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STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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**RE: HB5532, eliminates requirement to be certified to sell wild-picked Morel Mushrooms to food establishments.**

**MDARD recommends that HB5532 not be supported.**

This bill would exempt morel mushrooms from the current requirement for an expert to pick and identify wild mushrooms that will be used by licensed food establishments. Once exempted, anyone, including minors, could collect and sell morels commercially. Morels have common poisonous look-alikes and Michigan often leads the country in mushroom poisonings annually.

Exemption would be a major step backward and introduce unnecessary public health risk. Michigan already has an established, affordable and well-functioning program and the bill seems to address a problem that doesn't exist.

**Public Health Risk**

Michigan and National Poison Control Centers regularly get mushroom poisoning calls each year, most around people picking morel look-a-likes and poisoning themselves or others, and many due to the family "mushroom expert" picking false morels. Michigan Poison Control Center information indicates an ongoing annual problem with mushroom poisonings.

**Nationally**

2014: 6,117 exposures, 1,669 medically treated, 3 deaths.

**Michigan**

2014 (June 1 –September 26): 54 mushroom poisoning cases in Michigan reported by poison control.

2013: 56 mushroom poisoning cases in Michigan reported by poison control. 220 mushroom poisoning cases reported in a newspaper article.

2011: 11 people hospitalized-newspaper articles warning residents.

**Food Safety Requirement:**

The FDA model Food Code is adopted by all states across the country, and contains a requirement that wild mushrooms be picked and identified by a recognized expert if they are going to be offered by a licensed food establishment to the public.

The requirement is basic common sense public health. As we work to make good decisions about what are the smart and necessary public health requirements in Michigan, we consider this one of the most basic. Michigan residents expect they can order and eat their food without worry, confident that basic protections are in place. Mushrooms are a well-known source for poisoning if the wrong kind are consumed. Safe mushrooms have a lot of poisonous look-alikes, including morels. Also, mushrooms can be best identified as they are picked in the wild. Once they are picked, dried, etc. they become much harder to identify, just the same as it's hard to identify the species of fish on your plate in a restaurant.

**Certification Course:**

Currently there are 205 certified individuals, with classes scheduled each year.

The course was developed in response to the sharp increase in the demand for wild mushrooms by food establishments, wholesalers and processors. New people are continually getting involved in picking and selling mushrooms and Michigan needs a way to assure that they have had basic training. The course certifies individuals in more than 20 different mushroom species, more than any other program nationally. Several courses annually are offered throughout the state by a non-profit group of expert mycologists (<http://www.midwestmycology.org>).

The course not only provides certified individuals with the needed skills, it also provides them with reference material and contacts for questions going forward. Food establishment managers currently are not required to have any formal training in mushroom identification.

### **Industry Value**

This program also helps reduce the industry's liability by helping to assure an approved source. There are 2 scenarios that we rely on our certified mushroom expert program to assure food safety with:

1. Retail to Restaurant or grocery store (Food Code)
2. Wholesale to licensed distributor or processor (CFR 110 – requires no adulterated food)

So, the wholesale aspect is also an important consideration beyond the retail sales to restaurants and groceries.

Nationally, Michigan's program is quickly being considered the best in country. Wild mushroom safety is an emerging national food safety issue. This program is a strong collaboration between MDARD, Midwest American Mycological Information (MAMI) and Michigan Farm Market Association (MFMA), including MSU Mycologists.