



NEWS

www.maeap.org

Michigan
Agriculture
Environmental
Assurance
Program

MAEAP budget cut shows apathy

BY PAUL W. JACKSON

Among the items cut from Governor Jennifer Granholm's proposed 2011 budget for the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), one in particular seems to defy the intent of Pure Michigan and all that it's supposed to convey.

Forget for a moment that the Pure Michigan advertising campaign, with its images of clear blue skies and deep transparent water, would be hypocritical without governmental interest in environmental purity, said Carrie Vollmer-Sanders, agriculture ecology specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau. Proposing to eliminate the most effective and innovative voluntary farm environmental program in the nation exposes the current attitude of government toward agriculture, and it's not exactly a lucent philosophy in farmers' eyes.

"There's a lot of mistrust out there between government and the people, and this proposal is symptomatic of the reasons," she said after learning that the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) will be eliminated in 2011 under Granholm's budget proposal. "Here we have a program in which farmers voluntarily choose to spend their own money and time to do the right thing for the environment, and the governor refuses to trust it. She won't even lend it lip service anymore. Apparently, the mindset is that only the government is capable of solving environmental issues, and it should do it exclusively by way of heavy-handed regulatory action with an increasingly complex set of rules that often have been described as a moving target. But I would suggest that there are more than 800 farmers who can prove, by the practices they've successfully adopted through MAEAP, that they need very little government involvement to be good environmental stewards. In fact, many of them think the



Implementing MAEAP practices helps protect Michigan's natural resources – to support funding for MAEAP, call your legislator.

government does more harm than good when it employs heavy-handed tactics that frustrate people more than help them."

Obviously, the current administration does not agree. In Granholm's 2011 budget proposal, MAEAP – and the \$586,400 per year that's spent on third-party, independent verifications of MAEAP practices – would shift to the Michigan State University (MSU) Agriculture Experiment Station. But general fund money to pay for those verifications will not go along with it.

"Third-party verifications have been proven effective with voluntary programs," said Vollmer-Sanders. "Because there is an education component to MAEAP, permanent changes are required to insure environmental protection and good management."

MSU officials declined comment about what its role might be if the Governor's plan makes it through.

Farmers, however, are not about to sit back and let the government speak out of both sides of its mouth. But before farmers speak up, there's a dilemma to contend with. If the state does not provide third-party MAEAP verification, who will?

"It would be relatively easy to have someone other than a state employee verify MAEAP practices," Vollmer-Sanders said. "There are quite a few qualified people in this state. But then the door is open for anti-farming groups to cry about the fox being in charge of the hen house."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Make MAEAP green - and paperless

This is the last MAEAP Newsletter on paper. Beginning in the June issue, MAEAP will walk its environmental talk by offering the MAEAP newsletter via e-mail. How can you help?

By signing up to receive the MAEAP e-newsletter.

To help keep MAEAP costs down and maintain integrity of the MAEAP newsletter, e-mail the MAEAP office at mda-esd-maeap@michigan.gov, or call (517) 373-9797.

You can also view the MAEAP newsletter at www.maeap.org.

Total MAEAP Verification: 761

Printed with soy ink



With support from:



www.msu.edu



www.michfb.com



Michigan Food & Farming Systems-MIFFS
Bringing Farmers & Communities Together

www.mifffs.org

Budget

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

And even if that accusation is never made, it's better to have the state do MAEAP verification independently, with no ties to industry or even the slightest perception of influence from the farmers who've started down this road. It's a method that's worked pretty well for nearly 11 years now, and we think it's important for the environment and people of Michigan to continue a successful program."

Most important to farmers, Vollmer-Sanders said, is the MAEAP approach of solving problems before they happen. State environmental regulatory agencies operate under a strict response-and-punish regimen.

There are other environmental programs that remain effective, of course, such as the MDA's Groundwater Stewardship program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, created to address soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat issues in partnership with the federal government. But unlike MAEAP, they narrowly address very specific environmental segments.

"These programs address pieces and parts of farm operations," said Jim Johnson, director of the MDA's Environmental Stewardship division. "The advantage of MAEAP is that it looks at a farm as its own watershed. It looks at the whole farm."

Not only that, but MAEAP does something that the environmental arm of the DNRE – formerly the DEQ – could not or would not do. It actually lets farmers know what to do before something happens that could lead to environmental problems and fines.

"There was a large group of different organizations in the 1990s that got together to say that farmers needed some sort of program to allow them to know the laws that apply to them at the state and federal level," Johnson said. "MAEAP was the answer."

Eliminating MAEAP, Vollmer-Sanders said, sends farmers back into the dark without answers.

"DEQ was infamous for offering no help in being proactive," she said. "The agency was strictly an enforcer, like a traffic cop. Unfortunately, DEQ posted no speed limit signs for environmental stewardship, so without some instruction about what the laws really are, the DEQ turned into the agency that levied fines, but would not help farmers avoid fines. MAEAP put up the speed limit signs."

Fortunately, the state is not necessarily speeding toward elimination of MAEAP, despite what the governor proposes. She has asked the legislature to have a budget ready to go by July 1, which is the exact amount of time farmers have to express their interest in keeping MAEAP as the foremost voluntary environmental program in the nation, despite the rough road it's traveled, which includes potholes of criticism from anti-farming groups and apathy from government.

Unfortunately, proposed elimination of MAEAP has a discouraging effect.

"Right now we have nearly 800 farms that have been verified in one or more MAEAP systems, and several thousand more moving through the various stages of verification," Johnson said. "The impact of an announcement like this one to shift MAEAP without funding is that thousands of farm operations have stopped their participation at this point. The sad part is that it takes away one opportunity farmers have to do the right thing, to move through the process and to be recognized for doing it. Farmers need it to know what the rules of (environmental) compliance are, and MAEAP provides an opportunity to get all ag groups together to identify what the standards are. That's a tremendous loss."

Unfortunately, MAEAP is vulnerable every time there is a need to reduce funding, since it is funded 100 percent through the general fund, said Jan Wilford, MAEAP program manager.

"At the same time," she said, "MAEAP is a priority program both here at MDA and to our more than 50 partners. Each time the program is threatened to be eliminated, hundreds of farmers pause in their environmental efforts to wonder if the state places value on their actions when the program is not funded. We want to encourage farmers to continue in their efforts of excellent stewardship on all farms in Michigan."

On the positive side, Johnson said it's nice to know about the effort to eliminate MAEAP so early in the 2011 budget process.

"It's extremely early, and I think there are multiple solutions that could maintain the program in the MDA," he said. "Our hope here is that we don't miss a beat and that farmers will continue to move through the MAEAP process and don't stop because of fear that it will come to an end."

The only way to be sure it won't end, Vollmer-Sanders said, is to take action now.

"Farmers and everyone else who believes in MAEAP need to call their legislators early and often and urge them to save this extremely important program," she said. "Not only is this important for Michigan's environment, it's cost-effective. MAEAP protects the environment. For a mere half-million dollars, problems that would cost millions to fix have been nipped in the bud. MAEAP has saved the state money on enforcement costs, regulatory and administrative costs and cleanup. What better investment could there be when the goal is a pure Michigan?"

Pesticide applicator credits available despite changes

Recent changes in the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) pesticide applicator recertification program still allows farmers who complete a Farm*A*Syst or Crop*A*Syst with their groundwater technician to be eligible for pesticide applicator recertification credits.

Farmers completing their first risk assessment (either Farm*A*Syst or Crop*A*Syst) will be eligible for four credits, whereas those completing a repeat assessment will be awarded two credits. A farmer who uses pesticides on his own farm needs to accumulate 16 credits prior to the expiration date on an active credential to recertify by credit. Credits can also be earned by attending approved educational meetings and events.

Commercial pesticide applicators (applicators who apply pesticides for a commercial purpose, typically for hire) and also operate their own farm are also eligible for commercial core credits by completing a Farm*A*Syst or Crop*A*Syst with their local groundwater technician.

Risk assessments are available for field crop growers, as well as tree and small fruit, vegetable, greenhouse, nursery and juice grape growers. Farms with multiple cropping systems are eligible for one additional credit for assessing their second cropping system.

The confidential risk assessments are offered free of charge and can lead to MAEAP verification when the farmer corrects the identified environmental risks and requests verification by the MDA verifier. For more information, please contact:

- Groundwater technicians: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/GWTechsDtry_248123_7.pdf
- Conservation Districts: http://www.macd.org/local_districts.html
- MSU Extension: <http://www.msue.msu.edu>

MarketMaker and MEAP – a partnership to help you sell more products

BY TOM KALCHIK

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and the folks at the MSU Product Center have teamed up to help MAEAP-verified farms sell more products. The Product Center introduced MarketMaker in Michigan in 2008. It is a powerful interactive on-line system to help you make your products more visible to potential customers. The partnership between the Product Center and MAEAP enhances MarketMaker's ability to do that.

Right now there are almost 20 MAEAP-verified farms that are registered on MI MarketMaker. We encourage all MAEAP verified farms to register. Here's why.

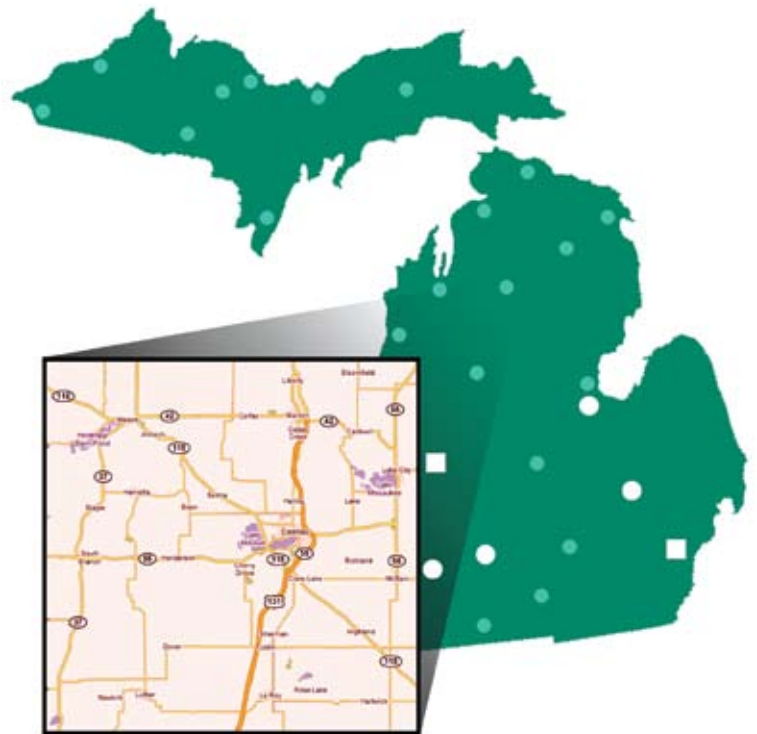
Mintel, an international market research firm that provides information to many food companies, says while the economic downturn has taken its toll on our behavior, in the case of food, consumers are loyal to locally grown food.

"Mintel's research indicates that consumers have become more likely to prefer local than organic: In 2007, 43 percent of respondents said that they always tried to buy local food, whether it was organic or not. By 2008, that figure increased to 59 percent." Further, Mintel concludes that the "Buy Local" movement is here to stay because it links consumers' concerns about environmental issues to other benefits and ideals, such as minimizing their impact on the environment.

The purpose of MarketMaker is to link customers interested in local food products to the producers of those products. Customers – be they consumers, processors, restaurant owners, or wholesale distributors – can use it to find you. And MAEAP-verified farms have an additional advantage because consumers will seek you out to help them minimize their impact on the environment.

So here is how you register. Go to the MI MarketMaker Web site at <http://www.mimarketmaker.msu.edu/>. Click on Register/Log In. Click on Register Your Business. Select Producers/Farmers from the drop down menu. Complete your business profile for the crops you produce and the way you produce them (look for the tabs at the top of the profile page for Dairy, Fruits and Nuts, Meat, Vegetables, etc. so you have a complete profile of your farm). Once you have completed your profile, click on Continue at the bottom of the page. Now comes the important part. Click the box next to Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program if you are MAEAP verified. Click continue and complete your General Business Information and the rest of your profile.

Why is clicking that MAEAP box important? Well, do a little experiment with me. Go to the MI MarketMaker homepage at <http://www.mimarketmaker.msu.edu/>. Click on begin your search. Under business type, select Producers/Farmers. Under Producer Type select Fruit and Nuts. Leave the rest of the fields blank and click on Find a Business. This will generate a list of all Fruit and Nut producers in Michigan who are registered on MI MarketMaker. Notice that some have the MAEAP logo in front of their name. We have already identified the almost 20 MAEAP-verified producers who are registered on MI MarketMaker and linked them to MAEAP.



Visit <http://www.mimarketmaker.msu.edu/>

Now click on the MAEAP logo. You will find a description of the MAEAP program. If you are one of the 59 percent of consumers identified by Mintel who value local foods and environmentally friendly methods of production; or if you are a business owner who wants to assure his or her customers that the business is environmentally friendly, buying from a MAEAP-verified farm could be important to them. Now click on the button View Directory. A list of all the MAEAP verified farms registered in MI MarketMaker is generated. As a potential buyer, I can view your profile, go to your Web site if you have one, or send you an e-mail. By going to your profile, I can generate turn-by-turn directions to your location by entering my Zip Code beneath the map that shows your location.

There are many other ways to search the MarketMaker database, including finding restaurants, farmers markets, processors, grocery stores and more. Potential customers can search for the crops you produce, the form you sell them in, how and where you sell them. They can search within a zip-code radius, city, county or state. They can also search in any of the 12 states plus District of Columbia (soon to be 16 states).

You can not only find a business, but you can identify a target market using the wealth of census data and business information. Space does not permit a full discussion of these options, but you are encouraged to visit the site at <http://www.mimarketmaker.msu.edu/> to try it. If you need more information, click on the link "Learn MarketMaker." And remember to register your farming operation.

Tom Kalchik is Associate Director of the Michigan State University Product Center.

Livestock farmers gain tool for achieving MAEAP verification

The evolution of the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) continues with the recent implementation of Livestock*A*Syst, the program's newest environmental risk assessment tool. Livestock*A*Syst offers livestock farms an alternative means of achieving MAEAP environmental verification. The rigorous environmental standards of MAEAP have not changed—but producers now have two options for how to go about achieving those standards and MAEAP verification. The farm may do so by completing Livestock*A*Syst or a CNMP.

Trained staff from Conservation Districts, Michigan Milk Producers, MSU Extension or a technical service provider can all walk farmers through Livestock*A*Syst to assess on-farm environmental risks and help develop a plan to address them. A Livestock*A*Syst scoring sheet helps farmers monitor their progress toward MAEAP livestock verification. Once the farmer addresses all the issues detailed on the scoring sheet, he/she can request third-party MAEAP verification.

Several farms from an initial Livestock*A*Syst pilot group will be among the first verified using the new tool. Pilot farmers felt Livestock*A*Syst helped them more impartially evaluate their operations and helped improve their environmental management.

Livestock*A*Syst timelines for identified farm modifications are established following completion of the risk assessment. All risks must be addressed prior to verification, similar to the Livestock Verification using the CNMP. Many livestock farms will still need a CNMP, particularly those seeking financial assistance for making nutrient management upgrades, such as improving manure storage.

MAEAP continues to help Michigan farmers protect the environment. For the past 10 years MAEAP has made it possible for farmers and agriculture professionals across the state to build a better understanding of the management and recordkeeping requirements necessary for sound environmental stewardship. MAEAP partners and supporters are excited about the program's continued advancement and are encouraged by the flexibility now available to livestock farmers. Visit www.maeap.org/livestock/livestockasyst for more information.

DON'T FORGET YOUR CENSUS

Census Day is April 1, 2010. Be counted!
For more information,
visit www.michigan.gov/census2010.

Inside

1 MAEAP budget cut shows apathy

2 Pesticide applicator credits available despite changes

3 MarketMaker and MAEAP – a partnership to help you sell more products

4 Livestock farmers gain tool for achieving MAEAP verification

Don't forget your census



Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program
P.O. Box 30017, Lansing, MI 48909

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESORTED
STANDARD
US POSTAGE
PAID
LANSING, MI
PERMIT #37