

Michigan Association of Timbermen Position Paper

Child Labor Law Modification

The Michigan Association of Timbermen (MAT) is seeking your support in modifying existing law to include forestry within the Agricultural exemption to hazardous employment for minors 16 – 18 years of age. The logging and sawmill profession is aging and the recruitment of young loggers and sawmill workers is becoming more difficult as they are not allowed to work in the logging profession legally until they reach the age of eighteen.

The exclusion of family members and minors from working in the logging and sawmill profession is hindering the future of our industry. MAT is not suggesting that we put our young adults in any more danger than young adults operating farm machinery or otherwise working in farming. The young farm worker and his father or employer is not violating the law. The logging and sawmill profession is just as technologically advanced as the farming industry. Our machinery is just as safe yet the logging industry is considered hazardous by law while farming is not. Unfortunately, if a logger took his child with him on the job to teach him the family trade, they would be breaking the law as it is currently understood. We believe that our industry should receive the same exemption as farming to help further the future of our forest industry.

Years ago, the vocational education program in Michigan's high schools was very active and covered forestry. Unfortunately programs like Future Farmers of America (FFA) are not as active as they once were. This is not only a problem for the farming industry but the logging industry as well.

MAT would like to see an exemption for family members. Currently, a family member of a farming operation is able to operate any farm machinery at ages younger than 16. We would like to receive this same benefit. Families today are much smaller; thus the pool is limited if we only consider immediate family members and must wait until they reach the age of 18. When these young adults are old enough to legally work in the forestry profession they have often developed other interests that they could be active in. Thus we are losing potential workers and business owners therefore jeopardizing our industry's future. We would define a family member to include sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and step-children.

The forestry profession is not a traditional occupation. The days are long and the work can be very demanding, much like farming. Yet our profession is not afforded the latitude to allow young adults to work in our industry. Safety is our number one concern and we are not advocating that our youth be exposed to the most dangerous aspects of our profession. However, we are advocating that our youth be allowed to work in areas that minimize their risk of injury. Skidding or forwarding harvested trees and logs does not put an individual in harm's way; the machine operator is seldom out of his/her machine. This would be comparable to hauling a grain wagon with a tractor, which many young adults do every harvest season. Our harvesting machinery is very similar in technology as corn or soybean combines; again the operator is not put in harm's way.

We ask that you support our efforts in changing the child labor laws to at least allow our family members to work in this noble profession before they reach the age of 18. This will allow our family business to carry on their rich tradition of logging and milling of Michigan's great natural resources. We thank you for your support in helping us make this change.

Submitted by

Michigan Association of Timbermen
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