

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Strengthening safety net for family farmers is critical in Farm Bill

Posted on Monday, Aug 7, 2017

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact:

Danielle Endvick

(715) 471-0398

dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

CHIPPEWA FALLS – U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue is in Wisconsin this week, kicking off a multi-state RV tour during which he will visit with farmers to hear their thoughts on the upcoming Farm Bill.

“This Farm Bill is critically important,” said Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden, a dairy farmer from Westby. “Here in Wisconsin, we’ve seen devastating dips in dairy and crop prices, and that is reflecting in declining farm numbers. The American farm economy is on the brink of a crisis – we need a drastic change in direction in the next Farm Bill. It may be time to focus less on how technology and exports are going to save the day and more on what can be done to address declining farm numbers, struggling rural communities, growing environmental concerns and the staggering anti-competitive consolidation in ag sectors.”

American farmers and ranchers have faced a 50 percent decline in net farm income since 2013. Net farm income is forecast to decline again in 2017, the fourth consecutive year. The 2017 debt-to-asset ratio is the highest the agriculture industry has seen in three decades.

Wisconsin lost nearly 400 dairy farms –more than one each day. The latest dairy

herds report by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection shows the state is down 283 dairy herds in the first half of 2017.

The current Farm Bill is set to expire in September 2018, and many farmers are hinging their hopes on changes within the next Farm Bill as their saving grace. Last month the House GOP announced a budget that calls for \$10 billion in spending cuts to agricultural programs through the next ten years.

In recent testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson noted that “NFU believes that the farm bill safety net should provide meaningful assistance in two fundamental circumstances: when disaster strikes and when prices are low and remain below the cost of production for extended periods of time.

These two scenarios have separate solutions, the first is crop insurance and the second is commodity programs.”

Johnson stressed the vital importance of crop insurance, an essential risk management tool for family farmers, which is under threat of budget cuts in Congress. He applauded changes contained in the 2014 Farm Bill pertaining to the policies such as the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), which have proven an important springboard for farmers, especially beginning farmers, into crop insurance.

Among Farmers Union priorities for the next Farm Bill are:

- Rework the dairy safety net, including a mechanism for curtailing oversupply
- Encourage investments in on-the- farm renewable energy projects like solar and wind power
- Expand broadband internet to rural areas
- Provide programs to assist beginning farmers and help retiring farmers transition
- Increase funding and incentives for conservation programs to protect soil and water
- Step up antitrust enforcement in the ag sector to ensure robust competition
- Retain the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as part of the Farm Bill

“The Farm Bill is probably the most important piece of legislation for not only our farmers but also for rural communities across America,” Von Ruden said.

“Unfortunately, there is no foreseeable end to these tough conditions. We have a challenging task ahead as we collectively begin to grapple with these problems.”

Johnson will travel to Wisconsin to visit with farmers and speak about NFU’s priorities for the Farm Bill later this month, when he will address the WFU members at their annual Summer Conference Aug. 17 at Kamp Kenwood in Chippewa Falls.