The board of directors of the Michigan Wheat Program (MWP), Michigan’s newest checkoff program has pledged their support of the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance program (MAEAP). The MWP board of directors knows the importance of looking out for the environment.

MWP Board members, Dean Kantola from Ravenna and Carl Sparks from Cassopolis, are both MAEAP verified. Both Kantola and Sparks were appointed to the MWP with Governor Snyder’s inaugural appointments to the board a year ago. Kantola represents District one, which is comprised of the counties of: Mason, Oceana, Newaygo, Mecosta, Gratiot, Montcalm, Muskegon, Ottawa, Kent and Ionia. Sparks represents district two comprised of Allegan, Barry, Jackson, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, Van Buren, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, Branch, and Hillsdale counties.

Kantola, a 34-year farming veteran, is owner of Kantola Farms. He farms more than 700 acres, including 100 acres of wheat. He is a third generation farmer and a partner in Kantola Farms Trucking.

“I feel MAEAP verification was well worth the time we spent getting certified. I think it is important to show our neighbors that we care about the environment and are doing our best to protect it,” said Kantola. “I think MAEAP also helped us to streamline our records and made it easier to make sound management decisions.”

Sparks, who has been farming 35 years, is the manager of Sparks Cedarlee Farm LLC. He farms 1,400 acres which include wheat, corn, soybeans, hay and pasture. He also has 230 head of dairy cattle and a hog finishing operation with a capacity of 2,400. He is the chairman of the Cass County Farm Bureau County Issues Committee. Sparks earned a bachelor’s degree in crops and soil science from Michigan State University.

When asked what he would tell people about the program, Sparks said, “This is an important program to be involved with and to complete to show the public that we are serious about protecting our environment.”

The MAEAP program is not something that is done over night, it takes a commitment and time to see it through. Sparks added, “It is worth the time to work on MAEAP, but it’s hard to say how much time it takes to do the programs because everything that is done is probably something that needed to be done anyway; MAEAP provides the framework to develop the plan and the timeline to go with it.”

MAEAP allows farmers to work proactively on their farms to minimize environmental risks or hazards. By working in partnership with reviewers, farmers are able to identify focus areas on their farms and develop a plan to address those in the future, while keeping up with the details of the regulations and maintaining the high standards of the program. The coordination of regulatory agencies through MAEAP, also enables farmers to work with one person to ensure they are addressing all environmental issues on their farms at one time.

The MWP will continue their support of MAEAP and will be supporting the work to verify additional farms. For more information on the Michigan Wheat Program, visit the newly launched website at www.miwheat.org.