

# Foresight needed in outstate farmland development

By WARREN M. HOYT  
Michigan Press Association

The governor's Community Development Cabinet recently released a report indicating new, state agricultural development bonds to provide low-interest farm loans, treatment of agricul-

ture as a target industry for economic and job development and establishments of exclusive agricultural zones are needed to preserve state farm lands.

The report noted Michigan is losing farm land at the second greatest rate in the nation at 115,000 acres per year.

Lt. Gov. James Brickley, who chairs the cabinet, said, "When we usurp farmland and build on it our cities and villages, we move food production farther and farther away from our population centers. We also pay little heed to the need for great food production for future generations."

RELEASE OF the farmland preservation report came on the heels of a recommendation by outgoing U.S. Transportation Secretary Neil Goldschmidt that the state drop plans to build a

new freeway leg southeast of Lansing through prime agricultural land and follow instead an existing highway corridor.

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The report, however, does not directly address highway development as a factor in opening farmland to development.

The report does urge that "development should be directed away from essential farmland."

"Farmland preservation does not entail the prohibition of all future development but requires the directing of growth to ensure that there is land available for agriculture as an important economic activity," the report noted.

AMONG WAYS to channel development, the report continued, are to amend the subdivision control act to make it more effective in preserving land. This could be done by extending the law to cover any subdivision of land in unincorporated areas and implementing the community development impact assessment process, which includes consideration of the effects of state actions on farmland and agriculture.

The low-interest loans urged by the cabinet would be provided through new powers of the Job Development Authority, which through agricultural development revenue bonds, would purchase loan guarantees.

In order to qualify for the low-interest loans, the report says farmers should be required to enroll in the existing state program providing tax breaks in exchange for a 10-year commitment to keep land in agriculture production or in the proposed exclusive agricultural zoning.

The zoning proposal would establish agriculture as the highest and best use of land in designated areas.

Other recommendations include:  
• Funding for the Department of Commerce to designate agriculture as a target industry, and conduct a study of agriness to determine how it can be strengthened.

• A farm transfer program by establishing a state authority for the mortgage, purchase or lease of farmland to keep family farms intact, make capital more available and to enable prospective farmers to more easily get started.

• Increased technical assistance, more agricultural research and promotion of the development of the agricultural support industry.

## TD service helps jobless face stress

A free program for unemployed people suffering stress-related problems is available through the cooperative efforts of the Family Service agencies of metropolitan Detroit.

Called Operation FAST, this Torch Drive service provides small group settings where families meet together for support and understanding and where they can receive professional help.

"Experiences connected with unemployment can be very stressful for the individual and the family," explained Virgil Carr, executive director of Family Services of Detroit and Wayne County.

"Usually income is reduced, savings are gone, and debts mount up fast. Time hangs heavy, relationships change and the effects of being out of

work often show up in heavy drinking, sleeplessness, fatigue or in depression, marital problems and troubled children."

According to Carr, families hit by unemployment are too close to their own situation to find new directions.

"But with the support of others who share their predicament and under the guidance of a professional counselor, they may turn a potentially destructive experience into a creative opportunity," he said.

Operation FAST groups are available throughout the tri-county area and each one focuses on the particular needs of the participants. To join a group, or to get more information, interested persons are being urged to call Operation FAST at 633-3733.



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