Plain Talk

By Elwood Kirkpatrick
President

MDEQ, MDA, Governor Granholm and Agriculture Industry Reach Agreement on MAEAP Legislation

Now is the time to contact both your House Representative and your Senator to urge them to pass the MAEAP legislation.

It is my hope that as you are reading this column, the package of Michigan House bills – HB 5711-5716 – commonly referred to as the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) legislation, is sitting on Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm's desk awaiting her signature.

Just a few days before this article was published, the Governor told a group of us as we met in her office that she would sign a revised version of the bills into law once they reached her desk.

Many of you sent letters to the Governor, urging her to support the MAEAP legislation once it reaches her desk. Several agriculture industry representatives as well as Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) officials contacted her office in support of the legislation, and to express a need for MDA and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to have a better working relationship when it comes to MAEAP.

She responded to our requests by bringing together representatives from her office, MDEQ, MDA and agriculture industry leaders in an attempt for us to reach an agreement over some points of contention in the language of the MAEAP bills.

After a number of long meetings where we hammered out several points of contention, several points of agreement were reached. Some of these points include:

- Meaningful stormwater discharge provisions for agriculture.
- Farms that are MAEAP verified should be presumed as not violating water quality standards.
- Permitted livestock farms that are MAEAP verified should not have to pay a permit fee or have their complete CNMP in the public domain.
- There is a provision that requires MDEQ, MDA and the Michigan Agriculture Commission to enter into a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) saying that they will jointly work together to resolve complaints. Any complaint that is lodged with the MDEQ against a MAEAP verified farm would immediately be told to MDA.

Each government agency and agriculture industry representative engaged in the negotiations has agreed on these issues. But, as we know, the Legislature decides on legislation. So when Legislators were presented with these points of agreement, the representatives felt it would be best to refer the bills back to the House Agriculture Committee for review. Once the new verbiage is approved by the House Agriculture Committee, it will be recommended to the floor for an entire House vote.

At press time, the legislation had not been voted on by the Michigan House nor had it reached the Michigan Senate. Now is the time to contact both your House Representative and your Senator to urge them to pass the MAEAP legislation.

Michigan Farm Bureau helped to coordinate and facilitate a large portion of these negotiations and staff members worked tirelessly to ensure an agreement was reached. Their commitment to Michigan's agriculture industry should be commended.

If you have any questions, please contact me in the Novi office. Future issues of the *Messenger* and other communications from MMPA will provide you with detailed information about the new MAEAP laws.

Elwood Kirkpatrick