

## **Task Force D Meeting Summary Monday, September 19, 2005**

Participants: Justin Rashid – American Spoon Foods, Inc. (Chair), John Bakker – MI Asparagus Industry, Tom Bloomer – Burr Oaks Farm, Bill Bobier – Full Circle Farm, Patty Cantrell – MI Land Use Institute, Rich Harlow – MI Department of Agriculture, Mike Hamm – MI State University, Christine Lietzau – MI Department of Agriculture, Terri Novak – MI Department of Environmental Quality, Ken Nye – MI Farm Bureau, Chris Peterson – MSU Agriculture Product Center, Leroy Ray – Farm Research Cooperative, Melinda Remer – Travel Michigan, Robin Rosenbaum – MI Department of Agriculture, and Dennis West – Northern Initiatives.

The first Task Force D: Enhancing Agricultural Viability meeting convened Monday, September 19, 2005 from 10:00am – 12:30pm at Constitution Hall in Lansing. Council Member Justin Rashid chaired the meeting.

Mr. Rashid called the meeting to order those present introduced themselves and briefly described their work. Task Force D is responsible for researching programs and policies that economically and environmentally strengthen the state's agricultural system and expand upon the state's agricultural diversity.

Mr. Rashid read the Executive Order goals assigned to Task Force D. The goals are:

1. Enhancing the viability of small- to mid-scale family farms in Michigan by promoting direct farm marketing, sustainable agriculture, and agri-tourism, among other initiatives.
2. Preserving farmland as open space and amplifying the environmental benefits of agriculture by promoting sustainable agriculture practices in Michigan.
3. Developing strategies aimed at enhancing connections between Michigan growers and Michigan food outlets.
4. Identifying mechanisms by which Michigan may expand markets for Michigan agricultural products, including, but not limited to, niche markets such as "organically-produced," "pasture-raised," and "sustainably-grown" agricultural products.
5. Recommending approaches that maximize coordination of existing federal, state, and local resources and capture additional federal resources for Michigan.\*
6. Make recommendations to MDA on the adoption of policies to advance the goals for the Council in the Order.\*
7. Identifying strategies to increase collaboration and communication between state agencies in the delivery of food-related programs and evaluation of collaborative opportunities.\*
8. Develop and adopt 6-month, 12-month, and 18-month recommended action plan for achieving the goals of the Council.\*

\*Assigned to all four Task Forces

Mr. Rashid invited participants to comment freely on the issues, challenges and opportunities they'd like the Task Force to discuss and develop recommendations for, given the charge. Many discussed the challenges development pressures, fragmentation of farmland, seasonality, and the difficulties of breaking into farming or changing from conventional farming methods to others when interested. Also, touched on was how the current food distribution system often makes it easier to get food from thousands of miles away than locally.

Participants discussed how best to preserve farmland and keep agriculture viable. Some argued that supporting new market opportunities for farmers would increase their economic viability and therefore decrease the loss of farmers and farmland. However, others argued that agriculture is resource-dependent and the best way to keep the industry viable is to focus on protecting the resource. Participants generally agreed that both approaches are important and necessary and that the work of the Task Force should not pursue one at the exclusion of the other.

Several opportunities were identified for recommendation development:

- Investigate Point of Origin Labeling
- Review Land Division Act for upcoming renewal
- Prioritize Federal Farm Bill opportunities for upcoming reauthorization
- Connect with available tourism marketing resources through Travel Michigan
- Support small and large-scale greenhouse farms to extend growing seasons
- Connect with state and local media to promote Michigan's agricultural heritage
- Improve farmland preservation efforts
- Encourage development of brokering or distribution systems connecting local producers with local consumers
- Review Michigan organics program
- Assess ways to encourage new market entrants into agriculture: market support, capital support, business training, etc

Participants also identified ways to successfully frame the issues and recommendations in terms of:

- National Security
- Michigan's Economic Future
- Diversity (crops, soil, size)
- Quality of Life
- Location
- Water availability

Chris Peterson from MSU's Product Center will facilitate the November Task Force D meeting, which will focus on assessing existing research and programs and filtering out short-term recommendation priorities. The next meeting is **Friday, November 4, 2005 from 12noon - 3:00pm** at MDA's Geagley Lab, Gordon Guyer Room, East Lansing.