



VEGETABLE NEWS *and* VIEWS

FROM THE MICHIGAN VEGETABLE COUNCIL

SERVING THE
VEGETABLE
INDUSTRY

since
1964

P.O. BOX 277, ERIE MI 48133 | PHONE & FAX: 734-848-8899 | MIVEGCOUNCIL@CHARTER.NET | WWW.MICHIGANVEGETABLECOUNCIL.ORG

YOUR MEMBERSHIP

IN THE

MICHIGAN
VEGETABLE
COUNCIL

Thank you for attending the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market EXPO this past December. Your participation along with 4,200 other attendees, 450 exhibitors, and 167 education program speakers made the 2014 EXPO a tremendous success. The EXPO is co-sponsored by the Michigan Vegetable Council and the Michigan State Horticultural Society. In 2015, we will hold our 15th annual gathering on December 8-10 in Grand Rapids, MI.

As part of your EXPO registration, you receive membership in the Michigan Vegetable Council. While the Council's activities are concentrated in Michigan, we support research and education and advocate on issues important to vegetable growers in Michigan and beyond. Nearly 40% of the Council's current membership is located outside Michigan, particularly in the Great Lakes region including many from Ontario, Canada.

Starting with this newsletter, the Council intends to communicate with members twice a year to update you on Council activities and issues of importance to our industry.

SUPPORT OF RESEARCH, EXTENSION AND EDUCATION

It is important to know that part of your EXPO registration supports vegetable crop research and extension. The net proceeds from the EXPO, in addition to providing for the Council's operating expenses, are used primarily for vegetable research and

extension grants. For the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, these grants by the Council totaled \$50,000. In addition, the Council made research grants of \$53,517 that were funded by the USDA through two Specialty Crop Block Grants, thus increasing total research

and extension funding in the past year to \$103,517. Both Specialty Crop Block Grant projects were focused on research of a major disease problem, *Phytophthora capsici*, that affects many vegetable crops in Michigan and other states.

For the coming year, the Council has obtained additional Specialty Crop Block Grant funding for two important projects. One will focus on irrigation and chemigation practices in asparagus, which may help improve marketable yields

of this important crop. The other project will research management practices for controlling cucurbit downy mildew, which has become a major disease threat for vine crops, especially pickling cucumbers.

In cooperation with other industry sponsors, the Council awarded \$9,000 in scholarships at the 2014 EXPO to six undergrad and graduate students planning careers connected to the vegetable industry. We see this as an important investment in our industry's future.

Our Endowed Research and Education Fund – the Michigan Vegetable Council Fund

In 2003, the Council started an endowed research and education fund – the Michigan Vegetable Council (MVC) Fund – with an investment of \$50,000. Since then, the fund has grown to more than \$336,000 (through February 2015) and has funded research grants totaling \$46,737 (through 2014). A brochure about the fund is included with this mailing. Our goal is to grow the fund to \$1 million. We encourage you to consider a contribution to the fund, which will support vegetable crop research and education now and in the future.

MSU-AND-MSUE-POSITIONS

IMPORTANT TO THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY

A search is currently underway for a new Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University. Dr. Fred Poston, the current Dean, will be retiring later this year. This is a very important position for Michigan agriculture.

In January, Dr. Ray Hammerschmidt was named Interim Director of MSU Extension. Dr. Hammerschmidt, a plant pathologist, knows the vegetable industry well and we look forward to working with him. In March, Dr. Ron Bates, an animal scientist, was

named Director of MSU Extension's Agriculture and Agribusiness Institute. We also look forward to working with Dr. Bates to help him understand how extension can best serve the needs of our vegetable industry. We plan to address the Southeast Michigan Vegetable Educator position

which recently opened because of the resignation of Lina Rodriguez-Salamanca.

We are pleased that a search is currently underway for a sustainable vegetable production and nutrition systems research and extension specialist in the Department of Horticulture at MSU. John Bakker, who serves on the Council's Board of Directors, is on the search committee. Our hope is that this position will be filled later this year.

WWW.MICHIGANVEGETABLECOUNCIL.ORG

No. 1 ISSUE → THE AVAILABILITY OF SEASONAL Labor

THE COUNCIL'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS HAS IDENTIFIED THE AVAILABILITY OF SEASONAL LABOR AS OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY ISSUE. THE FUTURE OF MUCH OF OUR FRESH MARKET VEGETABLE PRODUCTION DEPENDS ON GETTING THIS ISSUE PROPERLY ADDRESSED. THE COUNCIL IS WORKING ON THIS ISSUE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS:

NO. 1

LABOR SURVEY: The Council was successful in obtaining a Specialty Crop Block Grant to fund a survey to assess the labor situation experienced by Michigan vegetable growers in 2014. If you received a survey form, we hope you have completed it. The survey is being conducted by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. It will provide an important snapshot of labor needs and shortages.

NO. 2

COORDINATION with Other Organizations on the Issues of Immigration Reform and Guestworker Programs for Agriculture: The Council continues to work with a number of organizations, including the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) and Michigan Farm Bureau, to advocate for Congressional action on these important issues. In February, Doug Horkey, the Council's Vice President, travelled to Washington D.C. to attend NCAE's annual meeting and to make Congressional office visits to address these issues.

NO. 3

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT'S Labor Work Group: The Council has participated in the meetings of this group, which pulls together all "boots on the ground" agencies and organizations involved with migrant labor issues. The intent is to cut through years of changing programs to improve worker availability.

NO. 4

PILOT H-2A PROGRAM: The Council supports and encourages the expansion of the pilot H-2A guestworker program organized by Michigan Farm Bureau. This is one way to address the shortage of seasonal labor. We are far behind compared to the guestworker program in Ontario, Canada, which Ken Forth described at the 2014 EXPO.

NO. 5

MICHIGAN'S OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS: The Council is establishing a relationship with this newly created office. The director of this new office is expected to use the full force of state government to attract workers needed to help grow Michigan's economy.

THE COUNCIL

Legislative Activities

On legislative issues, the Council collaborates with Michigan Farm Bureau through a legislative services agreement. Although we work together on many issues, the Council maintains autonomy on the positions we take on various issues. The Council is fortunate to have Roger Victory, State Representative from Michigan's 88th House District, as a board member. Roger, who grows vegetables in Hudsonville, is a strong advocate for agriculture in Michigan's legislature. In March, the Council hosted the monthly Ag Club breakfast with legislators and participated in Ag Day at the Capitol, which showcases Michigan agriculture to legislators and their staff.

Board and Staff

The Michigan Vegetable Council is directed by a 16-member Board of Directors. Last December, two new directors – Katie (Swanson) Hensley of Ravenna and Stephanie (Andersen) Kipp of Blanchard – were elected to the board. In January, Joe Pirrone of Capac was elected the Council's President and Doug Horkey of Dundee was elected Vice President. Dave Smith serves as the Council's Executive Director and Ben Kudwa serves as Director of External Relations. Although both serve the Council on a part-time basis, they have a combined 60+ years of experience in various roles connected to the vegetable industry.