

Seeing is believing for Michigan Lawmakers During Ag Day at the Capitol

Representatives from Michigan's diverse agricultural commodities joined forces to host the first-ever Ag Day at the State Capitol on May 24. Dozens of displays and samples lined the corridors of the state capitol to impress upon Michigan lawmakers the scope of Michigan's agricultural industries.

MMPA staff and board members visited with representatives and senators while handing out cold flavored milk. Staff from Michigan Department of Agriculture and MSU Animal Science Department was also on hand to discuss important issues facing today's dairy farmers.

"Bringing all these commodities groups together, really made an impression to those at the capitol," says MMPA President Elwood Kirkpatrick. "It is critical that we remind our lawmakers of the economic and social impact agriculture has on the state's economy. Events like this help make a real impression on them."

More than 30 commodity groups and organizations from across the state worked together to send the message: Agriculture: Growing Michigan's Economy. Michigan Farm Bureau members began the day by delivering 150 baskets filled with Michigan agricultural products to every legislative office.

According to the Michigan Farm Bureau, state appropriations for agriculture have been slashed by about 40 percent over the last five years, and the proposed 2006 fiscal year budget suggests more cuts. Michigan's commodity and agribusiness organizations are concerned additional reductions

will harm the agriculture industry – an industry that contributes \$37 billion to the state economy annually, employs 900,000 residents and boasts a payroll of more than \$318 million a year. The groups are requesting that state funding for agriculture remain at the current level of about \$90 million, which constitutes only one percent of the state's approximately \$8 billion general fund/general purpose budget.

"The increasing pressure on the agriculture budget, makes events such as this critical to our industry," Elwood stresses. "It is our responsibility to make sure our message is heard in Lansing."



MMPA members, staff and MSU Extension agents talked with visitors at the Capitol and lawmakers about the importance of Michigan's dairy industry to the state's economy.



MMPA President Elwood Kirkpatrick visited with fellow MMPA member and State Representative Judy Emmons.



Visitors at Ag Day included Department of Agriculture Director Dan Wyant (middle) pictured here with President Kirkpatrick (left) and MSU Professor Dr. David Beede.