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## **Farmers Union lifts up family farmers' voices during fly-in**

Wisconsin Farmers Union members joined farmers and ranchers from throughout the United States in elevating rural issues Sept. 20-23 during the National Farmers Union Fly-In.

"The same pandemic that prevented us from holding an in-person fly-in has also heightened the importance of family farm advocacy over the past year," said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. "We've seen now more than ever the value of policy that supports resilient local food systems, family farms, conservation programs, and fair, competitive markets."

Over the several days of the fly-in, NFU hosted sessions with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, U.S. Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, Senator Jon Tester, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison and other key leaders who shared the work that is being done around competition and resiliency in the food system. Members also met with Congressional representatives, sharing about challenges family farms face and potential solutions.

"This year's fly-in centered around competitive markets, rural and agricultural infrastructure, and addressing disasters and climate change," noted WFU Government Relations Director Nick Levendofsky. "Those topics resonated really well with our members because they are priorities we have lifted up on the state level as well."

Levendofsky added that the virtual aspect made it easier for members to take part in the fly-in this year. "The fact that they didn't have to leave their farm, their home, and their families for a few days to go to Washington, D.C. made a world of difference," he said. "We were still able to share those important stories and carry on the tradition of lifting up the voices of our grassroots membership."

Representing Wisconsin on the virtual fly-in were Rick Adamski, Seymour; Shawn Bartholomew, Elk Mound; Danielle Endvick, Holcombe; Ed Gorell, Eleva; Karl Hakanson, Wheeler; Jane Hansen, Prentice; Julie Keown-Bomar, Chippewa Falls; Vivienne Kerley-de la Cruz, Madison; Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Dells; Kriss Marion, Blanchardville; Alicia Razvi, Middleton; Jen Schmitz, Cashton; John Skoug, Osseo; Kirsten Slaughter, Madison; Anne Steinberg, Milwaukee; Darin Von Ruden, Westby; and Adam Warthesen, Westby.

### **Addressing Rural Realities**

Alicia Razvi, a Dane County Farmers Union member and WFU Regional Membership Coordinator, shared the stark difference in broadband access she observed in a move from rural central Wisconsin to the Madison area. "They say no broadband, no business," Razvi said. "I would extend that to education, telehealth, and so much more. Trying to have five of us on the internet during the pandemic when my husband and I were trying to work and the kids were trying to access virtual school -- it just wasn't possible. Adversely, I live in Middleton now and we can all be on devices all the time. There's a significant disparity compared to the realities of broadband for those in underserved areas of Wisconsin."

Razvi and other members stressed that funding for infrastructure – not only affordable, accessible broadband but also bridges, roads and rail – should be viewed as an investment in rural America.

NFU has noted that nearly a quarter of the population lacks access to broadband, and one in five miles of our highways and major roads are in poor condition.

“Farmers are wanting to be a part of the climate change solution,” stressed WFU District 8 Director Rick Adamski. “Market forces are really limiting opportunities ... but we want to help capture carbon in the soil, restore soil health, address water quality, and there are programs that are able to help us do that. Historically the USDA has only been able to accept one-quarter of all applications for working lands conservation programs. These programs need to be more fully funded or we need to come up with creative new opportunities for farmers to be a part of addressing climate change.”

NFU members advocated for disaster relief programs like the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program, alongside continued investment in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). They also called for support of the bipartisan Growing Climate Solutions Act and the Next Generation Fuels Act.

Members also raised concerns about a lack of market transparency and the growing consolidation in ag sectors. Four companies now control 85 percent of beef packing, 85 percent of corn seed production, 84 percent of the pesticide market, and 90 percent of global grain trading.

“During the pandemic, we saw scenarios where the price for meat in the store skyrocketed, even throughout periods where cattle markets were tanking,” said Danielle Endvick, a Chippewa County beef farmer and WFU Communications Director. “Consumers were paying significantly higher prices, but that money didn’t come back into farmers’ hands or to our rural communities.”

[NFU’s Farmer’s Share of the Food Dollar](#) shows that farmers and ranchers receive a mere 14 cents of every food dollar, according to USDA data.

Members called upon Congress to support access to a fair marketplace through support of the 50/14 bill, the Cattle Market Transparency Act, the Competition and Antitrust Law Enforcement Reform Act of 2021, and expedited renewal of Livestock Mandatory Reporting. They also called for a strengthened Packers and Stockyards Act that would make it easier to address unfair, discriminatory, or deceptive market practices.

### **Fairness for Farmers Campaign Launches**

A highlight of the fly-in was the launch of NFU’s [Fairness for Farmers](#) campaign, which calls for fair and competitive markets and reinvigorated antitrust enforcement.

Now is the time to build momentum for competitive markets and fairness across the agriculture industry, according to NFU President Rob Larew. The campaign comes on the heels of President Biden’s Executive Order on [‘Promoting Competition in the Marketplace’](#) – a commitment from his administration to restore fairness to the economy.

“Farmers Union started in 1902 because farmers were at the mercy of corporations and were seeking to restore a free and fair market,” Larew said. “Unfortunately, we find ourselves in the same place today. The Fairness for Farmers campaign endeavors to curtail consolidation in agriculture and bust the monopolies that hurt farmers and consumers.”

*Established in 1930, Wisconsin Farmers Union works to protect and enhance the economic interests and quality of life of family farmers and rural communities. WFU is a membership-based organization. Learn more and join today at [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com).*

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