

COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP HANDBOOK

**A Resource for the Michigan
Farm Bureau Community Action
Group Program**



Updated May 2006

Contents

Welcome	2
Starting a Group	3
The Structure	4
Responsibilities	5
<u>Roles</u>	
The Chairperson	6
The Secretary	7
The Discussion Leader	8
The Legislative Representative	9
The Membership Representative	9
The Legislative Action Center	10
Suggested Agenda	11
<u>Ideas for Involvement</u>	
Leadership Activities	12
Informational Activities	12
Legislative Activities	13
Public Relations Activities	13
Safety Activities	13

Welcome to the Community Action Group program!

Since 1941, groups of Farm Bureau members across Michigan have been meeting monthly to discuss the issues that affect their business and their way of life. These "Community Action Group" meetings allow farmers to talk about problems and opportunities that affect their county, their state and their nation, and then take positive, united action on those concerns. But community action groups are much more!

- They anchor Farm Bureau's grass roots communications system by serving as an organized sounding board for policy ideas and suggestions.
- They allow members to grow as leaders in their organization and community.
- They provide a friendly atmosphere for the expression of individual opinions and the strengthening of neighborly bonds.
- They give members a chance to socialize and have fun with their fellow Farm Bureau members.

Your participation in a Community Action Group has an important purpose: to be the backbone of the most proactive, successful farm organization in the nation. The voices of individual farmers, amplified through hundreds of community action groups, are heard in the halls of the legislature, in Congress and across the world. Congratulations on becoming a part of this influential network!

Michigan Farm Bureau Policy supports community action groups

Community action groups (CAGs) have served as a vital link to county Farm Bureaus by providing involvement through grass roots policy development, promotion and education, and other programs. Building and improving programs for CAGs, plus starting new groups, are important goals for your county and state organizations. To achieve these goals, we urge county leaders to focus on the following objectives:

- Utilize current groups to help identify and sponsor potential new groups with emphasis on young families.
- Review CAG activities at the monthly board of directors meeting.
- Invite input and involvement from community groups concerning county issues and programs.
- Encourage all new regular members to join a group or start one of their own.
- Utilize *Farm Bureau Update* at group meetings to keep the members up-to-date on key Farm Bureau issues.
- Explore alternative methods of delivering CAG materials, including the development of a virtual CAG program, and/or the creation of a material library (tapes and printed information) at each county office for use by local CAGs.

Starting a New Community Action Group

Use this form to specify the details of your new community action group. It will help you think of the major planning aspects that go into starting a new group.

County: _____ CAG name: _____

Name of host: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Members of a Community Action Group can become great friends and develop special relationships. If you were to consider organizing a new group, who would you like to meet with? Your group members need not be from the same area, commodity group or even be a Farm Bureau member. List potential invitees below. If you are having trouble thinking of prospective members, MFB can help you identify people in your area that may be interested in joining a group, call to find out how.

NAME

PHONE

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Questions to Consider

What day of the week would be best for someone to meet with your new group to explain the CAG program? _____

How will you invite new potential members (personal phone call is best)?

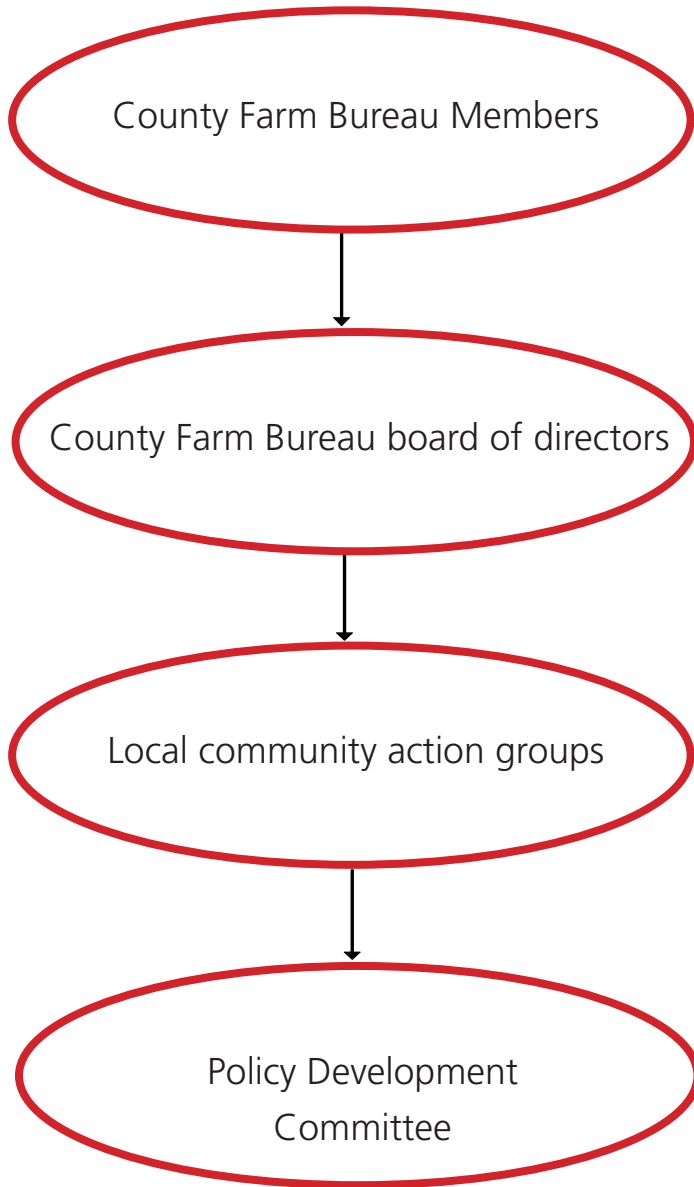
Who will you invite from you county Farm Bureau board to help facilitate this first meeting? _____

Where will you meet? _____

Will you have refreshments? _____

What types of activities will your group be involved in? _____

THE STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP PROGRAM



County Farm Bureau members elect the board of directors at the county annual meeting.

The local community action group receives information from the board of directors and Michigan Farm Bureau and take necessary action on important local affairs.

The community action groups then make recommendations to the policy development committee regarding the issue.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS

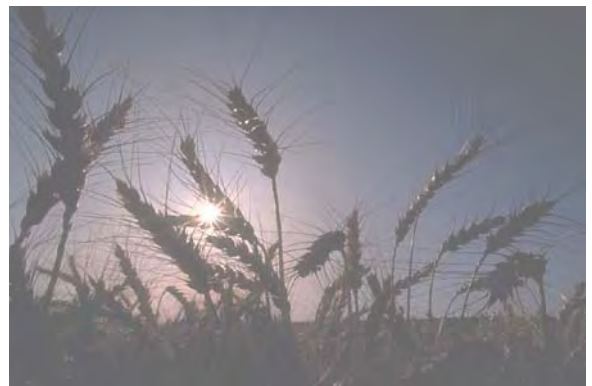
In all organizations, success comes only to those who truly pursue it. To be a successful community action group, the members involved should take their responsibilities seriously. These responsibilities vary from group to group, however, you will find your members will have a definite impact on local issues.

Your responsibilities as a group will focus on your own local concerns. Your county and state Farm Bureau stand ready to assist as the need arises. The following are suggested guidelines for your group:

- Remain informed on key agricultural issues and discuss them
- Hold regular meetings
- Know Farm Bureau policies. Do not take a contradictory stand on an issue your board is acting on. The time for policy debate is during the policy development process.
- Make policy recommendations to the county policy development committee.
- Identify local issues and concerns.
- Identify needs of group members and work to fill those needs.
- Fairly represent agricultural interests in local issues.
- Maintain positive regular communication with the county Farm Bureau board of directors.
- Participate at the county annual meeting.

ROLES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP

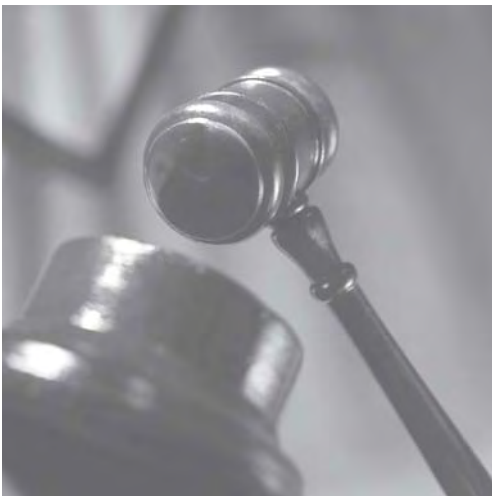
- The Chairperson
- The Legislative Representative
- The Secretary
- The Membership Representative
- The Discussion Leader
- The Members



THE CHAIRPERSON

Duties:

It is the chairperson's job to preside at all meetings of the group. They should keep the meeting informal but should be familiar enough with parliamentary procedure to be able to handle elections and properly dispose of any business that comes before the group in a democratic fashion.



Helpful Hints for Community Action Group Chairperson

1. See that plans for the agenda are completed well in advance of the meeting.
2. Call the meeting to order at the time established.
3. Conduct the meetings in an orderly manner--don't let the meetings drag and waste time. Use a gavel, if necessary.
4. Allow for reasonable discussion of all motions, and put all motions to a vote without delay.
5. Call for all committee or officer reports. Ask for reports to be brief and to the point. Material does not have to be read word for word.
6. Appoint members to any necessary committees. Dismiss all committees when finished with their assignments with thanks and recognition.
7. Help to guide other officers in the performance of their duties.
8. Meet with your group officers and plan a good program outline for the year. Look to adopt some worthwhile community projects. Consider how your group may help initiate county Farm Bureau activities and projects that will meet the needs of your members.
9. Check the agenda and any member assignments with the group secretary before the meeting.
10. Be present at all meetings. If you cannot attend, arrange for one of the other officers to take charge.
11. Review the duties of each officer before the election, so that members may elect the best qualified officers.
12. Rotate offices among the members from year to year. An office is an opportunity to learn group leadership. This is valuable to any person.
13. Install the new officers after an election. Hand over the gavel to the new chairman.

THE SECRETARY

Duties:

The job of the secretary is to keep record of the group's activities and meetings. The secretary does this by taking minutes and filling out the response form that is provided each month along with the discussion topic materials.



Helpful Hints for Community Action Group Secretary

1. At the beginning of each year, you should:
 - a. See that necessary supplies, such as report sheets and return envelopes, are on hand. Check with your county or state Farm Bureau office about these supplies.
 - b. See that set-up sheets (copies) are sent to the county and state Farm Bureau offices. They are due on or before December 15 of each year. PLEASE, THIS WILL ASSURE UP-TO-DATE MAILINGS.
2. Take a roll call of attendance at each meeting.
3. Record all business transacted at each meeting.
4. Provide a list of "carry-over business" from previous meetings for the chairman's attention. Record the minutes of the previous meeting.
5. Write up the minutes of the meetings. Send copies of the minutes and the discussion report sheets to the county and state Farm Bureau offices by the 10th of the following month.
6. Keep all letters and records of the community action group on file. Be sure to keep all records up-to-date, it is easier if you do.
7. Send out meeting notices 3 to 5 days in advance-to members or guests. Give invitations by phone to member families who have been absent or invite new members to the upcoming meeting.
8. Keep a complete list of the committees of your Community Group
9. During the discussion period, you may assist the Discussion Leader by:
 - a. Asking for clear statements of any motions or business to be put into the records.
 - b. Helping to keep the discussion "on track"--cite the question being discussed.
 - c. Call for the number of persons who favor or oppose any vote taken on a proposal.

THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Duties:

Each month the discussion leader receives a letter including a monthly response form, summary page, fun page and other materials if needed. The discussion leader's job is to bring these materials to the meeting (or be certain they get there if he or she cannot attend) and encourage discussion on the topic. The discussion topic and the discussion questions are published on specific topics.

We encourage the group to view the FB Update DVD program quarterly. The discussion leader should cover the discussion topic at the meeting, then read the questions on the discussion report form. It is the Discussion Leader's responsibility to get everyone to participate in the discussion.



Helpful hints for the Community Action Group Discussion Leader:

1. Prepare in advance for the meeting, by gathering information, deciding on the discussion method to be used and how to involve everyone in the discussion. Study the Discussion Topic article, read your discussion questions and review additional resources.
2. Work to get ideas, thoughts, experiences and views out of all the members of the group.
3. Keep the discussion of the subject "on track." Restate the question being discussed, if necessary. Do not allow anyone to monopolize the conversation--least of all yourself.
4. Guide the discussion through these steps:
 - a. Information about the topic.
 - b. Thoughts and viewpoints of the members.
 - c. Any conclusions--what the group members think should be done. Be sure that a clear statement of the "conclusions" is made for the record.
5. In most cases, the "next month's topic" is identified in the discussion letter. You may wish to plan ahead and invite a local expert on the subject to your next meeting.

THE LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

Duties:

This person is the legislative specialist in the group. He or she should give a brief report each month on the legislative items which are of the greatest concern to the group's members.

Web sites for current policy:

www.michiganfarmbureau.com/policy

www.fb.org

Helpful hints for the community action group legislative representative:

1. Know Farm Bureau policy. Use current copies of the Farm Bureau policy books - both state and national.
2. Keep yourself informed on legislative developments - state and national. Use the *MFB Legislative Newsletter*, newspapers, radio and television, extension bulletins, county Farm Bureau minutes etc.
3. Report monthly at your Community Action Group meeting. Your report should be brief, probably not over five or ten minutes. It should contain items which you think are of the greatest concern to your group members.
4. Act when action is needed. This is the payoff on your other work. When support is needed for the Farm Bureau legislative program, you can call on your group members to write or contact their legislators. Letters to legislators should be short, but courteous, and should indicate that the writer knows what he is writing about!

THE MEMBERSHIP REPRESENTATIVE

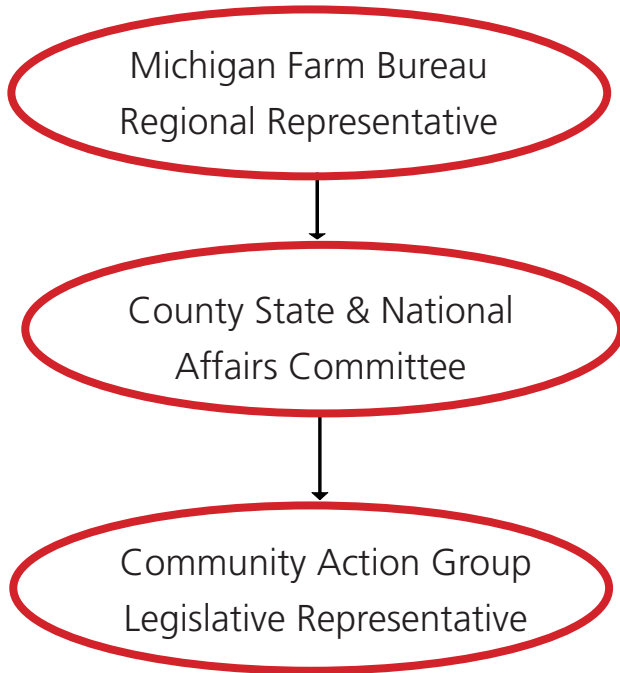
Duties:

The membership representative works with the county Farm Bureau membership committee encouraging group members to pay their dues and participate in the membership campaign.

Helpful hints for the community action group membership representative:

1. Encourage the group to seek out new people to invite to the community action group meetings.
2. Communicate with the county Farm Bureau membership chairperson to discover events and projects related to membership that your group can be involved in.
3. Encourage the group to attend the kick off and victory party during the membership campaign.
4. Encourage the group to talk to family, friends and neighbors about joining the Farm Bureau organization.
5. Create a prospect list of potential new Farm Bureau members and provide it to the membership committee for the membership campaign.

THE LEGISLATIVE ACTION CENTER



By using the MFB Legislative Action Center, information regarding current action requests can be in your hands within minutes. Today the most effective way to contact your state and national officials is through e-mail. The center, located within the Michigan Farm Bureau web site at www.michiganfarmbureau.com provides you with an avenue to contact your representatives in Lansing and Washington D.C. with a message related to current legislation.

The legislative representative will receive a copy of the *Legislative Newsletter*, and should look for Action Requests related to legislative issues and encourage your CAG members to act.

The screenshot displays the Michigan Farm Bureau website. At the top left is the MFB logo. To its right is the text "MICHIGAN FARM BUREAU" with a registered trademark symbol. Below this is the address "7373 W. Saginaw Hwy., PO Box 30960, Lansing, MI 48909" and a navigation menu with links: "About MFB | FAQ | Community Involvement | Press Room | Contact Us | Careers". On the left side, there is a vertical menu with the following items: "Home Page", "Farm Bureau Insurance", "Publications", "Agricultural Education", "Member Benefits", "Legislative Issues", "Legislative Action Center", "Young Farmers", and "Affiliated Organizations". The main content area features a search bar with the text "Enter your ZIP code to find your representatives" and a "GO" button. Below the search bar is a green banner that reads "ACTION ALERT!". Underneath the banner, there are two sections: "Defining MAEAP in statute" with "House Bills 5711 to 5716" and a "TAKE ACTION" button, and "Immigration" with "House Resolution 4437" and another "TAKE ACTION" button.

You can access the MFB Legislative Action Center by visiting www.michiganfarmbureau.com and choosing the Legislative Action Center link on the left.

WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD MEETING?

You can call it a good meeting when ...

1. The group gets something done, that is worthwhile such as starting a new program or activity, developing a proposed resolution or working on a community project.
2. People feel at home. They should feel that they are a part of the group, that they can take part in the program, feel welcome and comfortable among friends.
3. It includes some fun and variety. It should be enjoyed by the people. They should want to come again.
4. An "information expert" is included, but don't let them make a speech. Have the expert participate in your discussion. The group should ask questions leading the speaker to comment on what the members want to know.



SUGGESTED AGENDA

The following is a recommended order of business for your Community Action Group meetings. Refreshments are dependent on the group's agreement or the host of that meeting.

1. Call to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Reading of Minutes
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Roll Call
6. Committee Reports
 - a. Legislative Representative's Report
 - b. Other or Special
7. Old Business
8. New Business
9. Discussion of Topic, View quarterly *FB Update* DVD, Group Discussion
10. Recreation Period (Fun Page)
11. Adjournment

A good agenda should cover everything within a two hour time frame, however, this will vary depending on the amount of business conducted.

INVOLVEMENT IDEAS FOR THE COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP

Your group might wish to identify some action oriented activities. One of the best methods for doing this is FOR your community action group to “brainstorm” and surface concerns in your community. After you develop your list of concerns, consider some of the following suggested activities. Then set your priorities for the year.

If your group is planning an activity, do not hesitate to present a budget to your county Farm Bureau board of directors asking for financial and administrative support.

Leadership & Informational Activities

- Help your county Farm Bureau establish new community action groups.
- Canvas the county for new members to join community action groups, and host a start-up meeting.
- Participate in County and State Annual Meetings.
- Participate in preparation of prospect lists for the membership kick-off meeting and membership drive.
- Make membership calls on these prospects.
- Schedule at least one social event each year and invite new young farmer couples.
- Serve as a representative of the nominating committee for County Farm Bureau board of directors.
- Have a representative of your Community Action Group appointed to serve on the county Community Action Group Committee.
- Involve your group in voter registration campaigns to get out the vote on agricultural issues.
- Give away an American flag to civic groups based on their achievements.
- Sponsor a “Meet the Friends of Agriculture Meeting” for the school board or other local public officials.
- Special interest bus tours of market facilities in your area.
- Sponsor farm-city day promoting commodities such as dairy, beef, pork, wheat, beans, etc.
- Sponsor students to attend the Michigan Farm Bureau Young People’s Citizenship Seminar.
- Sponsor an assembly for elementary school children.
- Invite a marketing specialist to your meeting.
- Sponsor a Michigan agricultural commodity dinner or picnic using Michigan food products exclusively.
- Farm Bureau county fair booth promoting milk and other local commodities.
- Work with FFA Chapters on corn test plots or other demonstration plots.
- Commodity promotions at local grocery stores.
- Invent new ways to promote agriculture as an important industry.

Legislative Activities

- Hold policy development discussion sessions to review pertinent local issues.
- Participate and assume leadership in policy development at all levels.
- Sponsor a political education meeting.
- Encourage support of AgriPAC's "Friends of Agriculture."
- Submit resolutions to the policy development committee.
- Sponsor a legal rights and responsibilities meeting.
- Write letters to legislators.
- Host a get acquainted breakfast or meeting for county commissioners, selected county officials, etc.

Public Relations Activities

- Sponsor a blood mobile visit to your community.
- Participate in radio and TV talk programs at the local stations to let the city know of the farmers' challenges (grain prices, machinery costs, effects of foreign trade and prices). The public is given an opportunity to call in and ask questions.
- Write news articles for local newspapers and your county newsletter publication.
- Set up a farm-city tour program with the local chamber of commerce.
- Continuous beautification program, include cutting shrubbery at the fairground and help setting up and cleaning up during 4-H fairs.
- Host grade school classes on farms.
- Sponsor a school children's' tour of a farming operation which is covered and televised by one of the local TV stations.

Safety Activities

- Hold a combine safety and adjustment school in cooperation with equipment dealers.
- Co-sponsor chemical and anhydrous application safety programs with farmer cooperatives.
- Rural intersection improvement - become active in clearing intersections to improve the safety at cross-roads.
- Sponsor Agricultural Accident Rescue Program. (Give away first aid kits, fire extinguishers, smoke alarms and other safety equipment as door prizes.)
- Carry out a tractor driving school or driving contest for high school students.
- Meet with the local law enforcement agency to set up a neighborhood watch program.

