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 helps the state achieve this with programs promoting stewardship activities such as providing wildlife habitat, as well as the development of advanced renewable energy technologies to protect the environment and ease the financial pain at the gas pump.

"All in all, this bill has widespread benefits for Michigan residents beyond the traditional farm programs that tend to garner the most hype," said Ryan Findlay, Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) associate national legislative counsel. "This bill was designed with everyone in mind; it provides a critical safety net for farmers as well as nutrition, conservation, rural development and energy programs that are vital to this country for the next five years."

Findlay went on to say that "farm bills have taken public beatings in the past and this one is no exception," but said the House decision to pass the legislation by a vote of 318-106 on Wednesday followed by the Senate's action to do the same on Thursday by a vote of 81-15, both wide enough margins to override a threatened presidential veto, speak volumes about the caliber of the legislation.

"You're never going to have the perfect bill to satisfy everyone, but what you need is legislation that is good for the majority of your constituents and Michigan's elected officials found that in The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008," he said.

According to Findlay, Michigan's Representatives and Senators had numerous opportunities to meet one-on-one with Michigan farmers, and they've learned how programs in the bill beyond farm payments, which tend to get the most public attention, help Michigan farm families.

"We're talking about research programs to prevent crop diseases, and innovative marketing programs to

expand into new markets, not to mention programs that help farmers build environmentally sound structures to safely store manure on their farms, and the list goes on and on," he said, adding that there is something for every farmer in the legislation. "Michigan is unique in that we're second only to California for the state with most diverse agriculture industry. That means we produce a wide variety of commodities from dairy cattle and hogs to wheat and apples and green peppers. In one form or another, this legislation has something for every Michigan farmer," he said.

Even if lawmakers weren't completely sold on the farm programs, they couldn't deny the benefits of the nutrition title which, at 73 percent of the bill's total funding, truly represents the meat and potatoes of the legislation, said Findlay. In comparison, the Congressional Budget Office scores spending on the commodities section of the bill at 11 percent; crop insurance at 6 percent; conservation at 7 percent; agricultural disaster aid at a half-percent and "other" at 2 percent. "The legislation calls for increasing spending on federal nutrition programs by \$10.3 billion, including increasing funding for the school snack program, which utilizes fresh fruits and vegetables, by more than \$1 billion and increasing aid to food banks by \$1.25 billion. Who can argue against these kind of improvements?" said Findlay.

As for naysayers who continue to criticize the legislation saying more reform is needed in the area of farm program payments, Findlay says the bill already contains substantial reforms over the last farm bill. He also cautions that national farm policy of this kind is not written for market conditions in a single year but rather for a longer period of time that involves unknowns. So while prices for corn, soybeans and other commodities are favorable at this point, that may not always be the case. And even in today's supposed "heyday," farmers are not necessarily reaping a windfall, as production expenses and input costs, such as fuel, fertilizer and feed, are at all-time highs, making it more expensive than ever to produce a crop and raise livestock.

On top of this, many farmers are not reaping record commodity prices. More often than not, a farmer - wanting some economic stability - has already entered into a contract to sell a future crop at an already established price. So while corn today may be selling for a highly publicized price of about \$6 a bushel, for example, a farmer might have inked a deal a year ago to sell his crop at half that price. In fact, a large portion of the Michigan 2008 crop has already been sold at prices in the \$3 to \$4 a bushel range.

In looking forward, Farm Bureau hopes the President will follow the lead of Congress and reconsider his position on the legislation. "I think it would behoove the President to reconsider his position and realize that this legislation is not simply a 'farm bill' but truly a next generation Food, Conservation, and Energy Act," said Findlay.



Reminders

- CAG's have online resources available. The Loop, Discussion Topics, Discussion Response Form, Report Form, Questions and the Fun Page are all available to view and print by visiting [www.michfb.com/cag](http://www.michfb.com/cag).
- Completed set up sheets can be mailed directly to your county administrative manager. Remember: Discussion Leaders are designated to receive all materials, so make sure the person designated as DL is an active member of your group.
- 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