

BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 33, NO. 6 // JUNE 2022



Midterm Elections Could Really
Mix Things Up in Congress

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Leads to a Successful Future // PAGE 2

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for His Future in Retirement // PAGE 20

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BottomLine

THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS
VOL. 33, NO. 6 // JUNE 2022

features



GROWING UP IN THE FOOD RETAIL BUSINESS LEADS TO A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

Cliff Denha, MIRA's Chairman, has a storied past with the organization. His memory goes back decades to a time when even he underestimated the organization.



COVER STORY //

MIDTERM ELECTIONS COULD REALLY MIX THINGS UP IN CONGRESS

Due to redistricting, congressional elections have shifted across the country including in the Midwest States. "Due to confusion over redistricting it's hard to tell what the key races will be in November," said Terry Fleming, MIRA's Ohio lobbyist. "Ohio went from 16 congressional districts to 15. The current 12-4 republican edge will probably be 12-3 after November, but if there is a change it would be 13-2 republican."



AL CHITTARO SAYS GOODBYE TO FAYGO; READY FOR HIS FUTURE IN RETIREMENT

After more than 30 years, Al Chittaro resigned from the MIRA Board of Directors in 2020 and recalls those years as being enjoyable, "not that the job or responsibility was easy, but because the other board members became your friends," he said.



chairman spotlight

CLIFTON DENHA // MIRA CHAIRMAN

Growing Up in the Food Retail Business Leads to a Successful Future

Clifton Denha, MIRA's Chairman, has a storied past with the organization. His memory goes back decades to a time when even he underestimated the organization.

"My father came to this country in 1948," Denha said. "I grew up in this line of business. Wine, liquor, beer. My father had a lot of stores in the city." Currently, Denha owns and operates Wine Palace, an independent store in Livonia, Michigan, with his brother Kelly.

Denha explained that he had to learn the value of an organization like MIRA. When he was younger, Denha said he wasn't always fond of business associations because, from the outside, it can be difficult to see the inner workings of MIRA and how it benefits its members. Now, as chairman, he recognizes that he wouldn't be anywhere without it.

"People don't see what we do behind the scenes, but we fight hard for the independent retailer," Denha said. "We don't have the money or power of Kroger and Meijer. My goal is to help out the small guy."

Without a doubt, Wine Palace is one of the best stores in Michigan. In 2020, Denha's store earned the elusive award of most spirits sold in the entire state. Last year, Wine Palace defended the title, solidifying its position as a back-to-back champion. Of course, Denha hopes he pulls off the threepeat, but he understands the bar has been raised by the competition.

Wine Palace wouldn't be anywhere near where it is today if not for the direct help of MIRA. "Back in the day, more than 20 years ago, Costco tried to get a liquor license in Livonia," Denha said. Costco is located right across the street from Wine Palace. If it had the ability to sell liquor, with its cutthroat wholesale prices and corporate bargaining power, Wine Palace would be devastated.

Instead, MIRA's relationship with Livonia prevented corporate Costco from running Wine Palace out of town. Today, the decades-old store rivals the busiest franchises as it vies for its third year straight with the most spirit sales in Michigan.

Denha finds his current work with MIRA very fulfilling. On a day-to-day basis, he advocates for independent retailers and organizes on their behalf. In order to compete with corporate businesses, Denha said, independent retailers organize with MIRA instead.

In one instance, Denha remembers a sit-down meeting MIRA had with the Michigan Liquor Control Commission. Total Wine, a relatively new store in the metro Detroit area, was seeking to undercut normal prices by buying directly from wine and liquor companies while also lowering the state minimums they can sell at. "I can't stop them from opening," Denha said, nor would he want to. "They wanted to open everything. We fought for them to have the same playing rules as everyone else."

Total Wine has over 200 stores nationwide. "They were trying to undercut the entire industry," Denha said. Without a centralized organization representing independent retailers like MIRA, they might have been successful.

Denha remembers COVID-19 with some bitterness, but looks to the future with hope. "I'm proud that I took over the chairmanship during the pandemic," he said. "It hasn't been the best of times. A lot of our members got hurt. I'm proud that we tried to keep everything together with COVID-19, and I do feel like things are looking up. We're going to have an exceptional gala event this year."

MIRA's gala, the 105th Annual Trade Dinner & Ball, with a "Roaring 20's" theme, will be held on October 8, 2022. Call me for tickets at (800) 666-6233. ■

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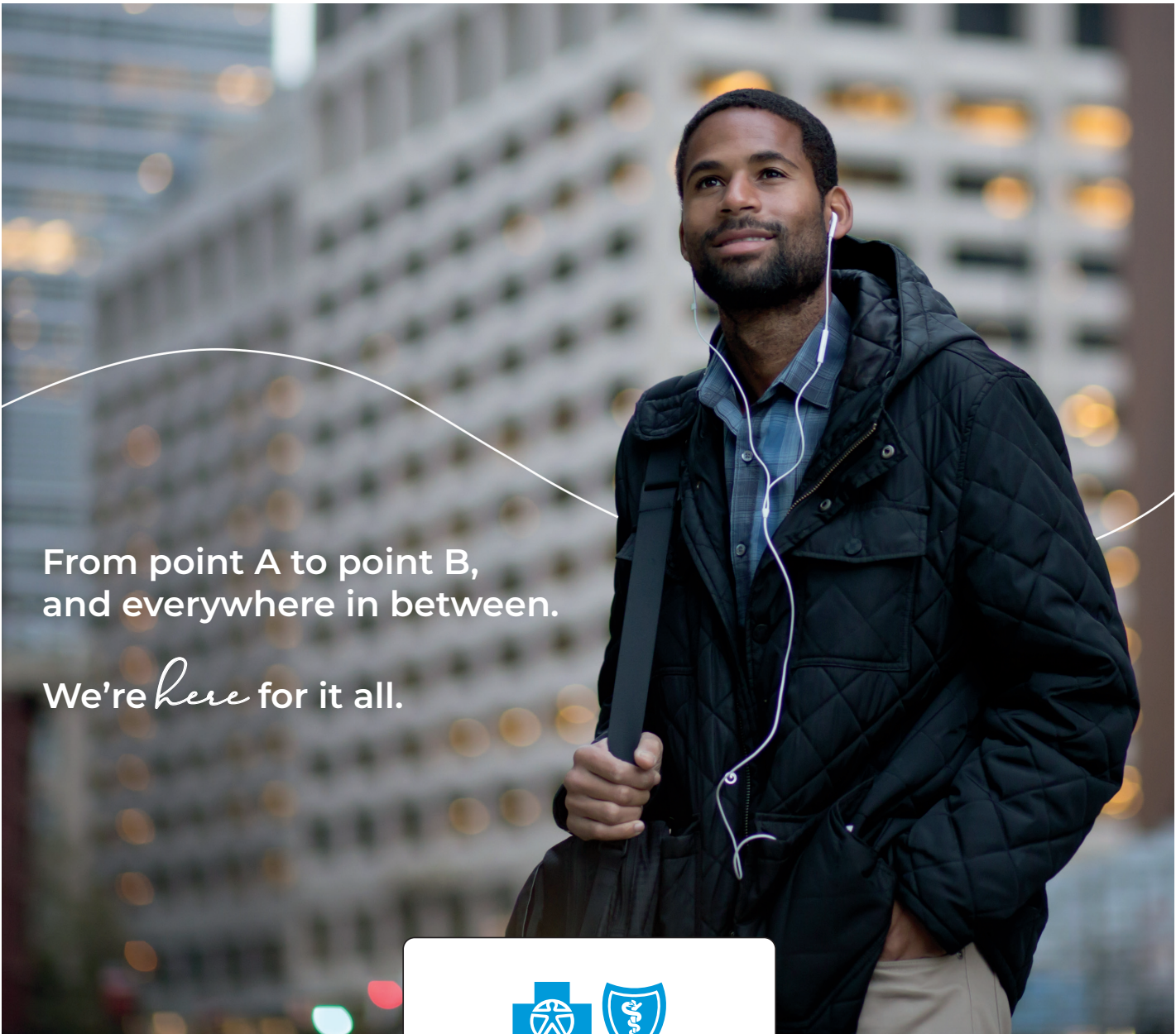
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c-store news & views

JIM GREEN // MIRA VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

A Delivery Solution for MIRA Members

The convenience store channel has been left behind during the digital retail revolution. They have been forced to work with platforms and tools that were created with the restaurant industry in mind. Online delivery is expected to grow at an annual rate of 17% over the next four years and convenience store owners want to be in this market and are searching for a better solution. Creating an ecommerce system and delivery process from scratch is overwhelming and expensive. Over the last twelve months Midwest Independent Retailers Association (MIRA) has worked to create **MIRA Orders to Go** for our members. This program provides you tools that were specially designed for the success of the convenience store channel and is amazingly simple for retail operators to get up and running. It puts you in complete control giving you the ability to deliver orders with your staff or utilizing the DoorDash delivery network to make a delivery without your customer even knowing. Set up is simple and the program is easy to use. We now have this program available to all members – *check out the details on page 5!*

Just using a third party delivery solution can be problematic for retailers. One issue is they take a serious bite out of profits with commission rates often starting at 15% and increasing from there. Another issue is that you want to build *your* brand and not a third-party delivery service. **MIRA Orders to Go** helps solve these two key issues for our members. First, they create a website for you, or, if you already have a website, they can use your existing site. This allows convenience store retailers to retain brand loyalty. Second, you will keep 100% of your profit. You can add a delivery fee if you decide to deliver the order yourself. If you decide to utilize the DoorDash delivery network, a delivery fee will be



added to the order and the consumer will pay for this when making a payment. For an additional fee, we have tools that seamlessly make the integration of your online menu presence on third-party marketplaces and apps. Our automations will also add the commissions and fees that they charge to those marketplace menu prices so that there is zero out of pocket expense for you. So, a \$20 order is truly \$20 for you.

Convenience store operators may have a desire to make every item in their store available to consumers. There is data that shows there is a very systematic way you want to approach your online menus. Categories you want to start with are fresh food, beer, wine, and alcohol. Then add your items that are in the top 15% of the sku's you offer. Offering everything will be too much noise for consumers. In this case, less is best.

Members can get started immediately at a base cost of \$75 per month with zero transaction fees, zero delivery fees, and a one-time set-up fee of \$299, which is being waived for all members that sign up by *October 15, 2022*. Simplicity and automation are what makes **MIRA Orders to Go** a must-have solution for members. It will only take a few minutes to fill out the registration form, and the rest will be taken over by the automations. If our members have any difficulty, a representative will help them through the entire set-up process. **MIRA Orders to Go** will make your menu the preferred menu on Google. There are 8.7 billion searches made per month on Google for not only online shopping, but for establishment location and information around food and alcohol purchases. Google is a great lead generator. I encourage every member to take a hard look at signing up over the next 30 days! It is a low-risk proposition that has the capability of unlocking new consumers for you! ■

- DISCOUNTS -



MIRA MEMBER EXCLUSIVE

Members with questions call the MIRA office at 1-800-666-6233

ORDERS TO GO →

Curbside and delivery made easy and affordable for every retailer!

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- \$299 sign-up fee, waived by MIRA until October 14, 2022
- No transaction fee because by default the transaction fee of 2.9% +\$0.30 on all online orders is paid by buyer and not the retailer
- Free Delivery including alcohol through DoorDash (DoorDash will add a delivery fee but it is paid by the consumer)
- MIRA automations to expedite your menu buildout
- MIRA automations to link your menu to Yelp
- MIRA automations to link your menu to Google
- MIRA automations to make your menu the preferred menu on Google



Connect right to your website

MIRA partnered with one of the leading online software companies and created a proprietary software called **MIRA Orders to Go**.



Delivery Made Easy

We are excited to have our software partnered with DoorDash, who will do all your deliveries, at no cost to you.



Curbside and In-Store Shopping

You will be provided with QR capabilities that you can have in your store or on your pumps for quick scan, order, and payments.



Create combos and promotions

MIRA Orders to Go is designed to give you all the tools you need to start slow to scale fast.

MORE DETAILS:

- Immediate approval of online merchant services for you to accept any credit card, debit card, Apple Pay and Google Pay for online payments.
- A product library of UPC codes *with* images and descriptions are ready and available to you. If a specific UPC is unavailable, just upload the UPC code and our proprietary system will match the correct image and description from a centralized data base. For unique foodservice items, you can manual add that to your inventory.
- Age verification on alcohol and tobacco products for both the seller and DoorDash driver. *If your State prohibits alcohol or tobacco delivery, no problem! You can still use MIRA Orders to Go for curbside or inside store pickup. You can always opt into the delivery function for these products later.*
- API capability to your POS with easy toggle switches that can be turned on and off if a product sells out or you no longer carry it.
- Language translation capabilities for you and your customers so no one is left out.

TO SIGN UP FOR THIS PROGRAM, CALL THE MIRA OFFICE AT (800) 666-6233 OR EMAIL INFO@MIRAMW.ORG



government relations report

JUAN ESCAREÑO // MIRA DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Where Are We Now

"It is legal because I wish it."

– KING LOUIS XIV

We are not kings, and much less nobles. It is often asked why we haven't won a certain issue or changed a certain law. The fallacy is thinking that simply wishing it, or saying it, will make it happen. We are not magicians or sorcerers either. So simply working at it, or again talking about it, will not make it happen.

Why do we have bottle returns? Why don't we have a minimum on beer and wine? Why is the retail market power concentrated on a few big box stores? The reality is that we live in a world where the other person, the opposing side, as wants, and needs too. To simply wish it, or demand it, will not make it happen.

To enact a paradigm shift, we must first recognize where we are. What we are truly capable of accomplishing? It takes humility in its true essence. In my tradition, the Catholic monastic defines humility as truth. Being truthful about what is your capacity in this world. What I am truly capable of doing by myself and with others. I am not a king, or a magician, and much less a sorcerer. So, I must operate in the world as it really is.

The second thing we must recognize to do a paradigm shift, is the true essence of the issue or people we are confronting. What and who are they really. What do they want, and how do they believe it will be accomplished?

Until we recognize these two facts, humility of self, and an understanding of our opposition, we will sit outside while others make the rules. I lay this out because below is our current agenda in Government Relations.

MICHIGAN

- We worked with the MLCC to reintroduce a half-mile rule for municipalities. Barring any opposition, the proposed rule may go into effect in late 2022
- We actively oppose expanding the bottle bill and continue to defend against the constant effort to add water bottles.

- Working to stop ghost retailers from undercutting brick and mortar stores in the delivery of alcohol. Legislation will be introduced soon to ensure delivery is not done with independent contractors. This would hinder Amazon like operations from undercutting our members.
- Stopped unattended gas stations. This would have allowed Walmart and Costco to run their gas stations with zero employees.
- Actively work to stop the increase in the motor fuel tax

ILLINOIS

- Actively worked on amending the Fair Work Week Ordinance in Chicago. We continue to monitor the ordinance and ensured the pandemic variance was implemented
- We have a growing list of aldermen in the City of Chicago that work with us on getting answers for our members
- Actively working with the Cook County Commissioners to enact a tax abatement policy for stores in food deserts. We project this saving independent retailers will help stores expand, remodel, and train employees. We anticipate this legislation moving in July of 2022.
- Spearheaded the Link Match pilot program in supermarkets. This program is bringing thousands of dollars for marketing to participating stores and expanding the purchase amounts of customers on EBT. Cermak, One Stop, and Pete's have signed up for the program.

OHIO

- Supported legislation to stop municipalities from passing anti-plastic bag laws
- Actively stopped Ohio from expanding the tobacco tax
- Actively work to stop the increase in the motor fuel tax
- We have good relationships with the legislative leadership so we can help our retailers get quick answers

NATIONAL

We actively participate in a national coalition of retail trade associations working to have anti-trust laws enforced so that our members can compete with big box stores. We got the endorsement of 3 Members of Congress to sign-on to a letter supporting the enforcement of anti-trust laws in retail. ■

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michigan liquor report

PAT GAGLIARDI // CHAIR, MICHIGAN LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

Moderation Matters – Why Age and Alcohol Don’t Mix

A few months ago, AARP magazine published an insightful article on why age and alcohol don’t mix. The article was written by Bill Stieg, a former editor for Men’s Health magazine and a journalist for more than 40 years. Here’s what he had to say.

Early in the pandemic, Mr. Stieg said that his drinking changed when his daughter moved back home and brought the New York cocktail culture with her. His beer or wine routine was “pleasantly upended.” However, his hangovers suddenly became more frequent, despite a half century of “mostly” sensible drinking.

Mr. Stieg’s family wasn’t drinking alone. During the pandemic, 14% of older adults reported drinking more, according to a national survey by University of Michigan researchers. (However, 27% drank less, possibly because work-related and social drinking became less frequent.) Of those ages 50 to 80 who do drink, 23% downed three or more drinks in a typical session. That’s unhealthy for anyone, especially for individuals in this age group.

Research shows that we process liquor differently over time. It’s about age 50 that biological changes start happening and people can’t process alcohol – or deal with its effects – as well as when they were younger. That is according to Alexis Kuerbis, an associate professor at Hunter College of the City University of New York, who has studied alcohol and other substance use among older people. Specifically:

- Your body loses muscle, gains fat, and carries less water in the bloodstream. Because muscle holds more water than fat, this means there’s less water in an older body. Any alcohol you consume isn’t diluted to the degree it was when you drank alcohol in your 20s. This results in a higher blood-alcohol content.
- Your stomach and liver don’t produce as much of the alcohol-digesting enzyme called ADH, which leads to a higher blood-alcohol content that’s sustained longer, even if you’re not drinking any more than you did when you were younger. Women have less ADH than men to start with, which is why they are less able than men to clear alcohol from the body.
- Our ability to perceive the effects of alcohol diminishes after age 50. We’re less able to sense whether our reflexes or balance has been diminished, so we don’t gauge our sobriety

as accurately. Our perceptions are failing (just as our eyesight or hearing starts failing). We can’t sense that we’re getting more intoxicated as we age.

“We perceive ourselves as having more tolerance than we really do,” says George F. Koob, age 74, and director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism. That misperception only increases the more intoxicated we become – so that fourth cocktail or beer seems to be having little effect and our body pays little attention.

Dehydration, (a common condition among older people, sober or not) is a contributing factor in the more severe hangovers we experience as we age. Alcohol pulls water from the body, often resulting in a headache or dry mouth. Drinking more water doesn’t dilute the alcohol in our system. Staying hydrated may help limit a blood-alcohol surge, but the physiology of aging will prevail. Alternating drinks with something non-alcoholic can help you pace yourself but may indicate you’re still planning on drinking too much in one session.

The maximum of 14 drinks per week for men and seven for women is a solid guide. But drinking at levels beyond that “accelerates some of the aging process” in the brain, Mr. Koob emphasized.

Our brains normally start shrinking in middle age, but older people who drink too much show marked loss of volume in the frontal cortex (the area that controls our executive function), a 2018 study found. Impulsive and compulsive behavior can be affected and lead to alcohol misuse that can speed up aging. The aging process can lead to more alcohol misuse. It becomes a vicious cycle.

There are an estimated 200 medical conditions that are worsened by alcohol, including the obvious, such as liver disease, as well as some not so obvious, like cancers, especially oral cancers. Others include high blood pressure, immune system disorders, stroke risk and diabetes. Contrary to the widely held notion, alcohol doesn’t help us sleep. It may make us drowsy, but it wrecks the quality of our sleep.

Alcohol in moderation can be beneficial to your cardiovascular system. But people who are pushing 14 drinks a week may be pushing their luck and it may be time to dial back drinking a bit.

The “sober curious” are both thoughtful and challenging of their drinking impulses. Drinking alcohol should not tend to be mindless and habitual. Make it less of a habit and more of an event (think “mindful drinking”).

Enjoy the vast array of spirits products offered in Michigan, but drink responsibly and mindfully. Moderation matters. ■

Source: AARP Magazine, March 4, 2022. The mission of the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) is to make alcoholic beverages available for consumption while protecting the consumer and the general public through regulation of those involved in the sale and distribution of these alcohol beverage products.



FOR THE
HUSTLE





ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

House and Senate Temporarily Excluded from Statewide Primary Elections

Ohio held a primary election on May 3rd for every office except the House and Senate. There is still no Supreme Court approved district map, but more on that later. The clear winner in the Ohio primary elections was Donald Trump, as all 22 candidates he endorsed won. Ohio is clearly Trump country. As for the races that were held, 10 republican incumbents won their spots in the U.S. Congress as did 3 democrats. There are two new republican candidates, Matt Miller, a former presidential aide, and Madison Gesiotto-Gilbert, an attorney and former beauty queen. Miller is heavily favored to win his seat in November but Gilbert will have a tough race against Emily Sykes, former Ohio House Minority Leader and daughter of longtime political activists and elected officials. The race for the U.S. Senate had 9

candidates that spent over \$100 million dollars campaigning between them and it gathered nationwide attention. Former State Treasurer, Josh Mandel, led for several months but at the last minute Trump endorsed J.D. Vance and that swung the election to Vance. Vance wrote a very successful book, "Hillbilly Elegy" that was made into a movie and he rode that to a successful political career. The democratic nominee is Tim Ryan whose congressional seat was split up due to census numbers. Vance is favored to win in the fall.

In the Ohio statewide races, Governor DeWine won but more people voted against him than for him, as Jim Renacci and Joe Blustone each got over 200k votes while DeWine had a little under 500k votes. The only other contested race was former State Representative John Adams challenging Secretary of State Frank Larose, who easily beat back the challenge. The other take away from this election was over 500,000 more republicans voted than democrats.

Back to the fiasco of why the State Senate and House were not on the May 3rd ballot, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled against several district maps submitted by a redistricting committee that was dominated by republicans. The latest news is that the court was going to choose one of the maps and hold another primary election in August. Meanwhile, the current legislature has been absent as they wait to see what the maps look like.

However, one Senator introduced a bill that's getting a lot of publicity, SB 327, which would phase out the personal income tax in Ohio over a 10 year period joining states like Florida and others who have no income tax. This will be a tough sell as politicians love to spend money and are adverse to losing money. Also, the sponsor of the bill, Steve Huffman, had earlier introduced a bill, SB 277, that would temporarily reduce the motor fuel tax, but Governor DeWine quickly killed this by indicating he'd veto this bill if it got to his office.

Lastly, for all service station owners, remember you don't control oil prices and are not responsible for high gas prices, if you get inquiries refer them to major oil companies. ■

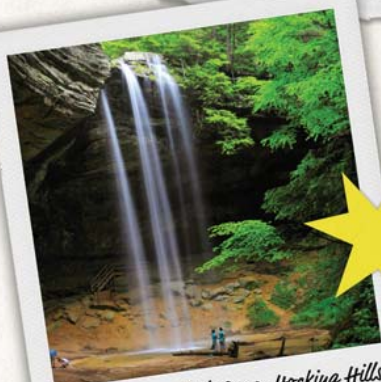


OHIO ELECTIONS CHIEF FRANK LAROSE (RIGHT) TALKS RECENTLY AT A MEETING OF THE OHIO REDISTRICTING COMMISSION IN COLUMBUS, OHIO.

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Midterm Elections Could Really Mix Things Up in Congress



BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*



Due to redistricting, congressional elections have shifted across the country including in the Midwest States. “Due to confusion over redistricting it’s hard to tell what the key races will be in November,” said Terry Fleming, MIRA’s Ohio lobbyist. “Ohio went from 16 congressional districts to 15. The current 12-4 republican edge will probably be 12-3 after November, but if there is a change it would be 13-2 republican.”

In the state of Michigan, incumbents Andy Levin (D 9th district) and Haley Stevens (D 11th district) are vying for the same seat in the Primary Elections in August for the 11th district. This is just one example of how redistricting changes the election map. The winner will face off with Matthew DenOtter or Mark Ambrose, candidates on the republican side. The primary will occur on August 2, 2022. The general election will occur on November 8, 2022. General election candidates will be added to the ballot following the primary.

In Michigan, MIRA’s Michigan lobbyist, Matt Miner, outlines key races including in the 3rd District where republican Peter Meijer faces a tough re-election campaign this fall as his seat has changed boundaries making his bid for a second term more challenging.

In Michigan’s 7th district, Congresswoman, Elissa Slotkin, faces an uphill battle to retain her Lansing area seat that became less democratic after redistricting. Republican State Senator, Tom Barrett, is poised to knock off the incumbent in a seat ranked in the top ten of seats most likely to flip nationwide this fall.

In Michigan’s 8th district, Congressman, Dan Kildee, faces the toughest re-election of his career in the newly drawn 8th district. A once safe democratic seat was redrawn to be much less democratic. Kildee will likely face off against political newcomer (not the former Congresswoman) Candice Miller, or Paul Junge. The new lines added in some pretty red areas throughout Bay/Midland counties and if Miller can use her rock solidly popular name to her advantage, Kildee could face an upset.

In Michigan’s 10th district, former two-time U.S. Senate candidate, John James, has found a solid district to make his third attempt at elected office a reality. This newly drawn seat that encompasses Oakland and Macomb County and

leans republican and will likely have a strong tailwind with James on the ticket. He faces either former State Representative, Henry Yanez, or Prosecutor Carl Marlinga, both from Macomb County.

In Michigan’s 11th district, an Oakland County seat pits two currently elected Congresspeople against one another. Haley Stevens and Andy Levin face off in this democrat leaning district. Whomever wins this primary, Miner believes will prevail in November’s contest against their republican opponent.

In Michigan’s 13th district, a jam packed democratic primary pits 11 candidates, including State Senator, Adam Hollier, Representative Shri Thanedar, John Conyers and Sherri Gay-Dagnogo. Whomever prevails in this primary will be the presumed Congressperson in this safe democratic seat.

For Illinois, Curt Fiedler, MIRA’s Illinois lobbyist, outlines the key congressional races for both the primary and general elections. In the 2022 primary election, the democratic 6th district was drawn pitting two incumbents against each other – Representative Mary Newman and Representative Sean Casten. This district is likely to remain held by the democratic candidate that wins the 2022 primary race.

In Illinois’s 13th district, a new “open” district, the favorite in the democratic primary is Nikki Budzinski, and if she wins it is possible this downstate district could flip from republican to democrat.

Illinois’s 15th district features a republican primary between two incumbents from downstate Illinois – Mary Miller and Rodney Davis. Representative Miller was recently endorsed by former President Donald Trump.

Both the 11th and 14th districts, currently leaning democratic and represented by Bill Foster (D 11th district) and Lauren Underwood (D 14th district), could both be flipped as current trends favor the Republican Party.

Illinois’s 17th district is a new “open” district that was drawn to favor a democratic candidate but is currently labeled a “toss up.” Republican candidate, Esther Joy King, may become the favorite to win the general election if she wins the primary race.

“In my opinion, to understand where each candidate stands, I think the top issues are economic health/inflation,



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supply chain concerns, labor force, and the reliability of the energy grid,” said Fielder. “Those are the issues that will mostly impact MIRA members to ensure they continue to operate daily. Margins are small in our industry, and any threat in operational or employment costs jeopardize stores remaining open.”

“Inflation and the economy continue to be the dominant issues nationwide and in Michigan,” said Miner. “If gas prices continue to soar and if inflation does not begin to subside, it could be a dismal year for democrats.”

Fleming also looks at key issues at the congressional level that the food retail industry is working hard to stay abreast of and be proactive. “At the federal level the issues that most concern our members is first and foremost tax policies,” said Fleming. “We are hopeful that there will be no tax increase and perhaps even less taxes. Minimum wage is always an issue especially with lack of employees currently. Supply issues have become huge for all businesses especially small independent businesses. Tobacco is still a huge seller for convenience stores so any effort to increase cost or to outlaw tobacco is always another issue as well.”

Recent polls indicate there is a good chance that the republicans take over the house and senate, and industry experts are offering insight on this possibility. “A republican takeover of both House and Senate would most likely be very good for MIRA members as republicans tend to favor lower taxes and less regulation,” said Fleming. “If democrats retain their majority in both House and Senate, I wouldn’t expect to see much change. I think they would be looking for answers to supply problems and lack of employees.”

In Illinois, Fielder indicates that it really depends on how big of a majority the Republican Party (GOP) might have in both chambers. “While there likely would be more business-friendly legislation proposed, unless the GOP can obtain 60 votes to prevent a filibuster in the Senate, there may not be any significant change,” he said. “There likely will be a larger effort to control the rise of inflation and a return to a more balanced energy sector that will ease certain financial pressures for both businesses and citizens.”

Meanwhile in Michigan, Miner notes that if republicans take control of Congress, it is likely that Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell will be the leaders of their respective chambers. “You can expect a much different agenda coming from the legislative branch over the next two years. Congress will likely pass legislation to reverse a vast

majority of the President’s executive orders as it related to energy, immigration, labor, and the economy,” he said. “If democrats lose the Senate, it will also make President Biden’s appointments to boards, courts, and departmental positions very difficult for his final two years of the term.”

If democrats keep a hold of their seats and control both House and Senate, it could mean status quo in Illinois and Michigan as well with the Biden administration pushing their agenda. “I do not see much change if the democrats retain control of Congress unless they obtain more than 60 votes in the Senate, which I don’t think is likely. I would expect inflation to remain high and economic policies remaining as they currently are,” said Fielder.

“It is likely that if democrats continue to control both chambers after November’s election, there will be significant legislative initiatives acted upon that will further advance the President’s agenda that has yet made it to his desk from the legislative branch,” said Miner. “The Green New Deal and other large ticket items still await legislative action, and a new session of Congress will likely breathe new life into these initiatives.”

With this insight from MIRA lobbyists, the question becomes: What should our members pay attention to as they head to the polls? “I would encourage MIRA members as they go to the polls to consider what’s best for their families and businesses and vote for your best interest and not be fooled by campaign promises,” said Fleming. “Where candidates stand on the key economic policies that directly impact businesses.”

“MIRA members should be very in tune to candidates on the ballot who have a strong focus on the inflation situation in America,” said Miner. “It is a massive issue for supply chains and consumers that must be curtailed. This may be the most consequential election of this new century to date, as America’s economy faces significant adversity.”

Fleming also notes that the issues that retailers face don’t necessarily get the attention they deserve. “Social issues, such as abortion, immigration, crucial race theory, LGBT get more attention than anything but in the long run have little to do with business, but we need to be aware of any legislation dealing with these issues and how they might affect your bottom line,” said Fleming. ■

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Catering to Lake-Goers, Boaters and Summer Patrons



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

Beer, beer, and more beer is the item of choice at NorthShore Market (Lyndon, Michigan) owner Jim Conway commented with a chuckle as he talked about the summer crowd. He spent four summers delivering orders to customers on one of the three lakes near his store. “They tie their boats in a sandbar area and the customers would call in an order and I would go out a few times a day and deliver all kinds of items,” said Conway. “I would primarily deliver on the weekends.”

When the 2020 pandemic hit, he stopped the delivering service to the summer boaters but hopes to start it up again. “I can’t right now because I am short employees,” he said. “I need about two more cashiers and two more people to work in the pizza department.”

The three lakes Conway would deliver items to are Bennet, Hoisington, and Lobdell. Bennett Lake is a 150 acre, all sports lake, located just south of Lobdell Lake. The two lakes are attached by a channel that runs under Bennett Lake Road.

His business triples in the summer, primarily in the pizza department. In addition to being a local convenience store, Conway makes pizza and has an ice cream parlor. “In the summer, it gets chaotic,” said Conway.

Between the Great Lakes and the inland lakes in the Midwest, local stores are busy with boaters and lake-goers during the summer season. In fact, summer is the busiest time of the year for all convenience stores, but is especially busy for those located close to summer attractions like parks, lakes, pools, campgrounds, and other outdoor venues. “You want to make sure you have the items your customer base is going to want,” said Derek J. Ward of Team Sledd, a convenience store distributor. “If you are located next to a swimming pool or a park, you are going to want to make sure you are stocked up on a bunch of items for the kids. Items like snacks, chips, kids drinks and ice cream novelties.”

There are other items that sometime get overlooked such as Band-Aid’s, sunblock, sunglasses, chapstick and bug spray. “A lot of customers don’t realize that there are items in every category that should be ordered and ready for summer customers,” said Ward. “For customers that are close to lakes and campgrounds, firewood is an example of one of those items that is also often overlooked.”

Campers need firewood and it’s a great item to have to bring customers into your store. “Don’t forget to make sure you

have the supplies for the kids to make s’mores - graham crackers, marshmallows, and chocolate,” noted Ward. “We also offer a program for convenience stores to cater to the customers that are heading out to fish in the lakes with DMF bait which offers fishing supplies including worms and night crawlers.”

The region, station and country in many areas are moving passed the COVID-19 pandemic and returning to a normal way of operating and living. “During COVID-19, c-stores were being relied on for more grocery like items and now they are getting back into the quick grab-and-go items customers were looking for before COVID-19,” said Ward. “As the weather gets nicer, people will be back to traveling again and foot traffic should be picking up at most locations.”

He also noted that customers should make sure they order extra safety stock on items, so they don’t run out of products. “It’s better to order extra and be prepared than to run out and lose a possible sale,” said Ward. “The summer season and summer crowd are where convenience stores get the most business and make up the majority of their sales for the year. Convenience stores need to make sure they are prepared with all the items their customer base may be looking for so that they can capitalize on those purchases.” ■

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For more information on Team Sledd, call the office at **800.333.0374**
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MIRA Member and Former Employee Goes Back to His Roots

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

When Kenny Ibrahim purchased Princess Grill at the end of 2019, he didn't know the world would soon face the farthest-reaching and most economically-disastrous pandemic in recent memory. He just wanted to cook.

Like many Chaldeans, Ibrahim was raised in a family store, but his story was somewhat different. His family got rid of their groceries to install a full kitchen inside the store. "That's where I learned to love cooking," he said.

Ibrahim's family store moved away from liquor sales and toward serving fresh food. His favorite part was making the sandwiches, but they sold just as much pizza, salad, and other items. He explained how the margins on fresh food were much better than a case of beer, and how it was more fulfilling to serve food. That's what led him to the restaurant business.

MIRA has always been a big part of Ibrahim's life, even before it had that name. He consulted for MIRA back when the association was called Associated Food and Petroleum Dealers, or AFPD. Ibrahim recalls fondly the connections and friendships he made while in that role.

Now though, he's gone back to his roots, running the famed Princess Grill. His restaurant is known for its Chaldean-styled mediterranean food, and it's enjoyed by everyone.

Most recently, Ibrahim opened a new location in Farmington Hills on the northeast corner of Orchard Lake and 12 Mile Road – A busy intersection, right off the highway, that's sure to bring loads of business.

The new location is pristine and pure. It's exactly the place you'd want to sit down for a meal. Ibrahim's expansion into Princess' third restaurant was calculated and convenient. Princess is traditionally known for its deep trays and party size combos, where families and offices alike get together to enjoy fresh meat on a bed of rice or bulgur. COVID-19, however, changed everything.

As a restaurant, Ibrahim suffered like all the rest when offices closed and employees started to work remotely.



His business from office catering tapered off. It was slow to come back, but it did, although in a different form. He noticed that few larger orders wanted to share a combo platter anymore. More often than not, they requested individual servings that could be sealed and delivered themselves. Thus, the Princess Grill Bowl was born.

Ibrahim's kitchens, however, were set up for catering, not individual bowls. "It became difficult to make the bowls. It broke up our process in the kitchen," he said. "The new location is set up for individual bowls, with fresh ingredients laid out in a bar for the customer to pick-and-choose, fast-casual style."

Ibrahim closed the store at 8 p.m. the day I visited – only a bit early because they were barely open. Even still, as we sat down to enjoy a meal together and talk about his passion, a woman knocked on his door.

"I'm so sorry, but we're closed." Ibrahim told her that all of the cooking equipment was turned off for the day and the ingredients were mostly put away.

The woman, named Norma, begged Ibrahim. She didn't live in the area, she explained. She was driving back from her eye surgery, she said, and had already been to several restaurants around here. Many were closed, and the others were unacceptably disgusting. She was impressed, on the other hand, with the exquisite cleanliness of Princess Grill.

Ibrahim stood from his seat. He spent the next thirty minutes accommodating his final guest for the night -- offering her the restroom, a drink, chips and hummus, a salad, and a rice bowl. Eventually, they found out they both went to Southfield High School. Norma received her food, gave her thanks, and took her leave.

"Customer service is in my blood," Ibrahim said. ■

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Al Chittaro Says Goodbye to Faygo; Ready for His Future in Retirement

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

After more than 30 years, Al Chittaro resigned from the MIRA Board of Directors in 2020 and recalls those years as being enjoyable, “not that the job or responsibility was easy, but because the other board members became your friends,” he said. “They were mostly in an industry that everyone was passionate about. We never lost sight of the association’s objective – *how do we help make our members stronger and better.*”

After 48 years, Chittaro is now saying goodbye to Faygo Beverages. He started in 1974 as a part-time employee for four years and was a full-time employee for 44 years. “My four part-time years began as a “driver salesman”, and a member of the Teamsters, while also attending Michigan State University,” said Chittaro. “After graduating in 1978, my first full time job offer was for an assistant personnel manager (called in the 70’s) with a compensation package of \$12,500.”

A week before his start date, Chittaro received a call from the National Sales Manager and he said, “we just lost an area manager from the Ann Arbor area, would you be interested in starting your career in sales?”, which included a salary of \$15,500 and a company car. “So there my sales career began,” he said. “I moved to Baltimore, Maryland, as a District Sales Manager and then to Charlotte, North Carolina as a Regional Sales Manager, until moving back to Michigan as the Michigan Sales Manager.”

In the mid-80’s, he was promoted to National Sales Manager covering 30 states. He eventually received the Vice President of Sales title, followed by Executive Vice President, and finally President.

Chittaro is ready for retirement life. “My wife Heather and I plan on enjoying lake life, boating, kayaking, paddle boarding, barbecuing with the grandkids (they don’t ever want to go home), and reading,” he said. “We plan on spending the winter months somewhere a little warmer, changing our destination yearly.”

Chittaro is also a proud family man. “Heather and



I have been lucky, we are proud of our three kids – Ryan, Paige and Jamie,” he said. “We still enjoy each other’s company, while now attending multiple sporting competitions and school events with the next generation – the grandkids.”

Like Chittaro, many people got their start at Faygo and even those who eventually left, Chittaro says they witnessed several success stories and has many wonderful memories to share with others. “It probably sounds like a cliché, but the time at Faygo went by in a blink of an eye,” he said. “There were several highlights over the years, including expanding outside of the 10 states we were sold in when I started, to going national. We introduced multiple brands and packages over the years, competing against much larger beverage competitors annually.”

Faygo was acquired twice from the founding Feigenson family. Since 1987, Faygo has been under the National Beverage Corp. umbrella. “Over the years we recruited many great employees who we have had long tenures with,” he said.

Chittaro noted that the relationship between Faygo and MIRA was positive. “The members are the priority. Everyone works hard, and 90% of the decisions made at Faygo were recommended by the individuals that were charged with the responsibility,” he said. “We learned early on that, if our retailers and distributors are growing and profitable, we as a company will do the same.”

He still plans to keep his eye on the industry. “We would like to continue to witness the ongoing creativity in the beverage business – new flavors and new packages,” he said. “I would advise any new individual entering the food industry to listen, gain knowledge, keep reading, and approach business with a high degree of integrity, intelligence, passion and empathy.” ■

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A close-up, profile view of a smiling woman with dark hair, looking towards the right. She is holding a black sign with the word 'OPEN' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a blurred stadium at night, with bright lights and structural elements visible. The overall mood is positive and hopeful.

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 Petrosoft LLC (412) 306-0640
 Success Systems/Smokin' Rebates .. 1-800-653-3345
BMC-Business Machines Company (517) 485-1732


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 Saxon, Inc. **M** (248) 398-2000
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EGI Solutions (586) 978-9630
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PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

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All American Restaurant Equipment (313) 369-5331

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UBCR, LLC (248) 529-2605

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 DensityUSA (314) 798-8747
Clearview (855) 903-7233
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 Reyes Coca-Cola (Metro Detroit program)
..... Metro Detroit **M** (313) 868-2008
..... Belleville **M** (734) 397-2700
..... Flint **M** (810) 237-4000
..... Cleveland **O** (216) 690-2653
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..... Howell 1-800-878-8239
..... Pontiac (248) 334-3512
..... Cleveland (216) 252-7377
..... Twinsburg (330) 963-5300

TREE & ARBORIST SERVICES

Horton's Tree Service (734) 422-1634



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Swisher International (904) 607-7405

TOBACCO COMPANIES & PRODUCTS

Altria Client Services (513) 831-5510
PMI Global Services Inc. (810) 923-9732
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (336) 741-0727

UNIFORMS, LINENS & SUPPLIES

 Socks Galore Wholesale (248) 545-7625
 UniFirst Corporation (888) 256-5255 ext. 232

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Midwest Recycling (Clothing recycle boxes) (313) 304-9099

WINE & SPIRITS COMPANIES

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Cornerstone Wine Distributor (586) 839-2552
Endless West (313) 590-7491
Heaven Hill Brands (248) 885-5664
Luxco (313) 333-4637
Proximo Spirits (810) 278-0599
Tito's Handmade Vodka (248) 885-3424

WINE & SPIRITS DISTRIBUTORS

Great Lakes Wine & Spirits 1-888-860-3805
RNDC of Michigan 1-888-697-6424

FOOD RESCUE / FOOD BANKS

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Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank (616) 784-3250
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Benton Harbor (269) 926-2646
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Cadillac (231) 779-0056
Food Bank of Eastern Michigan (810) 239-4441
Food Bank of South Central Michigan .. (269) 964-3663
Food Gatherers (734) 761-2796
Forgotten Harvest (248) 967-1500
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Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley (330) 792-5522
Shared Harvest Foodbank (513) 874-0114
The Foodbank, Inc. (937) 461-0265
Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank ... (419) 242-5000
West Ohio Food Bank (419) 222-7946

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Eastern Illinois Foodbank (217) 328-3663
Greater Chicago Food Depository (773) 247-3663
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MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS FOUNDATION'S 14TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON

Every year, the Midwest Independent Retailers Foundation awards academic scholarships in the amount of \$1,500 each to extraordinary and deserving students in Michigan, Ohio and Illinois. Help the MIR Foundation invest in the leaders of tomorrow. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities available.

Detroit Athletic Club // Detroit, MI



JULY 20, 2022

MIRA'S 46TH ANNUAL MICHIGAN GOLF OPEN

A day on the course includes breakfast, lunch, 18 holes of golf and samples at every hole! Last year we sold out! Sponsorship opportunities are available.

Fox Hills Golf & Banquet Center // Plymouth, MI



AUGUST 9, 2022

MIRA'S 17TH ANNUAL OHIO GOLF OUTING

This outing is a social event where retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and service providers all come together to have a little competitive fun. A day on the course includes breakfast, dinner and 18 holes of golf!

Shale Creek Golf Club // Medina, OH



SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

MIRA'S 23RD ANNUAL HOLIDAY FOOD & BEVERAGE BUYING SHOW

As Michigan's largest liquor show, retailers and on- and off-premise licensees come from miles to see, sample and buy a wide variety of new products. Admission for MIRA members is free. Must be 21 years or older to attend this show.

Suburban Collection Showplace // Novi, MI

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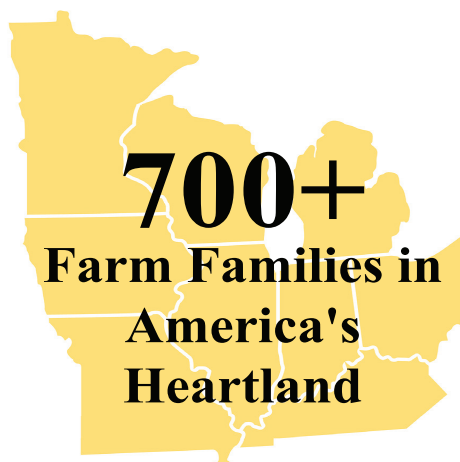


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