

The

# LOAD

October 2008

## MFB honors Otsego farm for environmental thoroughness, foresight

Organization's Ecology Leadership Award goes to Sklarczyk Seed Farm  
Contact: Carrie Vollmer-Sanders, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2026

LANSING, Sept. 25, 2008 - Spotting a nook or cranny on the Sklarczyk Seed Farm that has not been touched by the nimble green thumbs of father-and-son operators Don and Ben Sklarczyk is nearly impossible. From top to bottom and inside and out, the farm's greenhouse and farm fields employ the best and newest practices for environmental stewardship, energy efficiency and wildlife conservation.

For its progressiveness, thoroughness and dedication to caring for the environment, the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) will present Sklarczyk Seed Farm, LLC of Johannesburg with the organization's 2008 Ecology Leadership Award, previously known as the Award for Proactive Leadership in Ecology Management.

Now in its fifth year, the award goes to an individual, farm or partnership whose natural resources stewardship practices contribute to the protection of the environment, while maintaining or enhancing productivity and profitability. The Sklarczyks will be formally recognized in December at MFB's 89th Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids.

The farm, which produces seed potatoes in a hydroponic greenhouse and grows wheat and soybeans on 500 acres, was nominated for the award by the Otsego County Farm Bureau, and selected from a field of 21 nominees submitted by county Farm Bureaus from across the state.

"Their recent Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) certification, their efforts to conserve energy with hydro-cooling pads and energy-efficient fans in all greenhouses, and their 1999 Environmental Protection Agency/ National Potato Council Environmental Stewardship Award are just a few of the reasons why the Otsego County Farm Bureau feels Sklarczyk Seed Farm is deserving of this honor," said Otsego County Farm Bureau President Linc Campbell.

In nominating Sklarczyks, the county Farm Bureau submitted a letter of support from Otsego Conservation District Chairperson John Middleton who shared similar sentiments, writing "Don Sklarczyk recognizes that natural resource health affects not only his farm, but the surrounding area as well."



## Membership Standings

	2008	9/25/08	
Goal	206,843	9,653	4.67%
Target	47,543	1,535	3.23%

**Attention:**  
**2008/09 CAG Packets were mailed out in September to ALL county Farm Bureau SECRETARIES.**  
**Included in the packet were 12 CAG envelopes, 12 revised Set-up Sheets- Sorry! 12 revised & Response Forms.**  
**Set-up Sheets must be returned to CAMs by 12/1/08 to insure mailing.**



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

### A LOOK AHEAD ...

#### : **October**

: 7-8 State Policy Development Committee Meetings

: 28-30 State PD Committee Meeting

#### : **November**

: 27-28 Holidays

#### : **December**

: 2-4 State P&E Committee Mtg  
: 2-5 MFB Annual Meeting, G.R.  
: 16-17 AFBF Resolutions  
: 18-19 New County leadership Conf  
: 25-26 Holidays

\*\*\* County Annual Meetings Continue through November \*\*\* Membership Schools run 10/30 - 12/15 \*\*\*

(Cont'd from front page)

## What makes the farm special

The Sklarczyks have a long and extensive list of improvements made over the years. The achievements are broad and range from establishing filter strips and converting to minimum tillage to reduce soil erosion, to installing a low-pressure irrigation pivot system along with a low-watt, motion-activated lighting system to reduce energy consumption.

Among the farm's biggest advancements has been the use of high-tech field gear such as global positioning system controls on tractors and yield monitors on harvest equipment. The yield monitors helped the men determine that in some fields the energy requirements to produce a crop outweighed yields; thus, it made more sense to use the fields for wildlife food plots.

The Sklarczyks have also gone to considerable lengths to protect the water quality of nearby Denny Lake. Water runoff that collects on the farm is captured in water retention basins and funneled to a holding pond where the water can be purified. Acting like a dam, water levels in the pond are regulated so that gates allowing water to flow into Denny Lake are only opened once the water has reached optimum purification.

In 2005, the farm secured a permit from the state Department of Environmental Quality to collect, receive and consume used oil. The Sklarczyks have been able to reduce liquid petroleum gas consumption on the farm by using more than 5,000 gallons a year of used oil for heating purposes.

The family sought help from the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 2006 to remove old underground fuel storage tanks and replace them with modern above-ground fuel tanks and filling areas.

Pursuing voluntary verification in MAEAP was a natural next step for the farm. MAEAP verification signifies that a farm operates in compliance with all applicable state and federal environmental regulations and generally accepted farming practices. In 2007, the wheat and soybean arm of the business became verified in the MAEAP Farmstead and Cropping Systems. A year later the greenhouse portion followed suit, becoming one of the first MAEAP-verified greenhouses in the state.

## Living a legacy; helping the masses

Conservation was instilled in the men by the farm's founder Michael Sklarczyk, Don's father and Ben's grandfather. The father and son recall the elder Sklarczyk often saying, "We use the land for a short time. Care must be given to leave it a better place than when you found it."

In addition to carrying on that family heritage, the Sklarczyks take pride in sharing newfound knowledge with others, no matter whether a person farms for a living or owns farmland for recreational purposes. As they humbly say, "it makes no difference as long as the ecosystem is benefited."

To this point, Don Sklarczyk most recently has been working with the Otsego Conservation District to design a greenhouse for the production of native plants which can be used for restoration projects throughout northern Michigan.

"His help with our project exhibits his concern for natural resources at a large scale," said Middleton.

According to MFB President Wayne H. Wood, the Sklarczyks fully embody the spirit and essence of the Ecology Leadership Award.

"It seems no stone has been unturned on their operation. From the biggest to tiniest detail they've thought about the environment in all their decision-making," said Wood, adding that the feat is impressive considering the farm produces more than 75 percent of the base seed potatoes for Frito Lay and also does business in Canada and Mexico.

"The fact that the family is so passionate about educating others is icing on the cake," he said.

MFB is the state's largest general farm organization, representing more than 47,000 farm families. MFB's annual meeting will be held Dec. 2-5 at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel and DeVos Place.

## Michigan's weekly crop and weather



Little to no rain fell over the week ending Sept. 21, but harvest and other fieldwork remained held up from the rains received Sept. 13-14, according to the Michigan Field Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). See Table 1 for soil moisture levels.

As reflected in Table 2, harvest of corn for silage continued. Meanwhile, a few farmers began harvesting or said they would begin their corn for grain harvest as soon as fields dried out. Harvest of soybeans was just beginning in some areas as field conditions permitted. Alfalfa and dry bean harvests were also slowed due to damp conditions. Some farmers report that a fourth cutting of alfalfa may not be possible on their fields. Planting of winter wheat continued where conditions allowed. Sugar beet harvest has begun.

In the orchards, apple harvest was in full swing across the state.

Peach and pear harvest finished, and quality was good. Meanwhile, harvest of fall raspberries continued, and plum harvest neared completion.

Carrot and onion harvests resumed late in the week, as potato harvest continued. The heavy rains took a toll on the remaining celery fields, with some acreage not harvested at all and the rest experiencing reduced yields. Meanwhile, pumpkins and winter squash were maturing rapidly and most will be harvested by the end of September.

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>.

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### FARM BUREAU QUICK FACTS:

#### *Significant Events in Agricultural History*

1607 - English colonists in Jamestown, Virginia, planted grain, potatoes, pumpkins, melons, cotton, oranges and pineapples.

1850 - About 75 to 90 hours of labor were required to produce 100 bushels of corn with a walking plow, harrow and hand planting. Yields were about 40 bushels per acre.



1858 - Mason jars, used for home canning, were invented.

1987 - Less than three hours of labor and about one acre of land were required to produce 100 bushels of corn, with the farmer using a tractor, 5-bottom plow, 25-foot plow, 25-foot tandem disk planter, 25-foot herbicide applicator, 15-foot self-propelled combine and trucks.

1991 - More farmers use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques, working with nature to lessen the need for crop protectants and other inputs.

*Source: American Farm Bureau Federation*

## Work under way to add farm markets to state's Right to Farm Act

### MDA directed to develop GAAMPs for farm markets

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

LANSING, Sept. 25, 2008 - A new set of Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices (GAAMPs) for farm markets will be developed now that the Michigan Commission of Agriculture has approved a final report of the state's Farm Market Task Force.

The task force, consisting of farmers, local officials, academics, environmental groups and Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) staff, recommends that the Michigan Department of Agriculture "initiate actions to write a GAAMP for farm markets" and "take steps to initiate legislation to address aspects of agricultural tourism operations that are not covered under the (Michigan) Right to Farm Act."

What that really means, said task force member Ken Nye, MFB's horticulture and forestry specialist, is that a new set of GAAMPs will be written to protect farm markets from nuisance lawsuits and certain local regulations under the state's Right to Farm Act.

Michigan's Right to Farm Act protects agricultural producers from nuisance lawsuits so long as the producer is following applicable GAAMPs, which represent widely accepted industry practices. GAAMPs are reviewed annually by technical committees and revised and updated as necessary. To date, Michigan has GAAMPs covering: manure management, nutrient utilization, farm site selection, irrigation/water use, pesticide utilization, care of farm animals, and cranberry production

"We have a need for a farm market GAAMP because farm market operators run into problems with local regulations. They're not sure of the regulatory requirements, and there is not a lot of information available about regulations of farm markets," said Nye. "On top of that, Farm Bureau member-developed policy encourages a farm market GAAMP."

Nye emphasized that a GAAMP will not exempt farm market operators from following certain local ordinances; it only sets a voluntary standard for compliance with accepted practices.

"This is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but it will provide education and a statewide standard for both farm market operators and local officials, and it will protect farmers from nuisance lawsuits," he said. "But keep in mind that certain local and state regulations are not going to be pre-empted by this."

## Farmers markets are growing nationwide

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

The number of farmers markets in the United States continues to grow, reports the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), reaching a total of 4,685 in August 2008. This represents a 6.8 percent increase since mid-August 2006, when AMS reported 4,385 farmers markets nationwide.

Since 1994, when AMS began to track farmers markets, the number of farmers markets nationwide has grown by nearly 3,000.

"More and more consumers are discovering the wide array of fresh, locally grown produce available at farmers markets," said AMS Administrator Lloyd Day. "Another reason for their popularity is food buyers like the opportunity to interact with the producers."

To find a farm market in Michigan, consult the 2008 Michigan Farm Market and Agricultural Tourism directory, available online at [www.MichiganFarmFun.com](http://www.MichiganFarmFun.com). Links can also be found from the Michigan Department of Agriculture at [www.michigan.gov/agtourism](http://www.michigan.gov/agtourism), Michigan Farm Bureau at [www.michfb.com](http://www.michfb.com), and Farm Bureau Insurance at [www.farmbureauinsurance-mi.com](http://www.farmbureauinsurance-mi.com).

### 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 newsletters, 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
- "FB Update" (DVD) are mailed quarterly
- Please send your completed committee set-up sheets into the home office.