

## AGENDA PRIORITIES

22. Include Michigan food and agriculture in state marketing efforts, such as the Pure Michigan campaign, to build awareness of the state's great variety and quality of local food products and farm amenities.

### “PURE MICHIGAN” CAMPAIGN GEARING UP TO PROMOTE FOOD AND FARM PRODUCTS

Les Timmer's southeast Michigan carrot farm on Muck Road near Imlay City is about as pure Michigan as you can get.

Muck Road is named after the loose, rich soil left behind by an ancient lakebed. In the 1800s this natural resource, which is especially good for growing root vegetables, drew many Belgian and Dutch farmers to the area. They began raising produce for rapidly growing cities such as Detroit. Many of their descendants, like third-generation Les Timmer, are still at it.

Today, however, Timmer's carrots sit side by side in grocery produce sections with carrots from California and elsewhere. It's not easy for Timmer's Muck Road Michigan carrots to stand out in that global commodity crowd. That could change, however, because the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) is now making the state's highly successful Pure Michigan logo available for free to farmers and other businesses.

Pure Michigan is one of the strongest destination brands in the world; Forbes magazine has put it in the Top 10 of all time.<sup>1</sup> Now farmers like Timmer can use it to connect with a growing contingent of shoppers who prefer to buy Michigan products. "It's a very good promotional idea that could go like crazy," Timmer says. He plans to take the next step of requesting a licensing agreement to use the Pure Michigan logo. "All we'd have to do is talk to our bag supplier and add that to the printing," he says.

#### **Opportunity**

The value of using Pure Michigan to differentiate the state's food and agricultural products goes well beyond connecting with dedicated local food buyers. It is, in fact, an opportunity to re-introduce consumers at home and around the world to the distinctive flavors and food quality that Michigan's farmland, climate, and communities produce. Before long-distance shipping transformed the food industry, Michigan fruits and vegetables were well known for their taste and quality. Michigan's moist climate produces tender, juicy fruit, for example. Such delicate peaches and plums do not travel well, but in taste tests they outperform others.

Getting shoppers to try Michigan and taste the difference is half the battle, says John Bakker, executive director of the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board. He credits an earlier promotional program, Select Michigan, with opening the minds and wallets of many shoppers who have since become loyal to Michigan asparagus because of its flavor. Now Michigan has the advantage of a popular brand for the state, the power of MEDC marketing minds, and a new infusion of \$10 million from the state budget for Pure Michigan. The Michigan Apple Committee used these to great effect in a fall 2011 advertising campaign that included radio ads in the target markets of Chicago and Detroit.<sup>2</sup>



## Need

The big question that could slow use of Pure Michigan in agriculture, however, is how purely Michigan a product must be to use the logo. Many Michigan-made products include ingredients from other places, and some products, such as pineapple or potatoes, may be packed for distribution by Michigan companies but are not grown in Michigan. That's why the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, which administers the program, is working with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) to develop criteria. They are working to assure consumers that a significant percentage of the value of a product has been contributed within the state.

Talking with farmers at the 2011 Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable, and Farm Market Expo in Grand Rapids, Joseph Serwach, MEDC's managing director for communications, explained the agency recognizes the need to establish parameters. Such guidelines can protect the meaning of the Pure Michigan brand and provide farmers and others with practical guidance.

## Action

Michigan food and agriculture is a top industry in the state. It also has room to grow in a new food world where shoppers are putting a premium on taste over transportability, and on local over global. Important next steps include MEDC and MDARD working together to:

- *Finalize criteria that will ensure consumers that food and farm products carrying the Pure Michigan logo are significantly "Michigan" in value.*
- *Develop targeted campaigns, such as promoting Michigan agricultural products to wholesale and processing buyers. Identifying Michigan grown and Michigan made products on food service order forms, for example, is one of the biggest challenges for hospitals, schools and other large volume buyers because distributors often do not have or do not include that information. The MEDC's new Business Connect program<sup>3</sup> is one opportunity for developing such business-to-business Pure Michigan promotion.*
- *Partner with local economic development officials, tourism agencies, and local food promoters to develop coordinated regional food and farm branding efforts in concert with the statewide Pure Michigan brand. Shoppers often identify with different parts of Michigan, which also have different products, flavors and stories to offer.*

## 1-2-3 Go!

Help get the word out about the availability of the Pure Michigan logo for food and farm entrepreneur use. Share the news with farmers and others in your area. Consider a letter to the editor of your local paper as one way to do that.

If you'd like to see additional Pure Michigan marketing steps with agriculture, you can share your ideas with MEDC Marketing Director Kelly Wolgamott, [wolgamottk@michigan.org](mailto:wolgamottk@michigan.org) and with Linda Jones of the MDARD business development division, [jonesL9@michigan.gov](mailto:jonesL9@michigan.gov). Be sure to carbon copy your state representative and senator, too.

<sup>1</sup>See: <http://www.forbes.com/2009/06/29/las-vegas-australia-paul-hogan-leadership-cmo-network-marketing.html>

<sup>2</sup>See: <http://www.michiganapples.com/pure-michigan-and-michigan-apples-join-forces.html>

<sup>3</sup>See: <http://www.michiganadvantage.org/Business-Connect/>