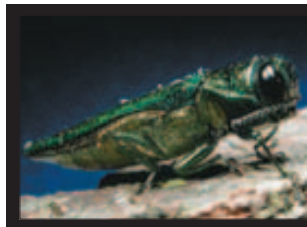


Michigan

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Lower Peninsula declared single EAB zone
Page 30

Kudos to MDA staffers
Page 42



Writers turn up volume with blogs
Page 44

Ag educator deficit

Key Points

- MSU is the only university in Michigan that offers agricultural degrees.
- Tough admittance standards exclude some freshmen.
- MSU can't keep up with demand for agriscience educators.

By JENNIFER VINCENT

OF the 340 students attending Springport High School, 241 of them are enrolled in an agriscience class. With three agriscience teachers devoting all but four classes to agriscience, it is the largest high school program centered on agriculture and natural resources in the state.

However, no matter how inspired students may be to pursue a career in agriscience education, it's not an easy road to travel — at least in Michigan.

Michigan State University has a stronghold on agricultural majors and is the only institution in the state offering ag degrees. Combine that with tough, competitive admittance standards, and students often struggle to meet the grade point average and ACT requirements.

"Of our agriscience students, only a few have a shot at getting into MSU's four-year undergraduate program," explains Pat Henne, an 11-year agriscience teacher at Springport.

MSU receives 25,000 to 26,000 freshman applications yearly, and only about 7,200 are accepted. The middle 50% of the 2008 freshman class averaged



AG'S STORY: Springport Public Schools is dedicated to agriscience education and nutrition. Its new agriscience building is heated with the corn burner above, thanks to a \$4,500 grant from the Michigan Corn Growers Association. Springport elementary nutritionist is Emily Reardon (second from right), and the school's high school agriscience teachers are Megan Merrill, Pat Henne and Jeremy Gasplie.

a 3.64 GPA with an ACT score of 25. "Finding a student with the passion to be an ag educator and also having this standard of academic excellence is tough," Henne says.

The lack of ag educators and the challenges they face are growing concerns within the current 103 high school programs with 122 ag educators, who are developing a strategic plan they will unveil next year, pinpointing six areas to strengthen education in agriscience and natural resources in Michigan.

In the meantime, MSU cannot churn out enough agriscience educators to meet demand.

Time to act

MSU has only three interns in agriscience education who are student teaching this year. And, although five are set to student teach next year, it's still down from the 12 that graduated in 2000.

One of those graduates of 2000 was Kyle Fiebig, who is the agriscience teacher at Montague High School and the president of the Michigan Association of Agriscience Educators.

"None of us had a hard time finding a job," Fiebig says. "In fact, several of us were employed before we finished student teaching."

As more and more students become generations removed from the farm, Fiebig says agriscience programs are needed even more in both rural and urban communities.

"We need to do more than retire and replace ag educators," he says.

■ Read more on Pages 6-7 and 60-61.

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