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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Starke County Economic Development Foundation**

**Testifies on Behalf of Mint Farmers**

The Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) supported mint farmers in Starke County and surrounding counties by testifying on behalf of HB 1451 in front of the Indiana House Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. This bill would define mint farming as being an agricultural activity and would thus free mint farmers from potentially having to acquire air or discharge permits from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) and being regulated by such agency.

Speaking for the Foundation, Executive Director Charles W. Weaver pointed out to the Committee that mint farming has taken place in Starke County since at least since 1902 and that Indiana, while once the American leader in mint production, is still either the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> largest producer today in the United States, with a total value of such crop in the vicinity of \$20 million annually. Weaver also reported that for the most part, there are very few mint farmers left and those that are still engaged in this activity are for the most part family farmers who are now 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmers, and not large corporations. He suggested strongly that the State should continue to support these farmers and taking away the requirement of having to acquire burdensome permits and regulation could well result with such family farmers being able to continue for more generations into the future. Weaver testified that "the fear of IDEM and/or EPA entrance into this industry led many of this small group of farmers to seriously question whether they should plant a mint crop or not this past year and in the future. Growing the crop is not the issue, but until some solution presents itself on the permit issue,

none of these mint farmers knows if they will be able to extract the oil from the crop, and it is the oil that is the most valuable commodity in the crop.”

Following the receipt of testimony by SCEDF, mint farmers, and IDEM, the House Committee deleted all of the provisions of the bill and instead inserted language that would not allow IDEM to impose any permit requirements for mint distillation operations until a study has been completed by the Environmental Quality Service Council looking at the actual and potential air emissions created by the distillation of mint and whether this process should be considered as a farming operation under current Indiana rules and regulations. The Council would also be asked to report to IDEM on the feasibility of establishing permit requirements for mint distillation operations. The Bill is now eligible to be considered on second reading in the full House.

SCEDF is a not-for-profit Local Economic Development Organization (LEDO) providing economic development opportunities on behalf of Starke County, Indiana, the City of Knox, and the Towns of North Judson, and Hamlet through the development of industrial parks, rail spurs, greenfield sites, shovel-ready sites, infrastructure, and workforce development. For more information regarding SCEDF, visit [www.scedf.biz](http://www.scedf.biz).

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