

Task Force D Meeting Summary Friday, January 20, 2006

Participants: Justin Rashid – American Spoon Foods, Inc. (Chair), Tom Bloomer – Burr Oaks Farm, Patty Cantrell – MI Land Use Institute, Terri Novak – MI Department of Environmental Quality, Robin Rosenbaum – MI Department of Agriculture, Gordon Wenk – MI Department of Agriculture, and Wayne Wood – Michigan Farm Bureau.

Additional Participants: Getachew Abate – MSU Product Center, Marty Gerencer – Michigan Food and Farming Systems, Rich Harlow – MI Department of Agriculture, Elizabeth Juras – MI Department of Agriculture, Mike Score – MSU Extension, Jamie Zmitko-Somers – MI Department of Agriculture.

The third Task Force D: Enhancing Agricultural Viability meeting convened Friday, January 20, 2006 from 1:00 – 3:30 pm at MDA's Geagley Lab in East Lansing. Council Member Justin Rashid chaired the meeting.

Mr. Rashid called the meeting to order and introduced Mike Score, MSU Agricultural Extension Agent for Washtenaw County and Ag Innovation Counselor for the MSU Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources. Mr. Score delivered a presentation entitled "Beyond Commodity Production: Affecting Farm Profitability Through Entrepreneurism," which described his work in the field as an Ag Extension Agent helping farmers to increase their profits. Mr. Score has worked with numerous farmers to develop business plans and create initiatives to add value to farm products, rather than primarily focusing on increasing per-acre production. Mr. Score emphasized that while there are some informational and support resources available to entrepreneurial farmers, there is also room for MSU Extension to improve its services and delivery of services to farmers.

In southeast Michigan, MSUE worked with several partners to create a regional agricultural economic development initiative called the Food System Economic Partnership, which works with private and public partners to implement new food system business ventures. This partnership could serve as a model as to how Extension might shift its focus from increasing production to fostering new markets and entrepreneurs and developing regional strategic agricultural economic development plans.

The Task Force participants discussed their relevant experiences and impressions of MSUE and worked to develop a recommendation around the role of MSU Extension. MFPC staff will process the discussion notes into a draft recommendation, which will be sent to the Task Force for feedback and further input.

The Task Force participants proceeded to discuss the topic of a “leadership academy” and continuing education for farmers. The Task Force decided that this recommendation idea would be an appropriate item to include as part of the Extension recommendation, rather than developing a separate recommendation for it.

Additionally, the Task Force participants discussed the issue of supporting regional partnerships for agricultural economic development in the State, similar to the Food System Economic Partnership in southeast Michigan and the Taste the Local Difference Campaign in northwest Michigan. MFPC staff will draft language for this issue and send it to the Task Force for feedback and further input.

The next meeting of Task Force D will again be on the topics of “People and Markets”, specifically, on supporting new farmers and new market opportunities. The March meeting has not yet been scheduled.