



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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West Michigan Agriculture Output More Than \$1.6 Billion *'West Michigan Agriculture' Report to Be Presented November 2*

WEST MICHIGAN—October 26, 2009—Agriculture is a business, and in West Michigan it's a very good business.

That's the lesson from a new report by the West Michigan Strategic Alliance (WMSA), the Land Policy Institute of Michigan State University and MSU Extension. *West Michigan Agriculture: The Status and Conditions* is a 50-page report that measures changes in economic data about agriculture from 1997-2007, including number of farms, crop sales, and acres of farmland. The study compares West Michigan to the rest of the state and has detailed assessments of the agriculture sector in each of the region's eight counties.

The report will be presented Monday, November 2 to agricultural preservation board members, economic developers, farmers, government leaders, and foundation representatives from the region at the MSU Extension and United Growth of Kent County offices, located at 775 Ball Avenue N.E., in Grand Rapids from 8 - 10 a.m.

[The news media is encouraged to attend for interviews and photo opportunities.]

The *West Michigan Agriculture* report will also be available on WMSA's Web site under "Publications/Reports": <http://www.wm-alliance.org/publications.php>

"WMSA requested this report because we have been trying to advance farmland preservation," said Greg Northrup, WMSA President. "We believe we can achieve this objective through a growing and profitable agricultural sector, and this report confirms that. We thank the Land Policy Institute for funding this research through its People and Land initiative."

The report provides solid numbers on the economic impact of agriculture in the eight-county West Michigan region over the last decade:

- Agriculture provides \$103 million in state and local tax revenue (in 2007 dollar values);
- More than 26,000 jobs and more than \$579 million in labor income come from agriculture;
- The value of the region's economic output from agriculture is more than \$1.6 billion (in 2007 dollar values);
- West Michigan accounts for 28% of the state's total agriculture sales;
- While the number and size of farms and agricultural land had declined from 1997-2002, all had equaled or surpassed 1997 totals by 2007. As of 2007, West Michigan has: 9,289 farms; 1,478,253 acres of farmland; 1,011,212 acres of harvested crop land; average farm size is 159 acres.

In addition, the report breaks down figures for each county, including acres of land devoted to and income derived from each type of crop or livestock. Information is provided in tables as well as coded maps.

“All of this shows that agriculture is an economic driver,” Northrup said. “Historically, efforts such as purchase of development rights (PDRs) are used to preserve farmland. We think farmland can also be preserved using economic development tools as part of the equation.”

The *West Michigan Agriculture* report is related to other efforts around the region to embrace agriculture as an economic factor. For example, GrandAction, a nonprofit downtown development group in Grand Rapids, has been exploring the concept of an urban market as a component of downtown revitalization. WMSA leaders hope other strategies will emerge from the *West Michigan Agriculture* report.

“This report will be used to develop a regional strategy to ensure the West Michigan agriculture sector remains competitive.” Northrup said. “Ultimately we hope such a plan will help us increase local agriculture production, create additional jobs, protect existing jobs, enable farmland preservation, and generally ensure the economic viability of this increasingly critical sector of our economy.”

About the Land Policy Institute

The Land Policy Institute of Michigan State University provides policy makers at the federal, state, and local level with science-based tools and solutions that help build a better quality of life, strengthen the economy, and protect the environment in ways that are fair to all. LPI works to encourage collaboration among land use researchers, policy makers, and community organizations. www.landpolicy.msu.edu/

About MSU Extension

MSU Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical needs, issues and opportunities for Michigan’s communities, families, agriculture and natural resources. The organization serves all 83 Michigan counties. www.msue.msu.edu.

About the West Michigan Strategic Alliance

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance serves as a catalyst for regional collaboration among the businesses, institutions and governmental units serving more than 1.4 million people living in a eight-county region including: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo and Ottawa. The WMSA works to encourage a regional mindset, which will foster collaboration on critical issues that impact how we live, learn, work and play. Additional information is available at www.wm-alliance.org.

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