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## Legislative Report: Urban Farming

# LEGISLATIVE REPORT

## Urban Farming

Michigan's Right to Farm Act serves to protect farmers from harassment and to protect Michigan's valuable farmland from sprawl and unnecessary development. One of the unintended consequences of this Act is if an urban area zones for agriculture, it would lose its ability to regulate and control what is done on that property. For example, if the City of Detroit allowed zoning for agriculture, and a neighbor had 20 chickens in their backyard, some might find the smell and noise as a nuisance and the animals and their waste as a health hazard. But under Michigan's Right to Farm Act, the City could not regulate what is happening at that property.

I drafted a bill that would exempt Detroit from the Right to Farm Act and State Senator Joe Hune, who is a Republican, the Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and a farmer, cosponsored my bill. Having a Republican cosponsor this bill is a major accomplishment and has drawn the attention of the powerful farming lobby in Michigan.

Before I introduced my bill which would allow Detroit to control agricultural development in the city, the Michigan Department of Agriculture asked me to wait so they could better explain what they are doing on this issue. On December 14, 2011 the Department will hold a meeting that will allow municipalities with a population of 50,000 or more the ability to regulate farming activity. I hope that this administrative fix will solve our problems and allow urban farming to legally sprout throughout our great cities in Michigan. I have agreed to wait on introducing my bill until after the Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> meeting to determine whether the administrative fix by the Department sufficiently allows municipalities to regulate urban farming.

### WHY URBAN FARMING

Detroit has approximately 35 square miles of vacant land. There are many who would like to use some of that space to grow their own crops. This could lead to more jobs and money in our great city and also serve as an opportunity to have healthier foods for our neighbors.

We need to remember that agriculture is the second largest industry in Michigan. There are tremendous opportunities in growing crops, especially as the price and demand of crops rises worldwide. We also have a tremendous need to process food in Michigan. Most people don't realize that a large number of Michigan's food is sent out of state to be processed and returned to Michigan to be consumed. Those are jobs that should be located right here in Michigan, resulting in money that can be saved by consumers.

As we attempt to determine what the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy looks like, I want to make sure that state government does not stand in the way of allowing economic development to flourish in Detroit. Cities like Cleveland and Madison have strong urban farming movements and I want Detroit to have the opportunity to grow this industry too.

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