



## Michigan Agri-Business Association

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### **Michigan Agri-Business Association focuses attention on sustainability leadership, energy issues in agriculture** *2016 MABA Winter Conference emphasizes market-driven leadership*

LANSING – Sustainability remains a hot topic in agriculture, and this week’s **Michigan Agri-Business Association (MABA)** Winter Conference and Trade Show focused attention on the related issues of corporate sustainability, energy concerns for agriculture, and climate change considerations in Michigan.

“We are seeing the private sector step up to lead the way on many aspects of sustainability – whether it’s saving energy, generating renewable energy, boosting transparency or asking what we can do about climate change,” said **Jim Byrum**, president of **MABA**. “As a sector, we need to keep encouraging these conversations and asking tough questions. We’ve been doing so for several years and we’re just cracking the surface on these issues, so this year’s winter conference was an appropriate place to continue a focus on energy, sustainability and climate.”

During the conference, **Michigan State Climatologist Jeff Andresen** focused on what he called “weather weirdness.” Andresen noted that February and March 2015 were significantly colder than average, but the rest of the year brought higher than average temperatures – especially during the end of the year. He said Michigan and the Great Lakes are becoming warmer and wetter, and weather volatility is set to continue in coming years.

**Karina Spencer** of **Star of the West Milling Co.** discussed the balance between social, environmental and economic sustainability – and noted that many sustainability efforts are bolstered by increased profitability. Saving energy saves money, for example – and **Spencer** noted that Star of the West’s advanced new boiler system has reduced natural gas consumption by 75%, saving money and boosting the sustainability narrative.

**Jed Calquhoun** of **FieldRise** also recognized the growing interest in sustainability and discussed his team’s work to reduce farm paperwork and provide sustainability benchmarks. Calquhoun said the public wants to know more about their food and where it comes from – and because public perception drives supply chain requests, sustainability will continue to be market-driven.

As Michigan agriculture continues work with utilities to maximize energy efficiency opportunities, representatives of **Consumers Energy** and **DTE Energy** focused on new energy efficiency programs that have been created for agricultural users in the past two years and discussed key recent announcements. In December, Consumers announced a new \$9 million natural gas compressor to resolve infrastructure problems in Michigan's Thumb, and DTE recently announced two new energy efficiency pilots for agriculture.

**Brian Ballinger** of the **Michigan Public Service Commission** emphasized the value of continued public-private partnership between agriculture and Michigan's utilities – and Indiana-based **IGS Energy** provided an update on natural gas opportunities in agribusiness.

“Energy access and reliability are basic building blocks for a successful agriculture sector, and the past year has resulted in great progress from utilities when it comes to saving energy,” said **Byrum**. “Energy issues are also sustainability issues, so we appreciate Michigan's utilities and utility regulators for providing their thoughts at this year's conference.”

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