



THE Loop

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NEWSLETTER

Lawmakers, agri-food leaders urge rejection of governor's E.O. Opponents testify plan is short-sighted; could harm successful ag industry

Contact: Tonia Ritter, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2048

LANSING, Oct. 23, 2009 - Individuals at a Senate hearing Wednesday laid out dozens of reasons why Gov. Jennifer Granholm's executive order minimizing the responsibilities of the bipartisan Michigan Commission of Agriculture is detrimental to Michigan and should be reserved.

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture and the Senate Agriculture and Bioeconomy Committee held the joint hearing to take testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution 24. Sponsored by Sen. Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland), the resolution overturns the executive order out of concern about adverse impacts to Michigan's agriculture industry and the state's economy, as well as erosion of Michigan's successful commission structure of government.

Since 1921, the Agriculture Commission has provided public oversight for Michigan's agriculture industry. Granholm's order removes significant responsibilities, including selection of the MDA director and review of rules and regulations.

Continued on page 2

The fall edition of the quarterly Farm Bureau Update DVD features stories centered around opportunities in agriculture such as:

- A Shiawassee County farmer who has made his land available to some young farmers who are looking for the chance to farm.
- The specialized trade of being a farrier, and the great opportunity for employment in the field.
- Ravenna High School's nationally recognized Agri-Science program, headed up by Melanie Block.
- What Michigan Farm Bureau's Ag Labor & Safety Services Program can do for you.

Membership Standings

	2010	OCTOBER 26, 2009	
GOAL	189,958	22,569	11.88%
TARGET	47,736	3,617	7.58%

A look ahead....

November

18 - 19 Campaign Management Workshop

December

1 - 4 MFB Annual Meeting

January

10 - 13 AFBF Annual Meeting

27 - 28 MFB Council of Presidents Conference

Membership Schools run 11/5 - 12/17

REMINDERS

- "FB Update" DVDs are mailed out quarterly. Your next version will be in February, 2010.
- Annual CAG Supply Packets were mailed out by September 4, 2009 to all CAG secretaries that are currently updated in our database.
- 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
- Any suggestions or ideas for future articles, discussion topics or fun pages can be E-mailed to apline@michfb.com or sent to Michigan Farm Bureau, 7373 West Saginaw Hwy, PO Box 30960, Lansing, MI 48909-8460 Attention: Amy Pline



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

Continued from front page

“State government should be working toward increased transparency, not moving away from this important goal,” said Kuipers. “The Michigan Commission of Agriculture is an excellent model of a system that is open and accountable to the industry and residents it serves.”

Subcommittee chairman Sen. Cameron S. Brown (R-Fawn River Township) and committee chairman Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom (R-Norton Shores) both expressed support for the resolution.

“This independent commission understands Michigan agriculture and the need for real-world considerations in the policy and regulatory decisions of the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA),” said Brown.

“The Governor’s short-sighted executive order would not achieve efficiencies or realize cost-savings, but would instead threaten the agricultural industry that is contributing more than \$70 billion to the state’s struggling economy.”



Pictured above, left, Doug Darling, a corn, soybean and wheat farmer from Maybee, testifies Wednesday in support of a Senate resolution that would reverse Gov. Jennifer Granholm’s executive order minimizing the responsibilities of the bipartisan Michigan Commission of Agriculture. Darling spoke from experience in outlining the many drawbacks to changing the authority of the commission; he served on the commission for 12 years from 1995 to 2007, the longest of any commissioner. See the following news release for more details.

Van Woerkom echoed the sentiment, adding that the commission has helped select MDA directors who have had “a strong understanding of and appreciation for Michigan’s agriculture industry for nearly 90 years.”

“The governor should rethink her plan so that decisions affecting one of the state’s most important industries will continue to be made in an open manner,” said Van Woerkom.

Doug Darling served on the Agriculture Commission for 12 years from 1995 to 2007, the longest of any commissioner, and also spoke in support of the resolution.

“As a farm operator in Monroe County and a former commissioner, I do not see any benefit to changing the role of the commission,” said Darling, of Maybee. “The commission oversees a wide range of issues, from food safety to protecting the environment, that affect state residents at all levels of their everyday life. It has been instrumental in advancing Michigan agriculture because of its emphasis on good government and nonpartisan policy making.”

Former MDA Director Dan Wyant also advises against making changes to the commission’s authority based on his past experiences and observations of government over the years. Wyant served as MDA Director from 1996 to 2005 under the administrations of Granholm and former Gov. John Engler. He said the commission’s balance of “politics and policy” and problem-solving culture made him a better director, best served the Governor, and made the department more responsive to issues affecting citizens and Michigan’s agriculture industry.

St. Joseph County beef farmer Monte Bordner testified to the latter, saying the commission’s decision to mandate electronic animal identification of cattle is a textbook example of how the commission is in tune with agriculture and able to make tough decisions in spite of opposition on controversial issues.

“(Animal ID) was too politically charged and never would have passed” without the commission, said Bordner, of Sturgis. The Michigan Grocers Association is among the many other groups who favor overturning the executive order.

“The Michigan Grocers Association believes the MDA should be the standard for all departments as they work well with their stakeholders,” said Michigan Grocers Association President and CEO Linda Gobler. “The agriculture commission understands the needs of Michigan residents from farm to fork. Why would we want to change a process that works so well?”

Additional resolutions to reject the E.O. At the hearing, the Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB)

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Continued from page 2.....

thanked Kuipers for his leadership and reiterated that the organization is not against government reforms that bring about increased efficiencies and cost-savings. And while parts of Granholm's executive order achieve this, her changes to the Agriculture Commission do not and therefore the organization disapproves the order and calls on the Legislature to reverse it.

MFB supports additional legislative efforts that advocate reversing the order. Sen. Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau) has introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution 23, which would overturn the order based primarily on concern about the Natural Resources Commission being stripped of its authorities the same way as the Agriculture Commission. Her resolution was considered Wednesday at a joint hearing of the Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and Appropriations Natural Resources Subcommittee.

In the House, Rep. Jeff Mayes (D-Bay City) is sponsoring House Concurrent Resolution 32, which would overturn the order also out of concern about adverse impacts to agriculture and the Agriculture Commission. His resolution has been referred to the House Committee on Government Operations.

Coalition letter urging reversal

On Tuesday, MFB and a coalition of diverse groups and individuals from Michigan's agriculture and food industries, along with other stakeholders impacted by the Governor's decision, sent a letter to Granholm and House and Senate leadership urging the Governor and Legislature to reverse the executive order for similar reasons expressed at Wednesday's hearing. The letter contains 250 signatures representing thousands of agribusinesses, farmers, food sector professionals and others.

Estate Tax Relief Act is step closer to Farm Bureau's repeal goal

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

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) supports H.R. 3905, the Estate Tax Relief Act of 2009, introduced this week by House Ways and Means Committee members Reps. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.), Kevin Brady (R-Texas), Artur Davis (D-Ala.) and Devin Nunes (R-Calif.). The bill would phase in a \$5 million exemption, with a 35 percent rate, over 10 years.

"We are pleased there is bipartisan support to do better than current law in the House and commend the sponsors of the bill for working to increase the exemption," said AFBF President Bob Stallman. "Extending the current estate tax exemption of \$3.5 million per person and the tax rate at 45 percent is a non-starter for Farm Bureau, which supports an increase in the exemption to \$10 million a person."

Farm Bureau has long warned that estate taxes threaten family-owned farms and the livelihoods of families who make their living in production agriculture. Eighty percent of farm assets are land based. So when estate taxes exceed cash and other liquid assets on hand, surviving family members can be forced to sell land, buildings or equipment needed to keep their businesses operating. Sadly, it takes two and half years of farm returns for a moderate-sized farm to pay off the estate tax owed.

"H.R. 3905 brings us one step closer to Farm Bureau's goal of permanent repeal and a continuation of a 'stepped-up basis,' which adjusts the value of property for inflation at death," said Stallman. "We look forward to working with the bill's sponsors as this legislation progresses."

Please join us in congratulating the Modern Agrarians on their 55 years as a Community Action Group. They will be disbanding as a group and we wish them all well. Good luck and thank you!





Michigan fruit grower profiled for online "Meet a Farmer"

Contact: Jill Corrin, (800) 292-2680, ext. 6585

Eau Claire fruit grower and agri-tourism pioneer Herb Teichman graces the "Meet a Farmer" section of the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) consumer-targeted Web site, Your Agriculture, at www.fb.org/yourag.

AFBF launched the site in February as part of efforts to educate the non-farming public about modern agricultural production and the farmers who supply the nation's food, fiber and fuel. The "Meet a Farmer" section profiles a farmer each month and tells their story through a picture slideshow and Q&A.



Teichman, a second-generation farmer who operates the hugely popular and highly successful Tree-Mendus Fruit Farm in Berrien County, is the first farmer from Michigan to be featured. His profile went live on the Web site Oct. 15 and will be posted for 30 days.

In viewing Teichman's profile, online visitors will learn about Tree-Mendus Fruit Farm's unique products and services, including the large heritage apple collection and Rent-A-Tree orchard program; the farm's environmental stewardship practices and philosophies; and Teichman's claim to fame as the founder and host of the International Cherry Pit Spitting Championship, the only cherry pit spitting contest recognized by the Guinness World Records.

The Your Agriculture Web site also features a series of quizzes to test the public's farm IQ and determine if they are "smarter than a fifth-grade farm kid," a consumer guide to farm policy and agriculture issues, farm fact sheets, a foodie blog and video stories from the public television series "America's Heartland."

Editor's Note: A larger version of the image is available at http://www.michfb.com/files/2009/10-16_Herb_eating_apple_in_field.jpg

Fun Facts for November



- Thanksgiving was first celebrated in the U.S. in 1789.
- The birthstone for November is the topaz.
- John F. Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963.
- Lincoln's Gettysburg address was given in November 1863.
- The ancient Roman calendar listed November as the ninth month.
- The US and Canada celebrate the end of WWI on November 11.
- Presidents Harding and Polk differed in age by 70 years, but they were both born on November 2.
- Winter once began on November 11, according to the calendar of ancient Rome.
- November was called "Blood Month" by the ancient Saxons because that was the month they sacrificed animals to their gods.

DIGITAL DIALOGUE REMINDER!

You can follow Michigan Farm Bureau news and interact with the organization using the following social media tools.

Facebook: The Michigan Farm Bureau operates a page on Facebook called Michigan Farm Bureau. Search for it at www.facebook.com and become a fan.

Twitter: The Michigan Farm Bureau operates a Twitter account named MichFarmBureau (no spaces). You can find us at <http://twitter.com/MichFarmBureau> and become a follower.

YouTube: The Michigan Farm Bureau has its own YouTube channel, appropriately titled MichiganFarmBureau (no spaces). Find it at <http://www.youtube.com/MichiganFarmBureau> and become a subscriber.

