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2018 Dry Bean Outlook Conference emphasizes importance of trade for Michigan agriculture

Michigan dry bean farmers, shippers look ahead to 2018 with wide range of briefings on dry bean production

BAY CITY – The **Michigan Bean Shippers** and **Michigan Bean Commission** this week hosted their 2018 Dry Bean Outlook Conference, a session that covered multiple topics related to dry bean production. More than 200 Michigan dry bean farmers and shippers attended the meeting.

With the future of free trade in limbo, this year’s session focused heavily on the importance of exports for Michigan agriculture, with multiple speakers discussing the need to maintain the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

“The 2018 Dry Bean Outlook Conference provides a chance for farmers and shippers to look at many different factors affecting our state’s dry bean industry, and there’s no doubt trade is at the top of the list this winter,” said **Jim Byrum**, president of the **Michigan Bean Shippers**. “The trading relationships Michigan has established throughout North America for our dry beans are invaluable to everyone in our industry. We can’t afford to sever ties with our longstanding trade partners, and dismantling NAFTA would have that effect.”

During keynote remarks at the forum, **Consul General Douglas George** of the Canadian Consulate in Detroit told attendees that nearly 260,000 Michigan jobs are tied to trade and investment between Michigan and Canada. More than \$1 billion worth of agricultural products head to Canada from Michigan every year.

For Michigan dry bean farmers, Canada is a leading export destination for dry beans that are then loaded on vessels for transport to Europe and Africa. Mexico is Michigan’s top customer for dry beans, driven by that country’s strong demand for black beans grown in Michigan. NAFTA ensures streamlined trade with both nations.

In addition to trade, farmers and shippers heard from experts on the latest information related to dry bean management. Topics included fertility, pest management, disease control, harvest aid performance and beyond.

“Providing an opportunity for Michigan’s dry bean farmers to get the latest updates on issues and information that can help them be successful is a key focus for the Michigan Bean Commission, and a goal of the Dry Bean Outlook Conference,” said **Joe Cramer**, executive director of the **Michigan Bean Commission**. “This year’s forum was an excellent opportunity to update those in the dry bean industry on the critical issue of trade, take time to reflect on market opportunities headed into 2018, and share the latest research and information on dry bean management.”

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