



# VEGETABLE NEWS *and* VIEWS

FROM THE MICHIGAN VEGETABLE COUNCIL

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## YOUR MEMBERSHIP

IN THE

MICHIGAN  
VEGETABLE  
COUNCIL

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Thank you for attending the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market EXPO this past December. Your participation along with nearly 4,000 other attendees, 454 exhibitors, and 170 education program speakers made the 2017 EXPO a tremendous success. The EXPO is co-sponsored by the Michigan Vegetable Council and the Michigan State Horticultural Society. In 2018, we will hold our 18th annual gathering on December 4-6 in Grand Rapids, MI.

As part of your EXPO registration, you receive membership in the Michigan Vegetable Council. While the Council's activities are concentrated in Michigan, we support research and education and advocate on issues important to vegetable growers in Michigan and beyond.

# FUNDING for RESEARCH, EXTENSION *and* EDUCATION

It is important to know that part of your EXPO registration supports vegetable crop research and extension. The net proceeds from the EXPO, in addition to providing for the Council's operating expenses, are used primarily for vegetable research and extension grants. For the

fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, these grants by the Council totaled \$67,312. In addition, the Council made research grants of \$64,621 that were funded by the USDA through three Specialty Crop Block Grants, thus increasing total research and extension funding in the past year to \$131,933.

In cooperation with other industry sponsors, the Council awarded \$9,000 in scholarships at the 2017 EXPO to six undergrad and graduate students planning careers connected to the vegetable industry. We see this as an important investment in our industry's future.

## GREG BIRD *named* EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COUNCIL

Greg Bird, of Mason, Michigan, has been named as the new Executive Director of the Michigan Vegetable Council, effective April 2, 2018. Greg is replacing Dave Smith, who is retiring after serving as the Council's Executive Director since 1998. Ben Kudwa, who has served as Director of External Relations on a part-time basis over the past four years, is also stepping down from his position.

Greg's background is in information technology, with more than 20 years of experience in private industry and government. Most recently, he served as the project manager for the

Michigan Department of Education's grant system. Although his background is not in agriculture, Greg has developed a passion for growing crops by getting involved in a family hobby farm and by volunteering at the Urbandale farm in Lansing and at the Lansing Roots program which supplies fresh produce to local food banks. In recent years, he has attended conferences and education programs for beginning farmers. Although the family farm has been for hobby, it has farmstead and cropping verifications from the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). This

growing interest in farming practices and agriculture in general helped Greg decide to make a transition in his career focus.

"What really came through when we interviewed Greg was his passion for getting involved with the agricultural industry," commented Dave Smith. Greg acknowledges that he has much to learn as he starts working on behalf of the state's vegetable growers. "I'm most excited about gaining additional knowledge by traveling around the state to visit the Council's board members and other key growers," he said.

Greg has a Bachelor of Science degree in



mathematics with a minor in computer science from Michigan State University. Greg's wife, Sue, is a nurse practitioner in Lansing. Greg's son, Wes, is a freshman at Michigan State University. Greg's daughter, Maggie, is a 10th grader at Mason High School. Greg's hobbies include fly fishing, disc golf, running, and waterfowl hunting.

Greg can be reached at [gbird@michiganvegetablecouncil.org](mailto:gbird@michiganvegetablecouncil.org) and 517-392-0719. The Council's new office phone number is 517-663-6725 and the mailing address is P.O. Box 367, Mason, MI 48854.

# MSU AGRICULTURE INNOVATION DAY: *FOCUS ON* → *FRUIT AND VEGETABLE* TECHNOLOGIES

The third annual MSU Agriculture Innovation Day will take place June 28 at MSU's Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (1791 Hillandale Road in Benton Harbor, MI). This event was first held at MSU's Saginaw Valley Research and Extension Center in 2016 and then at MSU's Lake City Research Center last year.

Agriculture Innovation Day focuses on a different aspect of Michigan Agriculture each year. This year the focus will be on utilizing new fruit and vegetable technologies. The June 28 event will begin with registration at 8:30 a.m. and wrap up around 5 p.m. It is free and includes lunch.

The morning program will focus on topics affecting the overall fruit and vegetable industry:

- **The Latest Buzz about Bees:** Incorporating non-crop

flowers can improve health and reproductive potential of managed and wild bees that pollinate fruits and vegetables.

- **Create Your Own Climate Change with High Tunnels:** High tunnels can create microclimates that increase production and reduce weather impacts in vegetables, berries, wine grapes and tree fruits.
- **Drone Technologies – What Growers Need to Know:** Drone and sensor technologies can assist in crop management. Growers will see firsthand the differences in technologies to assess the best technology for their operations.
- **Optimizing Sprayer Coverage:** New technology can optimize sprayers for better coverage, less waste, and maximum pest and disease control.

- **Getting the Most from Your Irrigation Inputs:** Adjusting irrigation strategies can ensure efficient water application to maximize production and minimize economic inputs while protecting ground and surface water.

The vegetable program in the afternoon will provide in-depth information on the following topics:

- **Making Cover Crops a Priority:** Incorporating diverse cover crops into vegetable production systems at various times throughout the year can maintain and build soil health.
- **Managing Diseases for Higher Profitability and a Safer Environment:** Management strategies are available to tackle *Phytophthora capsici*, a

persistent soil mold that kills plants and causes fruit rot.

- **Insights on Fine-tuning Your Vegetable Irrigation:** Comparing nutrient flow and potential movement in soil using various drip systems and soil moisture sensors can improve water use efficiency.
  - **Niche Market Vegetables:** High Tunnels, High Yields: High tunnels enhance productivity and increase harvest windows and crop quality for warm-weather vegetables and cut flowers.
- More information on MSU's Agriculture Innovations Day is available from this link:  
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/msu-agriculture-innovation-day-focus-on-fruit-and-vegetable-technologies>.

## THE COUNCIL'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Michigan Vegetable Council is directed by a 16-member Board of Directors. Last December, two new directors – Mike Iott of Petersburg and Hailee Leitz of Sodus – were elected to the board. Doug Horkey of Dundee serves as the Council's President and Justin Oomen of Hart serves as Vice President.



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