



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Wisconsin Farmers Union members set 2017 policy priorities**

WISCONSIN DELLS – Nearly 300 family farmers and rural advocates attended the 86th annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Jan. 27-29 in Wisconsin Dells, where delegates adopted resolutions reflecting the farm organization's views on key issues.

“Wisconsin Farmers Union believes that rural America works best when we work together,” said WFU President Darin Von Ruden, a dairy farmer from Westby. “Many of our policies this year look at how we as family farmers can stand up for our values of family, cooperation, community and civic engagement.”

The following were among the Special Orders of Business selected for 2017:

**DAIRY POLICY REFORM:** Wisconsin Farmers Union’s Dairy Producer Survey, conducted this past fall, indicated that dairy farmers in Wisconsin were losing nearly a dollar per hundredweight in 2016. Given that milk price volatility has increased dramatically since the mid-1980s, due to a combination of diminishing government price support levels and loosened regulations on speculation in commodity markets, among other factors, WFU members resolved that Congress overhaul or eliminate the Margin Protection Program and replace it with a policy that makes price stability the top priority for dairy policy.

**CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM:** In the wake of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision that opened the floodgates to unlimited campaign spending, WFU calls upon the State Legislature to pass an advisory referendum to be placed on the ballot allowing voters to reaffirm their view that corporations are not people, and money is not speech.

**NONPARTISAN REDISTRICTING:** In light of the recent federal court ruling striking down Wisconsin’s legislative district boundaries as unconstitutional, WFU supports the creation of a nonpartisan entity to perform all future legislative redistricting for city, county, state and federal offices in the state of Wisconsin in order to end gerrymandering, restore competition to electoral races, and ensure that voters are electing their representatives, rather than the other way around.

**A FAIR AND FISCALLY SOUND FEDERAL TAX POLICY:** WFU members expressed concern over President Trump’s tax plan, which would cost an estimated \$9.5 trillion over the next decade. WFU calls for significant cuts to military spending to offset the lost tax revenue or a reevaluation of the wisdom of deep income tax cuts. WFU opposes cutting taxes if it will result in cuts to bedrock government programs like Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid, or if it will contribute to deepening of the already-unsustainable federal deficit.

**HIGH CAPACITY WELLS:** WFU supports the consideration of cumulative impacts in high capacity well permit applications. WFU believes that no new permit should be needed for the replacement or repair of a high capacity well and that a high capacity well permit should transfer with the sale of the land, provided that the DNR conducts a periodic review of all high capacity well permits and withdrawals.

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**USDA GUIDANCE ON COVER CROPS AND CROP INSURANCE:** Cover crops have become an accepted and highly-regarded agronomic practice, which farmers have increasingly been using to improve water quality, crop productivity and nutrient efficiency. WFU called upon the Risk Management Agency to eliminate the confusing Cover Crops Termination Guidelines and replace them with the Good Farming Practice (GFP) determination process, so that farmers will not be deterred from using cover crops.

**SUPPORT FOR GROUNDWATER TESTING AND MAPPING:** In light of growing awareness of groundwater contamination around the state, the lack of complete data on groundwater quality and mapping, and given the universal need for clean, safe drinking water, WFU encourages the state legislature to provide additional resources for counties to plan and implement groundwater testing and mapping that will lead to better understanding, protection, and utilization of our groundwater and drinking water supplies.

*Among other language adopted by delegates was:*

- Support for tying nutritional and farm assistance in Congressional formulation of farm bills
- A call to the Wisconsin State Legislature to update Wisconsin's anti-corporate farming statute to prohibit non-family corporations from owning farmland or farming operations
- Support for state policies that limit vertical integration within agricultural industries in order to protect family farms from unfair competition and monopolistic (or non-competitive) business practices. The delegation also called for the Department of Justice to follow through on antitrust investigations already commenced and to prosecute violators of antitrust laws
- Support for community solar generation and encouragement to communities to offer such programs
- Support for legislation to end abuse of checkoff programs by prohibiting organizations receiving checkoff dollars from engaging in lobbying activities
- Encouragement to producers to use Integrated Pest Management Practices and to create more pollinator habitats through state and federally funded programs to help deter continued losses of pollinators
- Support for the following options for increasing road funding: general fund/income tax, gas tax, vehicle registration fees based on gross vehicle weight, local sales taxes, new vehicle tax, and local wheel taxes. WFU reaffirms its support for giving local governments the authority to design policies that address the unique transportation challenges in their communities.
- Support for the removal of hemp from the Controlled Substances Act, for the import of industrial hemp seeds from outside the United States and for an end to restrictions surrounding transportation of industrial hemp seeds and live plants across state boundaries
- Opposition to any effort to deny consumers access to information that is meant to provide transparency of any and all products and practices along the supply chain, in response to the demand of consumers

“WFU will continue to expand our efforts, develop and defend solid policy alternatives, and strengthen our voice for family farmers and rural Wisconsin,” Von Ruden said.

Wisconsin Farmers Union members will take the policy they drafted at the convention to the Capitol Feb. 28 for Farm and Rural Lobby Day, where they will visit with policymakers about the issues impacting family farms and rural communities. The updated WFU policy will be online soon at [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com).

(See third page for photo cutlines)

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Cutlines:

**Kriss Marion Policy**

Blanchardville farmer Kriss Marion spoke up during the policy discussion at the 86<sup>th</sup> annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Jan. 27-29 in Wisconsin Dells. During the convention, Marion, who is president of the South Central Farmers Union chapter, covering Green, Rock and Lafayette counties, was also awarded the Silver Star – National Farmers Union’s highest membership award – for her membership recruitment efforts.

**Michael Slattery Policy**

Maribel grain farmer Michael Slattery clarified a point during the policy discussion at the 86<sup>th</sup> annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Jan. 27-29 in Wisconsin Dells.

**Oren Jakobson Policy**

Stevens Point area farmer Oren Jakobson voiced his opinion during the policy discussion at the 86<sup>th</sup> annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Jan. 27-29 in Wisconsin Dells.

**Policy Discussion**

Several hundred farmers gathered in Wisconsin Dells for the 86<sup>th</sup> annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Jan. 27-29. Over 150 attendees served as voting delegates in the policy discussion, which set a direction for WFU on a variety of topics including dairy policy reform, conservation efforts, crop insurance, nonpartisan redistricting and more.

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