

MI Veterans in Agriculture: Programs and Policies to Support Our Heroes



**Michigan Food &
Farming Systems - MIFFS**
Supporting the Many Faces of Farming

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Background

- US Army veteran
 - 14E Patriot Missile Fire Controller
- BS in Agriculture and Plant Science
 - Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
- PhD in Entomology
 - Michigan State University
- Bee Wise Farms LLC
 - Largest local honey bee producer in the UP
- Consulting and programming
 - Bay Mills Community College
- Michigan Food and Farming Systems
 - Veterans programming (Heroes to Hives), outreach, advocacy and policy





Michigan Food & Farming Systems - MIFFS
Supporting the Many Faces of Farming

Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS)

- Est. 1998
- Supporting underserved communities in MI agriculture
 - Veterans
 - Communities of color
 - Women
 - Spanish speaking producers
- Administers MI Group GAP Network
- Member of the MI Food Safety Workgroup
- Technical assistance to USDA customers
- Advocacy and Policy
- MI Family Farms Conference since 2004





Michigan Food & Farming Systems - MIFFS
Supporting the Many Faces of Farming

Michigan's Farmer Veterans

- 7.8% of MI producers are veterans despite being 5.8% of MI population
- 13% of MI farms operated by veterans
- 55% under 50 acres
- Homesteading is very popular
- Diversified operations
 - Specialty crops
 - Row crops
 - Livestock
 - Bees



Vets in Ag Network

- Est. 2014
- Supported over 4,000 vets in MI:
 - Technical assistance
 - Policy recommendations
 - Educational programming



Technical Assistance

Supporting veterans with USDA

- One on one USDA navigation
- Advocacy in USDA offices
- Guides to support knowledge of how to work with USDA programming
- Events to connect with service providers
 - USDA
 - MAEAP



Technical Assistance

Connection

- Peer-to-peer support
- Farm planning
- Connect to resources
- Service provider connection
- Connection to other veterans
- Community of support



Advocacy and Policy

Advocacy

- Visibility
 - Developing partnerships in the industry
 - Domestic workforce development
 - Connecting with veterans in communities
- Developing community priorities
 - Focus groups
 - Working with lawmakers
 - National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
 - National Young Farmers Coalition
 - Farmer Veteran Coalition



Advocacy and Policy

Policy - Federal

- Testimony provided for 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills to US Senate Ag Committee
- Author policy papers focused on supporting veterans
 - U.S. Farm Bill Policies to Support America's Heroes
 - Are Extension Agriculture Programs Hitting Their Target with Military Veterans?
 - Do Payday Lending Bans Protect or Constrain Regional Economies? Evidence from the Military Lending Act's Final Rule



Advocacy and Policy

Policy - State

- Testimony provided to House Ag Committee (March 2016)
- Policy recommendations
 - You can GROW in MI! campaign
 - Incentivize farmer veteran relocation and farm operation
 - Expanding State property tax exemption
 - Continue supporting MAEAP



Programming

Heroes to Hives

- Est. 2015
- 9-month science-based beginning beekeeping education course
- Nation's largest ag training program
- Free to service members and their dependents
- 11,153 trained
- 4,130 in the 2024 cohort
- Participants from all US States, territories, and active duty from Asia, Europe, and Middle East



Heroes to Hives

Education Program

- Main Program (Online)
 - Monthly educational modules over 9 months
 - Self-paced with all materials pre-recorded
- Workshops (On-ground)
 - Optional part of the course
 - Seasonal offerings
 - In select states



Heroes to Hives

Main Program (March – Nov.)

- 43 lectures
- 37 instructional videos
- Support resources
 - Business Development (SBA – VetBiz)
 - Marketing
 - Commercial beekeeping
 - Therapeutic practices
- Comprehensive Exam

Survival is directly linked to varroa

Why is Varroa priority #1

- Global pest
- 99.99% of colonies in the US have Varroa
- Vector 20+ viruses
- **Feeds on fat body*



Lectures are 30 – 120 mins



Instructional videos are 5 – 20 mins



Heroes to Hives

Certificate of Completion

- Recognized by USDA as 1 year of experience in agriculture
- Heroes to Hives credits transfer to Great Plains Master Beekeeping Program
- Meets requirements for Apprentices level



CERTIFICATE
OF COMPLETION
IS PRESENTED TO:

For successful completion of the
Heroes to Hives Beekeeping Education Course



Dr. Adam J. Ingrao
CO-FOUNDER AND NATIONAL DIRECTOR



Heroes to Hives

Workshops (On-ground)

- IN, MI, MO, MN, NE, OK, PA, MD, NC
 - Hands on training in:
 - Hive handling
 - Pest and pathogen management
 - Accessibility
- Heroes to Hives Conference
 - June 27 & 28, 2024
 - UMN Bee and Pollinator Discovery Center – Chanhasseen, MN



Heroes to Hives

Research and outreach

- VA – Partners since 2019
 - Conducting research to support beekeeping as evidence-based therapy for mental health
 - Recreational Therapy program based at VA in Manchester, NH
 - Publish research in peer reviewed journal – Annual in Therapeutic Recreation
 - Using Beekeeping as a Recreational Modality for Improving Veteran Health



University of
New Hampshire
Recreation Management & Policy



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Heroes to Hives

North Central Region SARE Professional Development Program

- FY2024 award – 36 months
- Develop training in transpersonal practices for VA recreational therapy staff and beekeeping education professionals
- SOPs, train the trainer, support materials, evaluation standards
- National launch of beekeeping therapy at VA facilities across the US



University of
New Hampshire
Recreation Management & Policy



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Heroes to Hives

USDA-NIFA Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for
Military Veterans

- FY2022 award – 36 months
- Expand the Heroes to Hives online and on-ground programming
- Heroes to Hives conference
- Publications on accessibility in beekeeping
 - Bee Culture Magazine
- USDA Guides for beekeepers



Heroes to Hives

Testimonials

- Connects us with nature
- Allows us to nurture instead of destroy
- Brings us back together
- Offers stability and support
- Allows us to supplement income
- Engages our families
- Helps my mental health



Heroes to Hives

Success stories

- Nick Kaminski
- Marine Corps
- MI Veteran Entrepreneurship Lab GVSU
- Grand Prize 2019
- Hickory Tree Farm Apiaries
- Kent City



Heroes to Hives

Success stories

- Gary Brown
- Army
 - Gary's Bees
 - Vermontville
- Master Beekeeper
- Heroes to Hives instructor
- VFW-MI Liaison



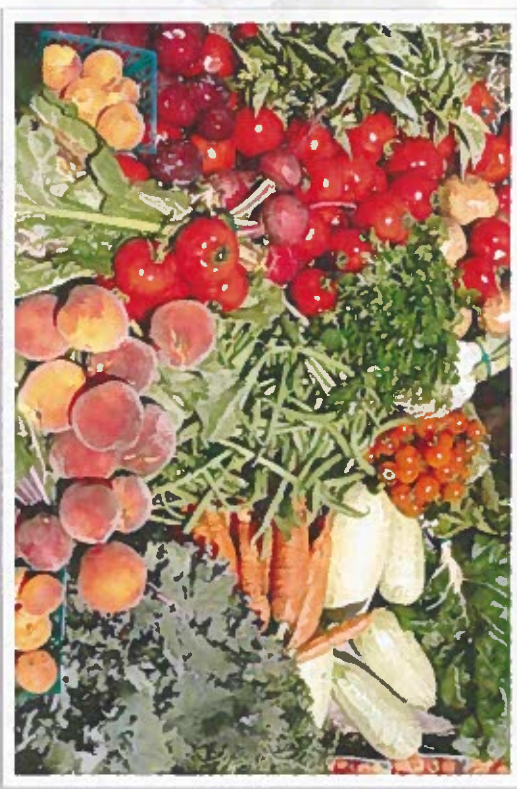


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MI has a unique opportunity

- Recruit and retain veterans in MI through opportunities in agriculture
“You can GROW in MI”
- Address the aging farmer population
- Secure skilled talent for MI’s agriculture industry
- Address MI veteran’s personal and financial health and wellness
- Support MI food security
- Ensure MI veterans and our ag industry thrives!





Thank you!

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Heroes to Hives

Michigan Food and Farming
Systems