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Wisconsin Farmers Union members set 2018 policy priorities

WISCONSIN DELLS – At the 87th annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Feb. 2-4 in Wisconsin Dells, delegates from across the state adopted resolutions reflecting the farm organization's views on key issues.

"The policy discussion at the annual State Convention is the democratic process in its purest form," said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. "Farmers from a variety of backgrounds come together to respectfully discuss and come to a consensus on the issues that are being faced by family farmers in Wisconsin."

WFU members will take the policy they drafted at the convention to Madison on Feb. 21 for the Farm and Rural Lobby Day, where they will visit with policymakers about the issues impacting family farms and rural communities. The views will also be presented by Wisconsin delegates to the National Farmers Union Convention in Kansas City in March.

The following were among the Special Orders of Business that reflect WFU's policy priorities for the coming year: **DAIRY POLICY REFORM:** WFU's Dairy Producer Survey, conducted in 2016, indicated that dairy farmers in Wisconsin were losing nearly a dollar per hundredweight. 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.

LOCAL CONTROL FOR LIVESTOCK SITING: Wisconsin Farmers Union supports lifting the preemption of local control of siting of large livestock operations.

COOPERATIVE LAW: In response to the recent passage of legislation regarding cooperative law, WFU members resolved to support educational efforts for cooperatives to resist implementing bylaw and operation changes that undermine the Cooperative Principles. Legislation passed in 2017 allows cooperative holding companies to change their bylaws and put the time-honored tradition of one member, one vote at risk. The legislation could also allow 20 percent of cooperative board seats to be given to non-members and allow cooperatives to deny members the right to view financial and other records of the coop.

PREVENTION OF AGRICULTURAL WORKER SUICIDE: In light of the recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report identifying agricultural workers as having the highest suicide rate of any reported group, WFU supports the full funding of the Farm and Ranch Stress Relief Network and similar programs to address training for behavioral specialists for farmers and the establishment of suicide prevention hotlines for farmers.

NONPARTISAN REDISTRICTING: In order to end gerrymandering, restore competition to electoral races, and ensure that voters are electing their representatives, rather than the other way around, 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.



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 Cover Crops Termination Guidelines and replace them with the Good Farming Practice (GFP) determination process.

SUPPORT FOR GROUNDWATER TESTING AND MAPPING: WFU respectfully encourages, on behalf of all counties, that the state legislature make available 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.

NET NEUTRALITY: WFU strongly encourages the United States Congress to pass a Resolution of Disapproval under the Congressional Review Act (CRA), a vehicle to overturn the FCC's net neutrality repeal with a simple majority vote in both the Senate and House.

One highlight included a conversation about immigration which offered a farm and rural perspective on the national debate. Some members lamented that the use of the labor of undocumented workers in the ag sector creates unfair competition for farms that seek to follow labor laws and that it fuels the expansion of very large livestock operations that would likely cease to exist without the availability of the labor of immigrant workers. Other members pointed to the necessity of hiring foreign workers on their own farms in light of a shortage of available farm labor from U.S.-born workers. Despite the diversity of views expressed, a common thread was an emphasis on the shared humanity of all workers. Delegates resoundingly approved a resolution to support a path to citizenship for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients, who arrived in the United States as children.

Other highlights included:

- A resolution regarding termination of service, urging dairy processors to give farms 60 days notice before any changes to premium structure or required fees and 90 days notice before termination of service. In absence of a catastrophic or health-related event, WFU also believes farmers should be required to give 30 days notice of discontinuing their relationship with their processor, and that farms producing over 2 million pounds per year should be required to give 30 days notice of any increase in annual milk production over 30 percent.
- A resolution supporting the Community Paramedic and EMT approach as an option for municipal governments to pursue in order to better serve their rural residents in hard-to-reach areas.
- A resolution supporting removal of burdensome regulations, such as a three-year feasibility study, on municipalities desiring to provide internet service.
- A resolution passed calling for on farm rabbit processing licenses to be issued so that rabbit farmers can sell rabbit meat processed on farm to anyone, including retail and restaurants.
- A resolution supporting reinstating "prove it first" legislation that requires mining companies to provide specific proof that a sulfide mine can run for 10 years and be closed for 10 years without polluting groundwater and surface waters with acid drainage.
- A resolution calling for the reinstatement of the office of Public Intervenor, an independent state agency charged with representing the interests of citizens in state regulatory and administrative proceedings. The office of Public Intervenor was eliminated in 1995.

"We have important work to do in the year ahead to help turn around the farm economy," Von Ruden said. "WFU will continue to expand our efforts, develop solid policy alternatives, and strengthen our voice for family farmers and rural Wisconsin."



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