

Keith Creagh

In April 2008 I retired from the Michigan Department of Agriculture where I had the pleasure to serve as the Chief Deputy Director for four different Directors since 1995. In this capacity I was responsible for operational and administrative functions within the department. During that tenure I did have the opportunity to work with and develop a relationship with MIFFS at the executive level. Prior to becoming Deputy Director with MDA I held various positions in the Pesticide and Plant Pest Management Division. During the last three months of my state employment, I worked with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to develop an implementation plan for the Governor's Land Use Leadership Council. My past experience has allowed me to form lasting relationships with numerous federal and state agencies as well as a diverse group of stakeholders. Upon leaving state government I worked on federal Renewable Energy Standards (RES) supported by the Union of Concerned Scientists. I was specifically asked to build an agricultural coalition that would support a broad RES portfolio. Currently I am employed by Neogen Corporation whose core business is to provide cutting edge analytical technologies to the food safety and animal health sectors.

I graduated from Michigan Technological University in 1974 and reside with my wife Laska in Williamston, Michigan. We are the proud parents of four great kids, have many diverse hobbies and are currently members of the MSU Student Organic Farm CSA. I look forward to using my experience to help MIFFS grow and continue to serve Michigan farmers.

Michael DiRamio (Incumbent)

Michael DiRamio is Program Associate with City Connect Detroit, a non-profit organization that convenes cross-sector collaborative partnerships and attracts new funding for innovative solutions in the Detroit area. In his role with City Connect, Michael enjoys providing management and strategic input to advance the work of several collaborative partnerships including the Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative and the North End Neighborhood Collaborative, among others. Previous to his current position, Michael served as a food systems policy and communications consultant to innovative organizations across the U.S. including the Wallace Center at Winrock International, the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and MIFFS. Michael co-championed and co-founded Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP), a five-county collaborative non-profit focused on local food systems and community economic development in Southeast Michigan. Michael's graduate thesis at the University of Michigan laid part of the foundation and provided a compelling case to launch FSEP, and his studies more generally opened up his passion for promoting local economies and locally-grown food as an essential ingredient for sustainable community development. Michael's graduate work brought him to MIFFS in the summer of 2003 as an intern, after which he joined the MIFFS Council. Michael served as Vice President from 2004-2007.

Michael believes MIFFS is a special organization because of its passionate people, its powerful vision and mission, and because it has proven itself a successful vehicle for bridging rural and urban communities' interests. He believes that MIFFS is creating solutions that promote prosperous farmers and healthy people in harmony with nature. Michael is committed to strengthening MIFFS' position as the "go to" entity for promoting sustainable farming and good food for all across Michigan.

Cindy Dutcher (Incumbent)

Cindy Dutcher has been involved in organic and sustainable farming since she and her husband purchased their first farm in 1981. They currently have a diverse small farm in the eastern UP where they raise and direct market poultry, meats, and produce. She is a past President and board member of MASA, a founding member of Big North Farmer's Co-op, is currently serving on the MIFFS Council, and has been actively involved in working to create access to, locally grown food in her community through the development of farmers markets and other direct sales, clarity in the processing and regulatory requirements and mentoring people with like interests. She also maintains a very active role in the day to day operations of the farm.

Tom Kalchik

Tom is a native of Leelanau County where he grew up on a fruit, grain and livestock farm. He is a 1969 graduate of Michigan State University with a Bachelors Degree in Horticultural Science. After graduating, Kalchik returned to the family farming operation in partnership with his brother. He left the partnership in 1973 and has held several positions with agricultural trade associations and food processing ventures. He has 25 years of experience in managing cooperative businesses. He joined MSU Extension in 2000 and was named Associate Director of the MSU Product Center in 2003.

Kyle Kempster

Kyle is the principal at Fluid, an advertising agency in Muskegon County. Before purchasing FLUID, Kyle served as the Director of Marketing for Shoreline Ophthalmology and he worked in the advertising department of the Meijer regional supermarket chain. Kyle was responsible for helping to define and to meet specific sales goals for the chain's many departments. Kyle currently serves on the Michigan Alternative and Renewable Energy Center Advisory Board and the Board of Directors for the Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County. He lives in Grand Haven, Michigan with his wife and two children and enjoys kayaking, running, reading, and experiencing the four seasons of the Lake Michigan lakeshore.

Doug Kirkpatrick (Incumbent)

Doug and his wife Lee moved from Alaska to the northeastern part of Michigan near Alpena, where they bought a beautiful 160-acre farm. There they pasture raise and process broilers and turkeys and keep 50-60 beef cows. Doug and Lee are innovators, using their ideas to develop workable housing and pasturing methods in the production of their eggs, meat birds, and turkeys. Doug has been challenged by the various rules and regulations associated with the processing of poultry on his farm. His greatest frustration comes from the 1,000-bird limit language and the availability of labor to assist with the process. Doug declares that he is making some progress in getting his production and marketing in balance. Like any entrepreneurs Doug and Lee have their ideas, but more than many they have a commitment and passion to see them through.

Lori Phalen

Lori has been employed in the agriculture and natural resources arena for many years and is currently the Executive Director for the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), based in East Lansing, Michigan. Prior work experience includes the Barry Conservation District, Co Executive Director position and ownership of Geum Services Incorporated, an ecological consulting company based in southwest Michigan. Lori has past experience with MIFFS, serving a term on the board during 2001-02. Since that time she has remained interested and committed to the mission of MIFFS and has enjoyed watching the organization grow and thrive.

Lori is a Barry County landowner and small farm enthusiast, along with her husband Floyd. On the Phalen farm one will find three horses and a small meat goat herd that share the rotationally grazed pastures, and in the summer a batch of chickens grazing their way in a movable chicken pen all the way to the freezer. There is also a long history on the farm of laying chickens and turkeys however at the present time, they are not in the animal mix.

Ron Steiner (Incumbent)

Ron was former executive director of the Oceana County Economic Development Corporation, from 1998 through 2004. Since then, he has been with MSU Extension, working as a regional entrepreneurship educator in the value-added agriculture sector. He has a deep desire to provide technical assistance to new entrepreneurs and innovators at the many points of the food systems, and his current mission to show local and state leaders in Michigan that “consumer-driven” farming is basic not only to the state’s economy and culture but also a great business opportunity. Ron has a sincere belief that rural communities can be revitalized and once again become economically viable if the residents of communities are willing to commit their time and energy to the process. Ron came to the position out of early retirement from working as a successful custom computer marketer. He has worked with MIFFS throughout the process of obtaining grant money to develop kitchen incubators on the east and west sides of the state, and is directing the development of the West Michigan Regional Kitchen Incubator, in Hart MI.

Nicholas Welty

Nicholas manages fruit and vegetable crop production and agricultural business plan development at Black Star Farms. He is dedicated to the pursuit of sustainable agriculture, saving farm land, and is an avid supporter of local farmers. Prior to his position as Farm Manager, Nicholas completed a Master of Science degree at The Ohio State University, where he focused on plant genetics. Prior to that, he received a Bachelor of Science degree at Carnegie Mellon University. There he doubled majored in Biology and Economics and minored in Chemistry. Early on, Nicholas developed a passion for growing plants and saving seeds. He first began growing plants for profit (giant pumpkins) at 13, and today he is the co-founder of Megalos LLC, a seed company based in 6 years of prior hobby pumpkin breeding research. He shares his love of plants with his wife Jennifer Welty (Farm Market and Winery Café Manager at Black Star Farms) and their 7 year old daughter Avery.

Dan Wyant

To replace Wendy Wieland’s position on the council for one year

As president and chief operating officer, Dan Wyant oversees strategic direction for the Edward Lowe Foundation, which promotes entrepreneurship and helps second-stage business owners accelerate growth for their companies. Wyant joined the foundation in a full-time capacity in 2005 and has served on the foundation's board of trustees since 1998. Wyant has a diverse background in both the public and private sectors. Previously, he was director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), a position he held for nine years under the administrations of two governors. Under Wyant's leadership, the MDA pioneered many nationally recognized economic development and pollution programs, which diversified and added value to Michigan's agricultural economy. Wyant holds a bachelor's degree in food systems management from Michigan State University and a master's in business administration from American University in Washington, D.C.