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MSU Extension Spotlight

Our champion in Washington

I spent some time last week in Washington, D.C. with our delegates to the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching. Their annual conference provides educational opportunities for ANR stakeholders interested in the federal partnership that forms the base of all land grant universities. In addition, stakeholders spend a day on Capitol Hill educating members of Congress and their staff members about the importance of the federal partnership in their home communities and state.

In addition, we were fortunate enough to be on hand when Senator Debbie Stabenow was recognized as a true champion of the land-grant system by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC). Senator Stabenow played a key role on the Senate Agriculture Committee by sponsoring language that aims to redesign and reinvigorate research, Extension and teaching in the Farm Bill. In fact, the language she introduced had been developed by CREATE-21, a NASULGC committee that is co-chaired by Dean **Jeff Armstrong**. You can learn more about that at www.create-21.org.

The highlight of the presentation was seeing how proud Senator Stabenow was to be recognized for her work. A number of people from across the country lined up after the presentation to chat with her and to thank her for her leadership. And if you've ever met Senator Stabenow, you know how quickly she warms up to people who appreciate Extension!

As she received the award, she talked through the key points of the CREATE-21 legislation (from memory no less!), and then went on to tell the story of the summer she worked as an intern for MSU Extension. She characterized the experience as one in which she and another intern were "dropped off" at a public school building in Lansing and told to develop community-based programs. Despite having few resources and little direction, they were able to pull together successful programming. Others in the audience quickly identified with the story, and recognized it as a true Extension professional experience.

It's great to have champions for our work in leadership positions, and particularly champions who have walked in our shoes. The award the senator received includes a beautiful bronze statue of a Percheron horse. This work horse is the perfect symbol to represent what Senator Stabenow has done for our programs in agriculture, nutrition, community development, natural resources and youth.

BVDV research may help eliminate virus in the U.P. Bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVDV) can be a big problem in dairy and beef herds. This deadly virus can cause abortions in cattle, calf mortality, pneumonia and other severe problems in development and production. Though vaccines are available, they are not 100 percent effective.

That's why Pfizer Animal Health has joined forces with the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM), the Upper Peninsula Agricultural Experiment Station and the county MSU Extension offices to eliminate BVDV from U.P. cattle herds.

Mike Schira, Houghton/Keweenaw CED, reports that an extensive eradication program has been developed that relies on identifying infected cattle and implementing a comprehensive vaccination and biosecurity program, much like those that have been successful in other countries. **Ben Bartlett**, district educator, and **Dan Grooms**, D.V.M., are heading up the partnership between the MSU CVM, MSUE and Pfizer with hopes that it will serve as a pilot program for other areas of the state and the country

This is another great example of how MSUE is a leader in forming partnerships that spur useful prototypes for the rest of the country.

CED raises a storm—of funds, that is. Sometimes it's hard to explain complicated concepts to people. **Roberta Osborne**, Branch CED, knew that when she tried to explain the advantages of the MSU enviro-weather stations to farmers who she hoped would help raise enough funds to get a station placed in Branch County.

"There was a big gap in the network where there wasn't any data," Roberta says. "And that needed to be filled. We grow a lot of seed corn and a lot of tomatoes. There was definitely a need for this."

So rather than tell them about the equipment, she decided to show them. She teamed up with **Steve Marquie** and **Steve Trent**, as well as Extension educators **Bruce MacKellar** and **Lyndon Kelley**, and **Jeff Andresen**, the administrator of the Michigan Automated Weather Network. With their help—and a few spare parts—she was able to jury-rig some equipment and show farmers and agribusinesspeople how the technology provides accurate and helpful agricultural weather analysis over the Internet.

Her strategy worked! She was able to raise \$8,200 for new enviro-weather equipment that she says will be up and running in Branch County by the end of the month. Project GREEN has provided much of the initial funding to get the enviro-weather system up and running, and we have supplemented that with MSUE funds and the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station has contributed as well. It's great to have partnerships that leverage our investments even further.

State Budget Update

So far, the state budget process is moving along relatively quietly and easily. Yesterday the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the higher education appropriations bill that the subcommittee presented last week. The bill includes a 3-percent funding increase for MSUE, MAES and MSU by for the next fiscal year. That is the same level of increase that Gov. Granholm proposed for MSUE and MAES. There are several differences between the Senate version and the Governor's version in other aspects of the bill, including the difference in proposed funding for MSU (the Governor's budget has only a 2.7-percent increase). But it's encouraging to see the agreement on the MSUE and MAES funding lines.

The full Senate is scheduled to vote on the higher education appropriations bill next week. The House will begin their work on higher education in a few weeks. MAES Director **Steve Pueppke** and I will provide testimony to the House Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee at a hearing in Sault Ste. Marie on April 25. It seems feasible that the House may complete their appropriations process by the end of May, allowing for the conference to be completed in June. Leaders in both Houses have said publicly that they expect the process to continue moving at this pace because there is no prospect for a tax increase this year.

Last week our State Experiment Station and Extension Council members had productive visits with a number of legislators. The reactions they had were consistent with the sentiment reflected in the Senate's appropriations bill: the prospects are very good for a FY2009 budget that will include a 3 percent increase for MSUE and MAES. And that is a direct consequence of the stories that our stakeholders tell to their elected officials about the importance of our programs for their families, businesses and communities. Thanks to all who help to ensure that our stories continue to be told.

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