



# MICHIGAN FARMERS MARKET ASSOCIATION

## Farmers Market Bench Partnership

**By: Dan Keane**

*MIFMA Board Member and District Forester*

### The Saginaw Conservation District and the Michigan Farmers Market Association Team Up

MIFMA, in partnership with the Saginaw County Conservation District, is transforming urban logs into market benches.

In 2008, the Saginaw County Conservation District obtained funding through the Southeast Michigan Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council to process logs from urban trees that needed to be removed because of road safety or insect infestation into usable lumber. In my role as district forester, I was charged with implementing the project. That year, we gained important experience and generated about 2,000 board feet of ash, oak and pine lumber. As a real commodity, the wood was used for a variety of uses - some sold, some bartered and some donated to foster additional partnerships.

After this project, I started to think about the many possibilities for this work...What If? To build on the project that had come before, I got in touch with partners Dru Montri, our Association Manager, and Jessica Simons of the Southeast Michigan RC&D to generate more community wood to custom cut and build into benches for farmers markets throughout the state. Local district supporters have come forward with generous support to get the project off the ground. Their support is greatly appreciated.

With the sponsorship support, several significant ash logs have been donated by the City of Saginaw. These 70+ year old trees are among some of the first ash trees in the city to die from Emerald Ash Borer. Some of the logs have been cut, and boards are now being kiln-dried at Mark Schultz's Custom Sawmill. I anticipate about 50 benches for this



**Farmers Market Benches, fresh from the shop, made with urban lumber.**

market season. The benches are priced at \$300 each and with first preference and a significant discount given to MIFMA members to show our support for member markets and to help them celebrate their role in the growing network of independent markets throughout Michigan.

There is already strong interest and genuine excitement for what these benches symbolize, as well as the truly organic material that is being used to make them. As additional materials are processed and more information gets out about these benches, several Conservation District volunteers will assist with assembly. Each bench will be tagged and individually numbered to celebrate our effort.

This project is one of our first key fundraisers for MIFMA. We sincerely look forward to your support and trust you will be just as excited about our farmers market benches as we are.

Contact Dru Montri at [dnmontri@msu.edu](mailto:dnmontri@msu.edu) to request a bench order form. Have a great season!!!

### What's Happening?

- **March 8:**  
Farmers Market Vendor Panel and Roundtable from 1-5p
  - **March 9:**  
MIFMA's 3rd Annual Market Manager "Boot Camp"
  - **March 9:**  
MIFFS Annual Meeting
  - **March 10-11:**  
CHOICES Conference in East Lansing
  - **March 18:**  
Training Session on Accepting Bridge Cards at Farmers Markets online webinar
  - **March 18:**  
MIFMA Professional Development Committee Conference Call
  - **March 24:**  
MIFMA Policy Committee Conference Call
  - **April 5:**  
MIFMA Marketing Committee Conference Call
  - **April 6:**  
MIFMA Board Meeting
  - **April 19-25:**  
MIFMA Membership Drive Week
  - **July 22:**  
Farmers Market at the Capitol
  - **September 16:**  
Farmers Market at the Capitol
- For more information regarding these listings, call 517-432-3381.



The Michigan Farmers Market Association advances farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products. Our vision is to place farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and to ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support.

# MIFMA Member of the Month:

## Robin Danto

Friend of MIFMA from Oakland County



Robin Danto talks to students about the importance of fruits and veggies in their diets.

### Tell us about yourself and your involvement with Michigan farmers markets.

I am a dietician and work as an Extension Educator in Food Safety and Nutrition for MSU Extension in Oakland County. I received my B.S. from Michigan State University and did my masters work at Wayne State University in Nutrition and Community Health. I have worked in a hospital as a clinical dietician and as a kitchen manager. I worked as a Public Health Sanitarian with the Oakland County Health Division, have taught preschool, and for the past 5 years have worked for Extension. Personally, I am the mother of four wonderful children, and my husband, Jeff is a podiatrist.

My involvement with Michigan farmers markets is both professional and personal. Professionally, I work with a number of Oakland County markets providing educational materials and presentations on food preservation, food safety and nutrition. One of my favorite things to do is go out on market day and do food demos using locally grown fresh produce, introducing new ways for consumers to enjoy all the wonderful things that are grown here in Michigan. Personally, I love shopping at my local farmers markets and being able to share with my family fresh healthy foods. And along with this is my personal commitment to help our local economy.

**At this year's "Boot Camp," you'll talk about your Project FRESH coupon distribution and nutrition education work with the Oakland County Farmers Market. What is your best piece of Project FRESH advice for farmers markets across the state?**

Project FRESH is so important in so many ways. It provides introduction of healthy foods to a very at-risk population. It gives young mothers the opportunity to learn about the importance of produce in their families' diets. Project FRESH supports our local markets and our local farmers. It's just a positive experience all the way around.

My best advice to farmers markets across the state regarding Project Fresh is to work with your local health department, WIC office and Extension office to get Project FRESH coupons distributed at your market. Redemption rates for the coupons will increase, bringing more money into your market, and you will develop new customers for your market.

### You are a Friend of MIFMA. Why is it important to you to be a member of MIFMA?

I am a Friend of MIFMA because I see farmers markets as providing so many benefits, both financial and health related. And they are so underutilized. I think it is important to support farmers markets, and being a Friend of MIFMA gives me the chance to support this.

### You also co-chair MIFMA's Professional Development Committee. Tell us about the committee and why you enjoy this leadership position in the association.

The Professional Development Committee provides support and educational resources for farmers markets. I work quite a bit in food safety, and I think this is an important issue at farmers markets. The committee is working on a certification program for market managers including a piece on food safety to which I believe I can contribute something important. The committee gives me the opportunity to share my knowledge with others.

### What is one thing that every MIFMA member should consider as we come into farmers market season this year?

As we approach a new season for farmers markets, I urge MIFMA members to consider their audience and how they can serve them the best. Consider accepting Bridge Cards if you don't already, so that low income families across Michigan can have access to healthy, locally grown produce. Work with your local Extension offices to offer education, both in nutrition and gardening to your customers and know that you are providing an amazing service to your community.

## Welcome New Members

MIFMA would like to welcome its new members for February 2010.

### Farmers Markets

- Westside Farmers Market in Ann Arbor

### Farmer/Vendor

- Tarek Abouljoud, Teta Foods in Park
- Wasem Fruit Farm in Milan

To join MIFMA, visit [www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu](http://www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu)

## Thank you, Sponsors!

### MIFMA Sponsors

- Lynn Ochberg, Ochberg Sugar Bush in Okemos

To become a MIFMA Sponsor, contact Dru Montri, 517- 432-3381 or [dnmontri@msu.edu](mailto:dnmontri@msu.edu).

