

A storm is brewing over proposed changes to the 2014 Site Selection GAAMPs in Michigan

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Dear Members of the Michigan Small Farm Council –

In this first newsletter to the full membership of the MSFC, I am writing to let you know of proposed changes to the 2014 Site Selection GAAMPs that could greatly affect Right to Farm protection for small farm operations in Michigan.

The MSFC recently FOIA'd a [letter written by Dr. Wendy Powers](#), chair of the Site Selection GAAMPs Committee, addressed to the Agriculture Commission about proposed changes to the 2014 Site Selection GAAMPs. We also FOIA'd the document in question, the [Draft 2014 Site Selection GAAMPs](#). Those documents are linked here, and I hope you'll read them.

In her letter Dr. Powers states that the Site Selection GAAMPs do not currently apply to farms of fewer than 50 animal units (the equivalent of 5000 chickens) except in the unusual case in which those landowners request a proactive Site Selection verification. This is striking because MDARD routinely claims the opposite, and uses the Site Selection GAAMPs to deny that small farms – those with less than 50 animal units – are protected by Right to Farm. Our disagreement with MDARD over this issue is a major reason why the MSFC was organized, and we are very glad to know that Dr. Powers interprets the Site Selection GAAMPs in the same way that we do.

Importantly, however, the changes to the Site Selection GAAMPs that are proposed for 2014, if approved, will make MDARD's false understanding of the Site Selection GAAMPs true, by changing the definition of a Livestock Production Facility from 50

animal units to 1 animal.

This is significant because the Site Selection GAAMPs also states that Livestock Production Facilities should not be constructed in areas where local zoning does not allow for agricultural uses. When this was written, a “Livestock Production Facility” was defined by MDARD as 50 animal units, the equivalent of 5000 chickens, or 125 pigs, or 50 cows. Since few people would find agriculture at this level acceptable in residential areas, this language received little attention.

But if the definition of Livestock Production Facility is changed from 50 animal units to 1 animal, as proposed, and if the language stated above does not change, then the Site Selection GAAMPs will suddenly have a new overall meaning, because it will assert that farm operations with as few as 1 animal can not be constructed in areas where local zoning does not allow for agricultural uses. If this change is approved, no single farm animal will be protected by Right to Farm in Michigan in non-agriculturally zoned areas. Instead, the regulation of farming operations will be controlled exclusively by local units of government, which will have the authority to both determine whether an area is classified as residential or agricultural, and also whether in residential areas agriculture of any kind is permitted.

A major problem with the proposed changes is that it puts the GAAMPs language in direct opposition to the language of the Right to Farm act, which explicitly states, twice, that local regulations may not supercede Right to Farm protection. The MSFC has made this argument many times, and will continue to do so. But there is another important point that I'd like to call to your attention. On page 7, in the fine print of Note 4, you'll notice that another proposed change for 2014 is that operations with up to 500 animal units – as many as 50,000 chickens – will be permitted to *self-assess* to meet the MDARD Site Review and Verification Process. Thus in a single year MDARD is proposing changes to the Site Selection GAAMPs that make it impossible for the vast majority of citizens of Michigan to have a single chicken in the non-rural areas where they live, and at the same time will make it possible for operations with as many as 500 animal units to require no oversight at all with respect to Site Selection verification, if those operations are sited in rural areas.

This highlights the real problem with agriculture in Michigan. At issue is not just that our state agricultural agency is grossly over-regulating small farming operations, but also that it is simultaneously under-regulating large operations. This balance of priorities is driving our food system increasingly into the hands of very large operations, with no recourse at the individual level to make different choices about the foods that are available to us.

Members of the MSFC will be attending the November 6th meeting of the Agriculture Commission in Lansing to advocate against the proposed changes to the 2014 Site Selection GAAMPs. We care about keeping Right to Farm protection available to all Michigan citizens who meet Right to Farm criteria, no matter where they live. We hope you'll join us there, or that you'll write to your legislators, the governor, or the Agriculture Commission to let them know what you think about the proposed changes to the 2014 GAAMPs, and the effects of these changes on Right to Farm protection for small farms in Michigan.

Please feel free to contact the MSFC for more information.

Best Wishes -

Wendy Banka

President, Michigan Small Farm Council

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