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**Sen. Mike Green, agribusiness leaders focus
on future of transportation infrastructure**
*2016 transportation forum seeks solutions to
improve rail, road options for agriculture*

ESSEXVILLE – Agricultural production continues to expand across Michigan, and the state’s agriculture sector needs modern, reliable transportation networks to move those products. This morning, **Senate Agriculture Appropriations Chairman Mike Green** and **Michigan Agri-Business Association (MABA)** President **Jim Byrum** brought agriculture leaders together at a forum to discuss improvements to transportation infrastructure.

“Michigan’s Thumb is the breadbasket of our state, and with our farmers growing more than ever, we need reliable options to move those products and boost the economy,” said **Green**. “We know there are unique challenges to road and rail transportation in the area. Policy leaders have a responsibility to be proactive, work together and ask how we can create new solutions that benefit the agriculture sector.”

Sen. Green emphasized the value rail and road transportation provides to Michigan’s Bay and Thumb. More than 50 percent of corn, 80 percent of soybeans and 40 percent of wheat produced in the region reach their destinations by rail every year. Truck transportation has also remained an important factor, especially with pressure on shortline railroads in the region.

Byrum noted that increased consolidation and higher rates in the rail industry – including a proposed takeover of Norfolk Southern railroad by Canadian Pacific, as well as rail rate increases by CSX last year – have raised uncertainty for Michigan producers and businesses.

“Trucks and trains are absolutely critical for growers and grain handlers in the Thumb to market their products, and without attention to the issues we’re seeing now, agriculture is going to be limited in the future,” said **Byrum**. “Rail is a huge issue, because the actions rail carriers are taking in Michigan and across the Midwest – moving toward higher rates and a consolidated industry – could have lasting

harmful effects on our sector. In addition, we need modern roads, including rural highways, and we're focused on maintaining the state's existing weight limits."

In 1970, according to MABA, Thumb and Valley producers grew approximately 178 million bushels of corn, wheat and soybeans. Last year that number was about 488 million, thanks to new technology and modern practices.

"We're looking at a need to move almost half a billion bushels of corn, wheat and soybeans to market – and if we can solve that logistics challenge, we can create economic benefits across the region and state," said **Sen. Green**. "We need to seize the opportunity agriculture provides for our region, and for the state of Michigan – meaning we need to talk about transportation."

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