

**May 15, 2026**



## **Michigan Vegetable Council (MVC) Regional News**

You have attended the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo (GL Expo) at some point. We have identified you as someone in the vegetable industry who would be interested in what is happening throughout the Great Lakes region. MVC hosts the GL Expo each year. If you attended the 2025 Great Lakes Expo you will also receive the Michigan Vegetable Council newsletter. These 2 newsletters have a different focus and will have some different content.

## **Great Lakes Vegetable Industry Workforce\Labor News**

This newsletter will skip over state level details for many things, like that in 2025 Michigan passed some state level labor laws. This news will go to the federal level, since this affects everyone in the Great Lakes region.

The Department of Labor (DOL) issued an Interim Final Rule (IFR) on October 2, 2025, creating a new methodology for the 2025 Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) for non-range H-2A workers. This probably is not news to you. However, do you know what occurred before and after October 2?

During the summer of 2024, the AEWR Coalition was established. The Michigan Asparagus Association took the lead in forming this coalition. The following year entailed meetings and planning. [Protectourproduce.com](https://www.protectourproduce.com) was created. The members of the AEWR Coalition do happen to be Michigan commodity groups, so much of the content appears Michigan based, but in reality it is very relevant to each state in the Great Lakes that produces specialty crops. There were some initial startup costs, but the following year had very minimal funding needs left. The goal was to show the faces of the businesses that could no longer withstand yearly increases to the AEWR. Check out the videos at @ProtectOurProduce on YouTube. The first 6 videos attracted between 10,000 and 50,000 views, not too bad for our small grass-roots coalition.

The AEWR Coalition was busy with Michigan's representatives in Washington DC. Congressman Bill Huizenga drafted a bill to House Appropriations and it contained well over 100 signatures from Congress. Congressman John Moolenaar sponsored a bill that would freeze the H-2A wages for 2 years. The bill and letter both had the same goal in mind.

Once the IFR arrived, it became time to make sure that rule would stick, at least until a greater agriculture labor reform package could come to fruition. The next course of action was to codify the IFR so it would become the final rule. About this point in time, organizations from the southeast formed the Ag Wage Reform Coalition. Their first goal was to get this codification done, [agwagereform.com](http://agwagereform.com). Realizing this was not just a southeast task, several other organizations outside of the southeast joined this coalition: Texas, Michigan, and Washington. This group travelled to Washington DC to work on the codification message. Strength in numbers is helpful at times. This group came to DC, about 50 strong. It was big enough to borrow a committee hearing room for its own press briefing. The total legislative meetings in that trip was many, many dozens. Here is a press article from this trip to DC

[Farmers-push-congress-to-lock-in-new-h-2a-wage-rules](#)

Post (Oct 2) continues. Here are new messages working towards improving agricultural labor.

Supporting Message 1 – The Program Must Work in Practice

Supporting Message 2 – The Program Doesn't Reflect the Food Supply Chain

Supporting Message 3 – Domestic Food Production Matters

H-2A applications have been up from the previous every year, H-2A workers have increased and 2026 appears to follow that trend according to every news source I have read.

## Other Regional Vegetable Industry News

The Michigan IPM Alliance will be hosting EPA employees in Kalamazoo, Michigan this year in early August.

### **Specialty Crops Applaud House Approval of H.R. 7567, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026**

WASHINGTON, April 30, 2026 — The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA) issued the following statement on the approval by the House of Representatives of H.R. 7567, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026.

“The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance commends House Agriculture Committee Chairman Thompson for his leadership and perseverance, and we thank the House for advancing H.R. 7567, marking a pivotal step forward for American agriculture. This bill includes key bipartisan provisions that would strengthen the competitiveness of family farms producing specialty crops across the nation.”

“As specialty crop producers face urgent and unprecedented economic pressures, enacting a comprehensive five-year farm bill is vital to their sustainability and to the communities they serve. We strongly urge the Senate to act swiftly so that a bipartisan farm bill can get through conference and to the President's desk this year. American specialty crop growers cannot afford further delay.”

GFVGA is a proud member of the alliance. The SCFBA is co-chaired by Cathy Burns, CEO of the International Fresh Produce Association; Mike Joyner, President of the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association; Dave Puglia, President and CEO of Western Growers; and Kam Quarles, CEO of the National Potato Council.

The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance is a national coalition of more than 150 organizations representing growers of fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, nursery plants and other products. The Michigan Vegetable Council is one of these organizations. The Alliance was established to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crop agriculture and improve the health of Americans by broadening the scope of U.S. agricultural public policy. For more information, visit [farmbillalliance.com](http://farmbillalliance.com).



## Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable, and Farm Market Expo

2026 Great Lakes Expo is December 8-10.

What's happening at Expo 2026, check out the program when it arrives. The education tracks are going to be split differently this year. Whatever was in the General track will now be in several other tracks: Farm Business, Small and Urban Farms, and Farming Principles. The vegetable, fruit, greenhouse, and farm market tracks will continue.

The cost to put on Expo sure hasn't gone down. We realize the cost to attend Expo makes for a not so small decision to attend. The Expo hopes to keep its normal attendance for Tuesday and Wednesday. However, we would love to tell you about the new option for 2026: THURSDAY ONLY TRADE SHOW ONLY BADGES will be \$10. Our goal is to get farms to have an option to bring employees for a morning trip on Thursday. Year #2 of the Expo Social was again successful. It's a great event to celebrate the industry with industry awards.

# Great Lakes Tek Flex

FIRST ANNUAL GREAT LAKES TEK FLEX CONNECTS CUTTING EDGE LABOR SAVING TECHNOLOGIES WITH SPECIALTY CROPS GROWERS

BENTON HARBOR, MI - May 8, 2026. On September 10-11, the inaugural Great Lakes Tek Flex will be held at the Michigan State University Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (MSU SWMREC) in Benton Harbor, MI.

Technology promises to ease labor issues and empower growers with actionable insights in ways most growers could never envision. Vegetable growers, vineyards, nursery and orchard growers throughout the Great Lakes region won't have to imagine any longer. The Tek Flex will feature the latest in weed mitigation and crop management solutions using robotics, drones and precision agriculture technology over two consecutive days..

On day 1, the event will focus on connecting growers with companies that have commercialized advanced technologies through "In the dirt" demonstrations, allowing them to see technology in use. Growers can interact with company representatives to better understand the benefits of these technologies to their operations. A wide range of technologies will be on tap, including but not limited to "see and spray", autonomous vehicles, AI perception tools, orchard management, planting, vegetation management, harvesting, drone spray and AI decision support. Complete lists will be updated on the [www.gltekflex.org](http://www.gltekflex.org) website.

On Day 2, the focus will be on removing barriers to adoption, with targeted discussions featuring governments, industry groups, and supporting industry participation, with the goal of identifying and aligning resources and activity to streamline the process of technology adoption.

The mission of the Great Lakes Tek Flex is to improve the sustainability and resiliency of Great Lakes Specialty Crop Growers by removing barriers to technology adoption.

This event is made possible by support and promotion from our partners and sponsors including: Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDARD), Michigan Vegetable Council, Michigan Grape Growers, Michigan Hort Society, The Ohio State University, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Agribusiness, Cornell University, The Ontario Ag Robotics Working Group, Cornell University, Meshcomm Engineering, with many additional sponsors expected...

## Key Dates:

Demonstrator and sponsor signup: NOW through August 1.

Earlybird savings cutoff MAY 15

Public registration opens: Early June 2026. Attendee signup list open now on [www.gltekflex.org](http://www.gltekflex.org)

## Quotes supporting the Great Lakes Tek Flex:

"We see technology transforming fields—making planting, monitoring, weed management and harvesting more precise and efficient. With these innovations,

growers are building a smarter, more sustainable future for farming,” said Randy Stratton, Director of Great Lakes Tek Flex Expo and Field Days.

The use of robotics and AI is now part of agriculture’s future. We have moved past the curiosity phase and today agri-tech is on pace to change every aspect of farming and provide new tools for soil health and better management of our food supply.

“At the end of the day, it’s a simple equation—lower input costs, less labor, and higher yields. That’s the value this technology brings to farmers,” said Dominique Mégret, CEO of Ecorobotix.

“This event is the first of its kind in North America, right here in the Great Lakes region. Growers and agronomists are going to find new and proven agri-tech manufacturers demonstrating their technology and connecting with potential end users of these amazing tools,” Mike Reinke, MSU Viticulture Extension Specialist and GL Tek Flex Board Member.

“We’re excited to bring SharpShooter™ to growers across the Great Lakes because it’s built to take pressure out of the season. When labor is tight and timing matters, SharpShooter uses Aim & Apply™ Technology to treat only identified targets instead of spraying empty space, so growers can reduce hand weeding reducing the amount of materials applied while keeping crop safety first. We’re looking forward to getting into fields with growers here and proving it in real conditions.” - Curtis Garner, COO & Co-Founder Verdant Robotics.

For more information about the GL Tek Flex field day expo, go to [www.gltekflex.com](http://www.gltekflex.com).

[Read full newsletter](#)

---

## MVC Communications

6835 S KREPPS RD, ST JOHNS MI 48879 - 517-663-6725 -

MICHIGANVEGETABLECOUNCIL.ORG

Like MVC on Facebook: @michvegouncil

Go SUBSCRIBE to

@michiganvegetablecouncil on YOUTUBE: [Vegetable Council Youtube Videos](#)

(<https://www.youtube.com/@michiganvegetablecouncil/playlists>)

