

January/February 2014

2013 Board Resolutions

The MFU Board of Directors unanimously adopted three resolutions at their November 8 meeting in Clare, Michigan. A brief synopsis of each follows:

Resolution 2013-1: Immigration Policy Reform

Resolved that the MFU support the initiation and implementation of a comprehensive federal immigration policy as expediently as possible so that impediments to fully employing willing, qualified immigrant labor by the agricultural sector can be assured before the 2014 growing season.

Resolution 2013-2: Redistricting

Finding that redistricting as currently practiced in Michigan ignores our rural communities' needs and interests and is harmful to the democratic process, MFU will seek active collaboration with like-minded groups and individuals to initiate non-partisan redistricting practices in the state as a matter of law.

Resolution 2013-3: Industrial Hemp

Recognizing that the production of industrial hemp is an historically proven viable alternate agricultural practice now being expanded in Canada and some U.S. states, MFU will advocate for expanded marketing opportunities for Michigan growers of industrial hemp by education as to the facts vs the myths and misconceptions with regard to the industrial form of hemp.

(Complete resolution narratives for any or all of the foregoing can be emailed upon request to the V. President or by visiting the NFU website and going to the MFU link.)

ANNUAL MEETING & CONVENTION NOTEABLES

On Nov. 9, 2013, members attending the MFU annual meeting and state convention approved a list of Board-recommended changes to the organization's by-laws. Many of the changes were minor corrections and additions. However, several were changes that went back to the language of the 2012 by-laws before changes were made at the urging of NFU but which MFU has found not to be in its best interests. In those cases, return to pre-2012 language was adopted after the Board explained the reasons for recommending the revisions. Other amendments omitted language not considered relevant to current MFU status and important omissions were added in.

For instance, once again associate memberships are eliminated. This category had proved financially harmful to MFU in the past and posed real concerns as to when an individual would qualify if their organization did not offer reciprocity. (A bookkeeping nightmare, especially since NFU keeps our membership lists and does our membership renewals for us!)

Also, dues delinquency grace period is now one year, not three. As long as we carry someone on our books as a member, we are obligated to pay NFU a fee for them yet receive no income from them, as is the case, unfortunately, for all of our Life Members. Paying for delinquent members for three years is an undue financial burden.

A major elimination of article language had to do with "subdivisions." MFU had once had three subdivisions that had been declining in activity over the years and for which no authorizing documents could be found. No oversight by MFU created some concern. Upon contact, two of the so-called subdivisions have chosen not to continue their former status and the third has never been heard from. MFU has maintained before to the IRS that we have no subdivisions. If, in the future, a group of

members wishes to form a chartered subdivision, they may petition MFU to develop the language of such a charter listing the requirements for reporting, meeting, fund raising, etc. In addition, each new subdivision/subchapter will be responsible for filing its own forms with the state and with IRS annually.



We went back to having the President vote only in case of a tie. Equally important was creation of language with regard to selection of a Secretary/Treasurer and at-large members of the Board of Directors, which was never addressed in the re-write in 2012, even though much controversy and admonishment from NFU for lacking same was to have produced corrections to past practices in place carried out in lieu of authorizing language. Now, "The Secretary/Treasurer will be appointed by agreement of the other members of the Board of Directors." And, "In the case of a vacancy in the office of the Vice President, the Directors shall appoint a temporary Vice President from their ranks, or outside, to serve until the next general election."

A major change is that the at-large Board of Directors "—shall be elected to two-year terms on a staggered basis, so that two [of its four] members are voted into office each year." Staggered terms begin in 2014 with two members, Gary Wiescholek and John

... continued on page 4

Weather -- or Not!!!

Our first venture into the world of the Great Lakes Horticultural Show in Grand Rapids was full of obstacles. The show staff was generous and obliging in letting us have an exhibit booth at a reduced rate as a non-profit; really nifty promotional items ("giveaways") were procured, and we were ready to go. President Thompson set up the booth the day before the show and he and Board member Frank Baffi staffed it the first day. Unfortunately, a real "hum-dinger" of an early winter storm moved in that afternoon and by the next day, when the V.P. was scheduled to work the show, roads were nearly impassable from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids. After an hour and a half covering only 40 miles with visibility often at zero, with slide-offs, roll-offs and run-offs in record numbers on U.S. 131, the Allegan Co. Sheriff pleaded with drivers to GO HOME! So she did, at a crawl.

The following day, the final half day for the show, weather had moderated enough so that Baffi and his son were able to return to GR and collect the exhibit materials and booth displays. So ended our first Hort show! This is one of the largest shows of its kind in all of North America and would have been a great way to meet members of the produce, greenhouse and bedding plant industries and to tell the MFU story. Maybe next year!! Next up is AgExpo in July at MSU, where weather hopefully will be kind to us!!

Monster Weed Marches North

The Godzilla of weedy threats to crops, Palmer amaranth is spreading north from its previous range in southern cotton fields. The plant recently turned up in Iowa, and can cause huge losses in corn and soybean yields if it takes hold. Purdue University scientists call it "a game changer."

Commonly reaching seven feet in height, a single plant can produce 500,000 to a million seeds. Its thick stem and deep roots make it very difficult to remove by hand and herbicides like Roundup are increasingly futile for controlling it. Cotton growers already spend \$100 million a year to try to keep it out of their fields by continuously changing herbicides.

... continued on page 4

IN THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Thompson's Tidbits



I would like to start this message by saying "thank you" to all of those who attended and participated in our 2013 Annual Meeting and Convention. I would especially like to express my gratitude to Bob Shumaker, Alaska Farmers Union President, for coming and sharing his experiences

working with the citizens of Zambia, Africa and for explaining how farming is conducted in Alaska. Another specific "thank you" I would like to extend is to U.S. Representative Gary Peters. Rep. Peters, who was honored by NFU with a 2013 Golden Triangle Award for his congressional voting record on issues important to Farmers Union, made time in his schedule to address our assembly and it was appreciated. And, finally, I must recognize and thank our own Chandler Goule, NFU vice president of government relations, for bringing us up-to-date on Washington happenings and other issues dear to NFU. Other speakers of interest dealt with information pertaining to the Affordable Care Act (Obama Care) on-going enrollment and AARP's "You've Earned a Say" campaign, which is an effort to make your voice heard on Medicare and Social Security issues. For those who were unable to attend, copies of these last three presentations are available, either electronically or paper copy, by contacting me by email bthompsonfarm@gmail.com or by calling 989-644-3907.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read about member benefits and a new membership "bounty" initiative adopted by your Board of Directors. Take advantage of this opportunity to do your part in helping our organization grow. And speaking of membership, we have grown by 39 members over the last year, due in large part to our continuing relationship with the Hasting Mutual Insurance Company. Take the time to explore what HMIC has to offer – you will likely save money!

As I have stated on many occasions, the life blood of any organization is the commitment that members make by not only paying dues, which is greatly appreciated, but by also being active and vocal. It is not enough for our Board to have adopted resolutions (as described elsewhere in this newsletter) it is imperative that interested individuals step forward and work with your leadership to develop policy to then be carried to the ultimate decision makers whether that be a state or federal govern-

ment bureaucrat or the State Legislature or U.S. Congress.

In addition to needing people to work on policy development, YOUR organization also needs members to step up and consider running for a Director's position or Vice President or President. During our 2014 Annual Meeting and Convention 2 "at large" Director positions will be voted on as well as filling both the President and Vice President positions.

Other opportunities to help abound (in no particular order) – Who will help staff the Ag Expo booth in July or the Great Lakes Horticultural Show booth in December? Who will serve on a nominations committee? Who will offer their time and talents to serve as a legislative leader? Who may be willing to serve as a membership director? Should there be a summer membership event and if so, what should the topic be and where should it be held? Who may be willing to serve as newsletter editor/publicity chairperson? And, how do we involve more young farmers in our organization?

These are just a few of the basic questions that need to be addressed by the membership of the Michigan Farmers Union. Only after we have reestablished these structural building blocks can we hope to be successful in tackling the most important issues of the day – such as maintaining Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL); dealing with components of the Farm Bill and a whole host of other issues critical to our rural family farm way of life.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and visiting with each and every one of you as we work together to grow the Michigan Farmers Union in membership and influence across the state. – *Bob Thompson, President*



Pictured: Rep. Peters (left) and President Bob Thompson (right) at the MFU Annual Meeting and Convention.

New Organic Trade Agreement

On Jan. 1, 2014, organic products certified in Japan or the United States may now be sold as organics in either country, which will allow U.S. growers and processors enhanced access to a growing Japanese demand. Currently valued at more than \$36 billion per year, the organic sector in the U.S. and Japan has been rising every year. The new agreement is expected to increase this important trade value even more.

Similar to previous U.S. equivalency agreements with Canada and the EU, this trade agreement eliminates significant barriers, especially for small and mid-sized growers. The new partnership streamlines the export certification process, reducing a previous paperwork burden for farmers and businesses. With a sizeable number of organic producers, Michigan is expected to see significant growth in its export market opportunities.

Weed (continued)

With its prodigious amount of seeds per plant, there is great risk in seeds being spread inadvertently. Combines can unintentionally scatter it across whole fields, and it hitchhikes in the dirt stuck to farm machinery or pickup truck tires. It has also been found in grass seed mixtures planted as cover for conservation programs. There is growing concern that climate change may speed the spread of Palmer amaranth as weather conditions become more favorable to the weed's success further north. (Cue the theme music from "Jaws" here!)

OTHER STUFF YOU NEED TO KNOW

At its November Board meeting preceding the annual convention and member meeting, the Board authorized a new membership incentive for existing members. MFU will pay a \$20 "bounty" for each NEW MFU member you sign up during 2014. Checks made out to MFU can be mailed to the Secretary/Treasurer with a notation that this is a NEW, not renewing, membership. Include your name and address so she can send you YOUR check as reward for your recruiting success. NFU will send the new member a membership card entitling them to the many benefits of state and national membership (when you join MFU, you are automatically a member of NFU as well.). There is no limit, at this time, as to how many new members each of our existing members in good standing can get credit for. Friends, neighbors, and family are all potential members. Personal contact with those you already know tends to be more likely to generate success. (Which is how those Girl Scout cookie sales are so profitable to the Scouts!)

Membership forms with the appropriate fees listed are available from the President.

Speaking of member benefits, there is a huge

list of opportunities to receive a host of services and products as a member of MFU. By going to www.nfu.org and clicking on "Member Benefits" you will see the entire array of options. Some of these include reduced rate on dental and vision plans and Life Line screening; complimentary hearing screenings with a 20% discount off Beltone hearing products if warranted; 25% off car rentals; huge discounts at Office Depot; substantial savings on wireless cellphones from several well known providers; lower energy rates on natural gas as a Constellation Energy customer; 20% off many hotel chains' room rates; 10% off the LifeLock Identity Theft Program, and so much more!!

And of course the great 9% discount from Hastings Mutual Insurance Company on your new or renewing farm owners policy. Call 1-800-442-8277 to find an agent near you to receive a free, no-obligation insurance policy and premium quote. Many of our members have already taken advantage of this generous discount and have received hundreds of dollars worth of exceptional coverage and service at substantially reduced rates from one of the industry's top-rated insurers.

CALLING ALL LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS

The National Farmers organization recently received a Mitigating Risk for Livestock Producers grant from USDA's Risk Management Agency. This grant is being used to hold informational workshops featuring the latest cattle marketing and risk management tools and techniques.

This meeting is free to producers, and will include segments on establishing true costs of production, and market fundamentals along with risk management strategies. Attendees will receive a risk management workbook, a DVD, and a Smartphone App that offers Fed Cattle Reverse Breakdown and Cost of Gain

calculators, as well as markets and weather.

The meeting for Michigan producers will be held in Hudson, Michigan with the specific date yet to be determined as of this writing. If you would like to attend or would like more information, please contact Perry Garner, director of communications for National Farmers at PGarner@nfo.org.

In keeping with our longstanding relationship with National Farmers Organization, Michigan Farmers Union encourages ALL livestock producers, regardless of membership in either organization, to attend.

MICHIGAN FARMERS UNION

10348 W. Airline Rd. • Weidman, MI 48893 • 989-289-4051(C) • 989-644-3907(H) • MIFarmersUnion@gmail.com

President – Bob Thompson
10348 W. Airline Rd
Weidman, MI 48893-9624
C – 989-289-4051
H – 989-644-3907
bthompsonfarm@gmail.com

*Vice President
Sandy Nordmark*
6666 D Drive South
Ceresco, MI 49033
269-979-3968
earthwoman@core.com

*Secretary/Treasurer
Alice Hammond*
2407 V Drive South
Athens, MI 49011
269-729-9279
alicehammond@ureach.com

BOARD MEMBERS:

Frank Baffi
7600 23 1/2 Mile Rd
Homer, MI 49245
517-568-3625

Larry Nelson
3085 E. Dansville Rd
Dansville, MI 48819
517-623-6185

John Schlicht
3712 South Vassar Rd
Vassar, MI 48768
989-823-7886
schlichtfarms@hotmail.com

Gary Wiescholek
P.O. 268
8221 Q Drive S
Union City, MI 49094
517-741-3830
grwfarmsrs@netzero.net



Michigan Farmers Union
c/o National Farmers Union
20 F Street NW, Ste 300
Washington, DC 20001

Non-Profit Organization U.S. Postage PAID Southern MD Permit No. 425

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

Schlicht, to serve one-year terms until the 2014 elections. There are no term limits for any member of the Board so the one-year members could be re-elected to new two year terms if they wish to run for those seats.

The annual meeting has been put back to the original language of being “—held between the first day of October and the last day of November—.” This better correlates with the closing of the books at our fiscal year end.

Likewise, the annual meeting of the Board of Directors will again take place within 90 days of the annual convention, AND “Any changes to Board memberships made during the state convention become effective when the annual meeting of the Board of Directors is convened,” which replaces the 2012 opinion by NFU that a new Board is convened and seated immediately following adjournment of the regular annual member meeting and convention. This is important in making an orderly transition of duties when replacing outgoing Executive Officers and/or Board members at large that might be new to the organization and its Board responsibilities. This also avoids problems closing the books at year/business end and filing state and federal reporting forms if a new Secretary/Treasurer is selected. (Must be some reason why the U.S. President and MI Governor, et al., are elected in November and seated in January!)

The 2012 revision omitted the article dealing with dissolution of the organization. It has been added back in as before, which is now consistent with the MFU Constitution.

In another important action, delegates to the NFU 2014 annual convention in New Mexico were chosen, to accompany President Thompson. Since that time, delegate Sandy Nordmark has had to withdraw, leaving alternate delegate Gerald Magda to look forward to an exciting convention and great Southwestern hospitality!

(For a complete list of changes visit the NFU website with our link, or email the Vice President with your request. Lack email? Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the VP. Don't forget that first class postal rates have gone up again so use the corrected amount or a “Forever” stamp.)