

From: Jeff Cobb
To: Hankwitz, Jordan
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Subject: Fwd: Executive Order 2009-45

For tomorrow

>>> "Donald Coe" <DCoe@blackstarfarms.com> 10/19/2009 12:59 PM >>>
To: Senate Sub-Committee

I would like to give you the benefit of my input as a serving member of the Michigan Commission of Agriculture for the last four years.

I am the "independent" member of the bi-partisan Commission and have seen personally how important that bi-partisan make up of the Commission is to its success. In addition the Commission is geographically and "business interest" bi-partisan as my fellow Commissioners are drawn from across the state and its agriculture interests. This was intentionally done to ensure that the Michigan Department of Agriculture would be responsive to the diverse needs and interests of Michigan agriculture and would not be controlled or dominated by any partisan politics, geographic or business sectors.

The intention was good but it only works if the structure is sound. The key structural element is the power vested in the Commission to choose the Director of the Department and to both recommend and ratify policy for the Department. This will be lost if those powers are vested elsewhere even with the best of intent. The present system was devised to ensure that checks and balances existed within the Department and that the Department was required to answer to a bi-partisan body with real authority. You will absolutely lose checks and balances by going to a Commission with advisory capacity only. Not only will you lose the necessity for the Department to be responsive to the Commission but you will lose the willingness of the commissioners to serve in such a changed role.

We have to ask, why is this being suggested at this time?

Is it simply because it would be easier for the Governor to choose the Director if there was not an independent bi-partisan body involved? This has not proven to be the case as the Commission has demonstrated that it understands the sensitivity of the MDA Director sitting on the Governor's Cabinet and pays great attention to the wishes of the Governor's office when choosing a Director. In addition the Governor's

office benefits from the diversity of a bi-partisan body when hard decisions concerning the Director have to be made.

Would tax-payer money be saved by changing the role of the Commission? As commissioners are not reimbursed for their services and only for their expenses this would not be the case. What would be lost would be the value of the freely donated time and efforts of the commissioners.

Has the Commission blocked management and budget decisions by either the Governor's office or the Legislature? No, in fact, the Commission has worked to help the Department work within the substantial funding cuts it has received and helped prioritize cut backs and priorities for the Department while keeping the interests of the public in mind.

Has the Commission been a problem for anyone in ensuring the people of Michigan are served by the Department? This is really where the Commission makes the most important contribution to agriculture as its members spend significant time in their local communities to get input from the public, conduct regular hearings and Commission meetings to solicit the input of the public and agricultural sectors and pledge to educate themselves about a wide range of agricultural issues. Does anyone really believe that these extra efforts will be made by only an advisory Commission or that trust and confidence in the Department would increase if it was solely controlled from within the Governor's office?.

The success and good record of Michigan's agriculture industry is due to the governing structure now in place. It would be a good time to consider emulating this structure in other departments rather than eliminating it. The Executive order as it applies to the oversight authority of the Commission is a mistake and bad for the economic growth of the industry and the people of Michigan.

Donald Coe, Commissioner

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