

Wisconsin Farmers Union: President pledges to inform, educate co-op members about changes to statutes

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Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU), while disappointed in recent votes by the Assembly and Senate to pass the proposed cooperative statutes changes, pledges to inform and educate cooperative members on what this means for their co-ops in the future.

“The changes proposed in AB353 and SB281 create significant concerns for cooperative members. Turning over board seats to outside investors, losing the right to review certain records beyond five years, and, in the case of cooperative holding company Cooperative Resources International (CRI) and its constituent co-ops AgSource and Genex, basing voting power on patronage rather than ‘one member, one vote’ – these are just a few of the alterations to our cooperative statutes Farmers Union disagrees with,” said WFU president Darin Von Ruden. “Cooperative members need to be vigilant and mindful of these changes and what they can mean for their co-op in the future.”

One key change that goes into place immediately after Gov. Walker signs these bills pertains to member access to cooperative records. Under the changes, cooperative boards may deny records requests if the purpose is not specific to the member’s interest in the cooperative or is otherwise contrary to the interest of the cooperative. In regard to financial records only, the bill establishes a timeframe of

five years plus the current fiscal year for requesting financial records. The board can authorize more than the limited time set forth in the bill, and co-ops can keep records for longer periods of time.

“Changes like this affect all cooperative members, and we believe it is important they are informed and educated about the change,” said Von Ruden. “Education is a key part of the work we do at Farmers Union, and sharing that information will be a top priority as we move forward. As our county chapter meetings continue throughout the rest of 2017, we will share this information with our members, who will hopefully spread the word to their fellow cooperative member-owners.”

For more information about the Cooperative Statute Modernization Bills, go to www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com and read Farmers Union’s blog posts, news releases, and information sheet under the “Legislation” tab.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven organization that is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement.