

SOYBEAN AS STATE PLANT

House Bill 4992 as introduced First Analysis (5-25-00)

Sponsor: Rep. Michael Green
**Committee: Agriculture and Resource
Management**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The state currently has eleven state designated symbols: a flower (the apple blossom), flag, bird (the robin), tree (the White Pine), stone (the Petosky Stone), gem (Chlorastrolite), fish (the Brook Trout), soil (the Kalkaska soil series), reptile (the Painted turtle), game mammal (the White-Tailed Deer), and wildflower (the Dwarf Lake Iris). In recent years, it has not been uncommon for school teachers to have their classes propose a new state symbol as part of learning about state government. Recently, a group of fourth-graders researched the soybean as part of learning how a legislative bill becomes law, and, at the request of the class, legislation has been introduced to make the soybean the state plant.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would create a new act to designate the soybean (*Glycine max*) as the official state plant.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill has no fiscal implications. (10-13-99)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The soybean is truly a remarkable plant and well-deserving of the designation as Michigan's state plant. Although soybeans were brought to the United States from Asia in the early 1800s, their economic importance was not recognized until nearly a century later. Soybeans have been grown in Michigan since the early 1900s, with the state's soybean acreage expanding rapidly after 1930. By 1960, Michigan soybean acreage reached 250,000 acres, doubled in the 1960s, and then again in the 1970s. Today, Michigan's soybean production has increased to more than five times that of the 1960s, and in 1997, Michigan produced a record yield of 75 million bushels of soybeans on 1.9 million acres of land in 46 counties, all

in the southern two-thirds of the Lower Peninsula. Three counties produce over 3 million bushels of soybeans each (Lenawee, Monroe, and Saginaw), while five other counties produce between 2 and 3 million bushels (Hillsdale, Sanilac, Shiawasee, Clinton, and Gratiot). Soybeans are an important agricultural crop in Michigan, second only to corn in value of production, with an average "farmgate" value, from 1993 to 1995, of \$350 million. Although nearly 95 percent of all soybean meal is fed as a source of protein to livestock, about 90 percent of U.S. soybean oil used domestically is used for human consumption (with about 3 percent used in nonfood products). Many human foods are enriched with soy protein. Whole soybeans are used to make texturized soy protein for meat enhancers, as well as isolated soy proteins for dairy-product alternatives and Asian foods, such as tofu, miso, tempeh, and soy sauces. In addition to healthful edible oil (which is used as a vegetable oil in salad and cooking oils, baking and frying fats, and margarines), other food products made from soybeans include soy flour, bakery ingredients, baby food, and cereals. In addition, however, many nonfood products are made from soybean oil, including adhesives, soaps, cosmetics, paints and varnishes, solvents, resins and plastics, pesticides, lubricants, and biodiesel fuel. Soy ink, in addition, is becoming the printing ink of choice. Many of the newer soy products are replacing petroleum products – often less expensively, with better quality, and from a renewable rather than nonrenewable resource – and are friendlier to the environment than petroleum products. In the new soy crayons, soybean oil replaces paraffin wax, and the resulting crayons are higher in quality than those traditionally made from paraffin.

Soybean production generates both dollars and jobs for Michigan, and as the soybean market domestically and internationally continues to grow, it can generate additional dollars and jobs for the state. In addition, if soybeans that are produced in the state were processed in-state even more money and jobs would be generated. Currently, Michigan has only one, solvent-type soybean processing plant constructed near Zeeland in 1996,

which nevertheless can process 7 million bushels – or nearly 10 percent of Michigan’s annual crop – per year and furnish about 30 percent of the state’s annual 500,000 ton high-protein livestock feed requirements. Growth of the soybean industry is expected to contribute to the viability of the animal industry, which currently is being revitalized by a statewide initiative called “Revitalization of Animal Agriculture in Michigan.” The initiative aims to increase animal production by one-third over the next 10 years, which would increase the demand for soy meal livestock feed by 167,000 tons. This increased demand alone would support another soybean processing plant the size of the one existing plant in Zeeland, and would contribute an estimated additional \$65 million to the state’s economy. Moreover, it is estimated that, even at the current level of soybean production, processing all Michigan-grown soybeans within the state would add another \$500 to the state’s economy.

Because soybeans are such an economically important crop in Michigan, with the potential for becoming even more important economically as the demand for soybean products grows, it deserves to be designated the state plant.

Against:

While it is a worthwhile civics exercise for schoolchildren to go through the process of requesting legislation designating a state symbol, nevertheless many people believe that there are more than enough – if not too many – state symbols already and that no more are needed. While, in addition, the soybean may be more remarkable than many other agricultural plants, the fact remains that it is not native to Michigan, having been imported from Asia. Nor, apparently, is it the economically most important agricultural crop in Michigan, with that honor apparently going to corn. If economic status is to be the deciding factor, then by all rights corn – which at least is native to the New World – and not the soybean should become the “state plant.” But even beyond this, as the analysis of House Bill 4943 (which would make the “cherry burger” the official “state burger”) points out, agricultural marketing and promotion is the job of the Department of Agriculture, and using the mechanism of designation as an official state symbol may well be neither the most effective way of promoting agricultural products nor necessarily best for the state in terms of state symbolism.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee supports the bill. (5-25-00)

Analyst: S. Ekstrom

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.