



THE FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE ADVISOR

Chronicling the progress of open space and farmland preservation in St. Clair County

Get to Know Ag Preservation Board Member Dianna Seifert...



I was raised on a dairy farm and, if you ask me, there is no better place to grow up. My interest in farming led me to attend college where I completed a bachelor's degree at Michigan State University in Crops and Soil Science. Since then, I have worked in many facets of the Ag Industry. Currently, my husband and I run a rotational grazing, cow/calf beef operation.

For the past six years, I have been a part of the farmland and open space initiative through its many stages of development and have continued to be involved serving as secretary on the county's Agricultural Preservation Board. I became a part of this group because I know and understand the importance of farmland in this state as a limited, valuable resource and it needs to be treated as such. Sadly, prime farmland in my neighborhood and in the surrounding area continues to be lost to development at a devastating rate, as farmers continue to sell to developers. Growth is necessary and important, but it must be done in a wise manner. My hope and goal is to see this program become a viable alternative for those wishing to sell their land, so that it can remain as farmland. It is imperative, in my opinion, that landowners, including myself, be responsible stewards of the farmland that has been entrusted to them, and keep it as such for future generations to enjoy.



A Note From State Senator Jud Gilbert

Senator Jud Gilbert, R - Algonac, 25th Senate District, representing Lapeer and St. Clair Counties

This year I introduced an incentive program for Michigan farmers before the State Legislature. The legislation, Senate Bill 192, could lower a farmer's property taxes if they agree to not give up their land for economic development. The bill would reduce the per acre tax level on qualifying farmland nearly 50 percent in order to keep farmers as thriving members of their communities.

It is alarming to me that the amount of Michigan farmland over the last 30 years has decreased dramatically, approximately 18 percent. There are many cities and counties that depend on the success of their farming community. Various farming techniques, population growth, and the high level of taxes the State of Michigan places on its farmers have contributed to this decrease. Tax reductions and other incentives must be created in order to keep farming, a cornerstone of Michigan's economy, from shrinking any further.

The bill will help to prevent the continued selling of farmland near urban areas that is eyed by developers. The intent being to lower the requirements to qualify for existing financial incentives. Many smaller farms in my district and across Michigan could qualify to receive the new tax level under the proposed legislation.

Senate Bill 192 would affect many people as well as the state budget. In order to slow the effect of the bill's change in tax revenues only 200,000 acres would be allowed into this system each year through 2010. Additionally, the tax level would be contingent on the millage rate of when the farm entered the system.

I look forward to continuing incentives concerning how agricultural land is taxed. It is my hope that the legislature can someday reach consensus on this vital agricultural matter.

— Jud Gilbert



ST. CLAIR COUNTY AGRICULTURE PRESERVATION BOARD

Michigan's Right to Farm Act

Michigan's Right to Farm Act, PA 93 of 1981, was enacted in to provide farmers with protection from nuisance lawsuits. This state statute authorizes the Michigan Commission of Agriculture to develop and adopt Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices (GAAMPs) for farms and farm operations in Michigan. These voluntary practices are based on available technology and scientific research to promote sound environmental stewardship and help maintain a farmer's right to farm.

To date, GAAMPs have been adopted for seven areas of production agriculture:

1. **Irrigation Water Use:** Includes recommendations for system management, record keeping, irrigation scheduling, application practices, and other practical considerations.
2. **Site Selection and Odor Control for New and Expanding Livestock Production Facilities:** Determining acceptable locations for livestock production facilities, developing a site plan and a manure management system plan, and discusses site review and verification process.
3. **Manure Management/Utilization:** Best practices for runoff control, odor management, manure storage facility design, and manure application to land.
4. **Pesticide Utilization and Pest Control:** Recommendations are for worker safety, application procedures, transportation, storage, disposal and record keeping.
5. **Nutrient Utilization:** Discusses on-farm fertilizer storage, application rates for nitrogen fertilizers, soil conservation and irrigation management.
6. **Care of Farm Animals:** Best practices for manure management and sanitation.
7. **Cranberry Production:** Discusses site selection, design and construction, water management, nutrient management, pest control, pollination, pruning, and harvesting.

The Right to Farm will be the topic of the 2005 St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission Fall Workshop, which takes place Thursday, October 27, 2005. See page 3 for registration details.

Farm Market, U-Pick, and Ag Tourism Directory Available Through MDA

Farm markets and agribusiness add value to farming operations and strengthen the long-term sustainability of farms. However, farmers are not the only ones who benefit financially from farm markets - especially downtown farm markets. Value-added activities bring an influx of customers into town centers, which is great for downtown businesses. Moreover, farm markets and u-pick farms can be enjoyed by families all year long.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture's (MDA) **Michigan Farm Market and U-Pick Directory** is a guide to over 255 farm markets, u-pick operations and agricultural tourism opportunities throughout the state. In addition, there is a separate listing for community or municipally sponsored farmers' markets in your area.

In St. Clair County, copies of the directory can be obtained at the following locations:

- **Greater Algonac Chamber of Commerce:** 1396 St. Clair River Dr., Algonac, MI 48001. 810-794-5511.
- **Michigan State University Extension:** 200 Grand River Suite 102, Port Huron, MI 48060. 810-989-6935.
- **St. Clair County Library:** 210 McMorran Blvd, Port Huron, MI 48060. 810-987-7323.

The directory can also be downloaded in PDF format from the Michigan Department of Agriculture website at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/MDA_Upick_dist_pts_126925_7.pdf.

Here Comes Growth

By David Struck, St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission

Each year, more than 3,000 square miles of land is converted to residential development over one acre in size, according to data from the American Housing Survey. As Arthur C. Nelson notes in his 2004 report **Toward a New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America**, "*Unless managed wisely, much of this development could occur on prime farmland and forest land, in ecologically or environmentally sensitive areas, and perhaps on hazardous landscapes.*" Nelson's report, pre-

pared for the Brookings Institution, examines a series of projected trends at the national, state, and metropolitan level to determine the estimated demand for new housing, commercial, and industrial space over the next quarter century.

One of the biggest problems with large amounts of land being converted to residential development so quickly is the large lot sizes that seemingly most Americans prefer. These large lots have caused commute times to skyrocket and have created a surge in infrastructure expenditures. According to Nelson, low-density development is the most expensive to serve with infrastructure, which is estimated to be about \$90,000 per home. *“Between 1997 and 2001, roughly 350,000 such homes were built annually, implying a cost approaching \$1 trillion in 30 years,”* he notes. While there are some indicators that people’s preferences for housing are beginning to change, much of the nation is gearing up for another large boom in development.

In his report, Nelson suggests that *“The volume of development to be seen during the next generation will be nothing short of staggering, probably eclipsing the amount of development seen in any previous generation. In 2030, about half of all existing development will have been built after 2000. Growth related and replacement development will be more than two-thirds of all development existing in 2000. All told, perhaps \$25 trillion in new development will occur between 2000 and 2030, maybe more. In a very real sense, America’s built landscape cannot only be rebuilt but reshaped.”* The question is: how will our valuable farmland and open spaces fare?

In many states, such as Oregon and Washington, a strong growth management system has long been in place. In other states, such as Arizona and Nevada – two states that are facing heavy growth – smart planning and growth management strategies will need to be employed. Michigan, like the rest of the Midwest, will not see the type of dramatic growth that will be experienced in the West and South. The Midwest will see a large amount of growth in industrial space, according to Nelson. *“By 2030, 70 percent of the Midwest’s industrial space will be less than 30 years old.”*

To be clear, the Midwest will need to implement more effective growth management strategies. *“For the Midwest, where state and local strategies to address patterns of sprawl and disinvestment have been uneven, the con-*

tinued stagnation of cities with rapid land consumption in outlying areas will further erode the overall economic competitiveness of whole metropolitan areas,” says Nelson.

With that forecast in place, Nelson’s report offers some interesting findings:

- In 2030, about half of the buildings in which Americans live, work, and shop will have been built after 2000.
- Most of the space built between 2000 and 2030 will be residential space.
- Overall, most new growth will occur in the South and West.
- Though a small component of overall growth, the projected demand for industrial space in the Midwest outpaces that of the other regions.

Toward a New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America, by Arthur C. Nelson, is available as a PDF document from the Brookings Institution’s website at <http://www.brook.edu/index/reports.htm>.

Mark Your Calendar!!

St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission

2005 Fall Workshop

TOPIC: THE RIGHT TO FARM

Thursday, October 27, 2005

6:45 - 9:00 p.m.

County Administration Building Auditorium

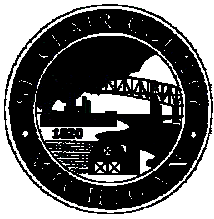
200 Grand River Avenue

Port Huron, Michigan

Cost: \$7.00 (\$10.00 after October 21)

- Speakers include **Larry Sheridan**, County Extension Director and Livestock Extension Educator for the Thumb, and **Wayne Whitman** from the Michigan Department of Agriculture’s Right to Farm Program.
- Citizens, planning commissioners and interested parties are encouraged to attend.

PLEASE CALL (810) 989-6950 TO REGISTER!!!



St. Clair County Agricultural Preservation Board

c/o Metropolitan Planning Commission
200 Grand River Avenue, Suite 202
Port Huron, MI 48060

2005 Ag Board Members:

Jim Reid, Chairman
Pat Anger
Jim Hayes
Chuck Kwasnik
Ken Langmesser
Mike Lauwers
Dianna Seifert
Susan Sniegocki

* If you are receiving duplicate copies of this newsletter, do not wish to receive this newsletter, or are not receiving this newsletter but would like to, please call the Metropolitan Planning Commission at (810) 989-6950.

St. Clair County Communities Showing Support for PDR Program

At present, **13 townships in St. Clair County have adopted a resolution supporting the county's PDR program.** While these resolutions do not obligate the townships in any way, they do give those landowners who wish to apply to the program the option to do so.

All PDR programs must be certified by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, which ensures that all of the required program elements are in place. Additionally, any local unit of government that wishes to participate in the county program must also be certified by the state. In order for local units to obtain state certification and participate in the county PDR program, there must be a comprehensive plan in place that is consistent with the goals and objectives of the county's program.

While the County Master Plan was qualified for this year's state funding cycle, unfortunately, none of the townships in St. Clair County were certified by the state due to master plans that did not meet state requirements. As a result, landowners in the county will not be able to apply to the county's PDR program this year.

So what does that mean for local units? Their master plans need work. Plans must be up-to-date, meaning they have been adopted within the last 10 years and reviewed and/or updated within the last five years.

Master Plans must also contain the following elements:

- A future land use map indicating the areas intended for agricultural preservation (designated as "preservation"),
- Text describing the strategies intended to be used in order to preserve the agricultural land, including PDR but should include other techniques,
- Language indicating why farmland should be preserved in the community,
- A description of how and why the preservation area was selected.

As townships begin to update their comprehensive plans, it is very important that these elements are discussed and included in the plan so that landowners have the option to apply to the PDR program if they wish. The Metropolitan Planning Commission can assist townships with these plan elements.
