

Marketing

Agriculture promoted with day on Capitol

ORGANIZATIONS representing Michigan's agricultural commodities, including the Michigan Corn Growers Association, will gather on Wednesday, March 19, to offer state lawmakers real food for thought by filling the state Capitol with food and information about the importance of agriculture in Michigan.

Ag Day at the Capitol brings together growers from across the state to discuss current agricultural issues and to educate state lawmakers on how the industry contributes \$60 billion to Michigan's economy annually and supports 900,000 jobs, yet costs the state just \$90 million in general funds from the state budget.

Corn has traditionally been used mainly as a livestock feed, but through research and market development, many new uses for corn have been developed. Michigan's corn crop can now be used to provide heat, or to make fuel, plastics, fiber and pharmaceuticals. In an economy that is becoming bio-based, it is imperative that corn remains on the cutting edge of the industry and that lawmakers know about the crop's capabilities.

In addition to providing information to lawmakers, participating organizations will treat them to food emphasizing each commodity's individual contribution to Michigan's economy, allowing legislators to truly get a taste of what agriculture offers this state.

National study shows meat-case evolution

NEW results from the 2007 National Meat Case Study will offer the Pork Checkoff insights on trends and strategies to make meat-case merchandising better appeal to consumers. The data from the 2007 study will be compared with findings from 2002 and 2004.

"The 2007 results confirm that consumers continue to look for convenience and ease in meal preparation," says Mary Kelpinski, who is in charge of retail marketing and promotions for the Michigan Pork Producers Association. "From increases in on-package communications and full-service meat cases to significant shifts toward case-ready

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packaging, retailers must simplify the shopping experience for consumers."

While the National Meat Case Study provides a benchmark against the same study conducted in previous years, it's important to keep in mind the overall economic and market conditions affecting retail during the time the study was conducted. At the time of the 2007 meat case audit, the economy was strong, the consumer price index was up, and corn prices were up due to speculations on the booming biofuels industry. As a result, retail meat prices were climbing in response to higher meat production costs and increased meat demand.

The 2007 study included 121 retail supermarkets and 10 club stores in 48 metropolitan markets across 34 states. The study was again sponsored by Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Packaging, the Beef Checkoff and the National Pork Board.

Pork led the trend of value-added products as it continued to increase. The growth is 4 percentage points, up to 10% of the total fresh-meat packages. Growth in value-added packages was driven by fresh pork, up 11 percentage points to 23% of fresh-pork packages; turkey was up 5 percentage points to 19%; and beef was up 3 percentage points to 7%.

Packages of natural and organic meats also gained market share in 2007. Packages with a "natural" claim increased to 29% of the packages, up 7 percentage points from 22% in 2004.

Chicken, at 67%, had the highest amount of packages including the "natural" claim, followed by ground beef at 25% and fresh pork at 15%.

Another key finding was the continued increase of case-ready packaging. There has been a significant shift toward more case-ready packaging and away from in-store packaging. In 2002, less than 50% of packages were case-ready. In 2007, that rose to 64%, with increases in most species; lamb/veal and pork had the largest percentage point changes.

Case-ready packaging also experi-

enced a greater "in stock" position than store-wrapped packages. Overall, 71% of case-ready packages were in stock versus only 50% for store-wrapped packages.

"The National Meat Case Study provides valuable information that's used widely," says Kelpinski. "We will share this information with retailers in Michigan and around the country as they review their current merchandising strategies."

Potato grower enjoyed term as council head

DON Sklarczyk of Johannesburg, who operates Sklarczyk Seed Farm LLC with his wife, Mary Kay, and son, Ben, completed his one-year term as president of the National Potato Council in January. "It was an eventful year," he says.

One highlight, he notes, was hosting the NPC's annual summer executive meeting, which traditionally includes farm tours.

"Mary Kay and I decided instead to showcase our state and escorted the group to Mackinac Island," Sklarczyk says. Many of the guests were from the arid West. "The impression of the Mighty Mack Bridge as we crossed it above those vast blue waters will last a lifetime for these people," he says.

Sklarczyk adds that his presidency was not all "fun and games." One priority was working with the Specialty Crop Alliance as the 2007 Farm Bill was drafted. He believes the outcome will be favorable through greater research and marketing funding for non-program crops.

The NPC remains "a leader" among organizations operating in Washington, D.C., Sklarczyk says. Two decades ago, NPC President Larry Young of Sandyland Farms LLC in Howard City emphasized amicable relations with regulators and legislators. Today, Sklarczyk says, doors open to NPC representatives for their balanced, well-reasoned positions and reliable supporting data.

State can't get enough of farmers markets

WITH spring on its way, now is the time to think about opening doors to new markets and bigger profits. Farmers markets are exploding across

the state as consumers and farmers get connected. Consumers benefit from increased access to fresh, local food, and farmers often see increasing profits.

More than 160 farmers markets exist in Michigan, and that number is constantly growing. In fact, many communities are looking for more farmers to sell at their markets.

"The most important market opportunity for small-scale and beginning growers is the farmers market," says Lynn Byczynski, publisher of *Growing for Market*. "An accomplished grower selling at a successful farmers market can make several thousand dollars per market."



The Michigan Farmers' Market Association was created in June 2006 by Michigan Food & Farming Systems-MIFFS and partners to support farmers markets as thriving marketplaces for local food and farm products. MIFMA places farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement, and the association works to ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support.

On April 20, MIFMA will hold its kickoff celebration in the greater-Lansing area. For more information, visit www.miffs.org and www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu. You also may call Dru Montri, MIFMA project manager, at 517-432-3381, or e-mail dmontri@msu.edu to learn more about the association and to get involved in bringing farmers and communities together.

Web sites offer info on weather, cherries

INFORMATION on Michigan's agricultural weather system and tart cherry integrated orchard management is available online. At www.enviroweather.msu.edu/news/Enviro-weatherReport2007.pdf, the first Enviro-weather report details the project, as well as how information has been used to help fruit, vegetable and potato growers and turf-grass managers. The latest tart cherry integrated orchard management project research update is available at ipm.msu.edu/pdf/RAMPcherry08.pdf.

Onion Crock recalls soups because of label mistake

Onion Crock of Michigan is recalling its Old Fashion Potato and Minestrone soups to make people aware that while the product is not contaminated, these soups may contain wheat or soy as ingredients not identified on the label.

People with an allergy or severe sensitivity to soy or wheat run the risk of serious or life-threatening allergic reaction if they consume these products.

The recalled soups were distributed to restaurants, retail stores and fundraising companies in mid- and western Michigan.

Old Fashion Potato may be packed in 1-pound frozen pouches (UPC #643640010772), or in 4- or 8-pound pouches (UPC codes #643640001053)

with "best if used by" dates of July 21, 2009, or earlier.

Minestrone may be packaged in 1-pound frozen pouches (UPC #64364001111), or in 4- or 8-pound pouches (UPC codes #643640001138) with "best if used by" dates of July 8, 2009, or earlier.

To date, no illnesses have been reported in connection with this missing labeling. Consumers who have bought Old Fashion Potato or Minestrone soups can bring them back to where they were purchased for a full refund if they have any concerns about wheat or soy allergies.

If you have concerns or questions, please call Onion Crock of Michigan at 616-458-2922.

Briefs

AFT's Ralph Grossi to step down

American Farmland Trust President Ralph Grossi has announced he will retire later this year, after a successor is on board. "I have had the privilege of serving this wonderful organization as its president for nearly 23 years, but it is time for me and Judy to return to our California ranch," Grossi says. He has been instrumental in building the organization into the nation's foremost advocate for farmland protection and conservation practices that lead to a healthy environment. With a staff of 60 professionals and strong financial capacity, AFT is positioned to provide leadership into the future, and Grossi will continue to assist the organization and the new president to ensure a smooth transition. A national search is under way to recruit the next president of AFT.

MFGC elects new officers for 2008

Michigan Floriculture Growers Council, an advocacy organization, is in its third full year, and 2008 marks a change in officers. The new officers have been associated with MFGC since its inception, and they include: President Paul Karlovich of G.M. Production of C. Raker and Sons Inc.; Vice President Jim Tuinier, co-owner of Post Gardens, Battle Creek, and Post Gardens Inc.; and Secretary/Treasurer Don Klooster of Klooster Greenhouse Inc. The Michigan Floriculture Growers Council focuses on public policy and legislation, expressing Michigan growers' concerns in both Lansing and Washington, D.C., as well as keeping Michigan growers informed about relevant public policy developments. For more information about the organization, visit www.mifgc.org.