

2nd largest in the state, employs 25% of the state's work force and contributes more than \$70 billion to the state economy.

Yes, in My Backyard!

In addition to a desire for fresh food, the combination of food recalls and the downturn in the economy has gotten some people thinking about ways to improve the quality and safety of the meals on their table in an affordable way. Not only vegetable gardens are sprouting up in your neighbor's backyard, but perhaps chickens are, too. Increasingly, small farm animals are being welcomed into yards once only prized for their landscape value.

These trends have spurred several Michigan communities to recognize the need to accommodate, and in some cases, encourage local food-related activities. While many communities already have agricultural zoning districts where fruits and vegetables can be grown and animals raised, the time may be ripe to consider how regulations for on-site processing and sales could impact the local economy as well as neighboring uses. Beyond agriculture districts, there may be locations where community farms are appropriate. With the increased interest in backyard animals, it is a good time for communities to think about where such animals should be permitted. Food-based tourism, including farm tours, u-pick farm destinations, and winery tours, is another area to explore within community master plans and local zoning regulations.

When evaluating current and proposed zoning regulations that involve agriculture and food, communities should be aware of the State of Michigan's [Right to Farm Act \(RTFA\)](#), PA 93 of 1981. Amended in 2000, the RTFA preempts local ordinances or regulations that conflict with "provisions of the act or generally accepted agricultural and management practices developed under the act." (MCL 286.474 (6)) The State of Michigan maintains Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices (GAAMPs) for farms and farm operations. These GAAMPs are developed and reviewed by industry, university and multi-governmental agencies, and cover issues including irrigation, site selection, care of farm animals, manure management, pesticide use, fertilizer use and cranberry production.

This does not mean that zoning regulations are not permitted, however. Communities are able to develop regulations for farms and farm-related uses that reasonably protect adjoining property owners. In fact, the RTFA allows local units of government to work with the Michigan Department of Agriculture on proposed ordinances that prescribe different standards from those noted in the GAAMPs that may have an impact within the community.

In order to promote healthy living, a sense of community and economic development, communities throughout Michigan should be aware of new trends, including emerging agricultural entrepreneurs and backyard hobbyists, and assess the best ways to incorporate these uses and activities within the fabric of the community.

We'd love to hear from you! If you would like more information on the above articles, or if you have any other planning or traffic-related questions, please feel free to contact us. Our email addresses are our **first initial and last name**, followed by @birchlearroyo.com. Our main phone number is 248.423.1776. Extensions are noted below:

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