



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 13, 2011

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Governor Snyder Signs Farmland Preservation Bill into Law

LANSING, MI (July 13, 2011) Governor Snyder signed HB 4666 (now Public Act 79 of 2011), sponsored by Rep. LaFontaine (R-Richmond), into law yesterday at the Michigan Capitol. This new law provides farmers with incentives to pay back defaulted P.A. 116 (the State's Farmland and Open Space Protection Program) Development Rights Agreement (DRA) liens. Payments could replenish the State's Agriculture Preservation Fund with an estimated \$5 million, allowing distribution of funds to communities to purchase farmland conservation easements. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal tool that helps farmers permanently protect farmland and keep their land in private ownership and production. Many farmers have chosen to enter the P.A. 116 program instead of selling their land to developers.

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy strongly supported HB 4666 and has worked for several years with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Michigan Farm Bureau to have this legislation introduced and passed. Heart of the Lakes Executive Director, Rachel Kuntzsch, was present at the signing and said, "The revenues generated by this action will provide a needed boost for farmland preservation, which in turn provides economic opportunities in our rural communities and certainty to growers and producers alike in this vital economic sector. We greatly appreciate Rep. LaFontaine's leadership on this issue." Also present at the bill signing ceremony were Richard Harlow and Gordon Wenk, Michigan Department of Agriculture along with Representative LaFontaine's staff members.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture draws from the Agriculture Preservation Fund to provide grants to local governments with Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs. Programs that receive state funds may also be eligible for Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) matching dollars. Providing an incentive to pay back liens only provides a temporary source of dollars for the Agriculture Preservation Fund, however, and Heart of the Lakes is working with other stakeholders to find a more permanent funding solution for farmland protection.

Heart of the Lakes' member land conservancies help landowners permanently protect some of Michigan's most important, privately-owned lands. Land conservancies are often instrumental in local farmland protection efforts, working with local, state, and federal government to leverage programs and funding while assisting landowners. For example, Heart of the Lakes member Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy works with the Peninsula Township Farmland Preservation Program on the Old Mission Peninsula which, since 1994, has permanently protected over 1/3 of all active agricultural land in Peninsula Township with support from the Agriculture Preservation Fund.

About Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy

www.heartofthelakes.org

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy is a statewide organization that strengthens the collective efforts of land conservancies and organizations dedicated to the conservation of Michigan's environmentally and economically significant lands. Heart of the Lakes provides leadership, innovative ideas, and advocates for smart public policy for the benefit of our communities and for generations to come.

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