

Issue Report

With unemployment at a national high and heated debates in Lansing and Washington dominating the papers and newscasts, it's easy to concentrate on what's wrong in Michigan. Given the spirit of the season and to attain some reprieve from the negativity that dominates the daily news cycle, I've decided to spend some time focusing on what's working in rural Michigan. Here are a few bright spots.



MICHIGAN RURAL NETWORK

Agriculture

Michigan's agricultural industry is second only to California in its diversity and is the second largest industry in the state behind the auto industry with \$71.3 billion in yearly revenue. From a distance, it would seem that Michigan agriculture is on the decline. With the rapid land development of the last 20 years farmland is getting harder to come by and the American family farm has become a symbol of a bygone era. Driving through rural Michigan paints a radically different picture, however. Farms have become streamlined and super productive and have found their place in the modern economic mix. In fact, Michigan's agriculture economy expanded more than five times faster than the general economy between 2006 and 2007. As such, Michigan can take pride in its agricultural heritage and rest assured that Michigan agriculture is here to stay.

MICHIGAN RURAL NETWORK

Diversified Economies

While the decline of Michigan's auto manufacturing industry casts a dark shadow over the entire state, a number of new industries are booming and, yes, even creating jobs. Seen as the poster child for economic despair, Flint has begun to focus on the technology sector by courting such industries as defense, aerospace, and alternative energy and have begun utilizing the mechanically savvy workforce of the region, a portion of whom reside in surrounding rural areas. Northwestern Michigan is also doing well in industries that require higher education such as healthcare and tech jobs such as graphic design and advertising. The beauty of the area provides a higher quality of life and technological advances such as broadband and satellite communications have lured educated young professionals back to the area. The five county area surrounding Traverse City is expected to experience continued growth through 2011.

Clean Energy Jobs

A report issued by the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth found that more than 2 percent of Michigan's workforce are employed in clean energy industries with average salaries greater than the state average of \$42,000. This number is expected to grow considerably in the coming years—that means new high paying jobs for Michigan's manufacturing sector.

The report also showed that clean energy manufacturing companies are being launched at a higher rate than in any other industrial sector. Those companies added 2,500 jobs from 2005 to 2008, an increase of 7.7 percent, while overall job numbers in Michigan during the same period fell 5.5 percent.

