

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Members set 2019 policy priorities

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APPLETON – At the 88th annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Jan. 25-27 in Appleton, delegates from across the state adopted policy that will guide the family farm organization’s work in the coming year.

“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 the issues impacting their farms and rural Wisconsin.”

WFU members will travel to Madison on Feb. 27 for the Farm and Rural Lobby Day, where they will share the policy priorities with legislators. The stances will also be presented by Wisconsin delegates to the National Farmers Union Convention in Bellevue, Washington March 3-5.

The following were chosen as Special Orders of Business that reflect WFU’s top policy priorities for 2019:

DAIRY POLICY REFORM: WFU urges Congress to replace the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program with a policy that makes price stability the top priority. WFU proposes management to deter oversupply. WFU also urges dairy cooperatives to implement internal oversupply management systems that apply proportionally to all.

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.

REGULATION OF LARGE LIVESTOCK FACILITIES & CAFOS: WFU recognizes the authority of ATCP 51 to set statewide, minimum standards and procedures for CAFOs, but supports allowing local governments to pass more stringent standards to protect water and air quality and public health or safety without seeking DATCP or DNR approval.

CONCENTRATION IN THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY: WFU calls on both the state and federal governments to aggressively enforce antitrust laws, and to establish a constant dialog within agriculture about monopoly and antitrust concerns. WFU opposes the investment in arable lands in all countries by institutional investors). WFU urges DATCP to vigorously enforce the law limiting ownership by foreign entities to 640 acres of land in Wisconsin.

INDUSTRIAL HEMP: WFU supports educational initiatives in the area of production, processing, and marketing of industrial hemp. WFU also calls on DATCP to lower the fee of an individual field location/variety test from \$250 per field test to \$50 per field test, and to remove the requirement for a background check and any permitting or licensing application deadlines. Wisconsin Farmers Union also suggests the allowable THC content of "Industrial Hemp," as defined by state and federal law, to be raised from 0.3% to 1.0%. WFU also calls for measures aimed at creating a robust and diversified seed-sourcing and seed-saving program in Wisconsin and protecting against monopolization of hemp genetics, including adding industrial hemp to the list of crops that corporations are prohibited from cultivating under Wisconsin's anti-corporate farming law.

BADGERCARE AND BADGERCARE PUBLIC OPTION: WFU supports legislation to create a public option to buy into BadgerCare, available to any citizen of Wisconsin no matter their income. WFU further supports inclusion of the BadgerCare public option on the Healthcare.gov marketplace, thereby allowing Wisconsin citizens to apply federal premium subsidies to make health insurance more affordable. WFU urges the governor, state legislature and Wisconsin Department of Health Services to pursue a Medicaid strategy that prioritizes maintaining eligibility for the largest possible number of citizens, leverages all available federal dollars for Medicaid expansion, and recognizes that fluctuating annual income levels are characteristic of farming and other self-

employment.

EMINENT DOMAIN REFORM: WFU calls for a comprehensive revision of Wisconsin's eminent domain statutes in order to:

- Limit the definition of “blight” to properties that are abandoned, dangerous, or in disrepair.
- Limit the power of eminent domain to units of government that are accountable to voters.
- Ensure that there is a clear and demonstrated public purpose for any use of eminent domain.
- Permit landowners to have a representative of their choosing in condemnation proceedings.
- Ensure that offers to purchase in eminent domain proceedings reflect the full value of the property being acquired and adjacent property devaluation.
- Consider how taxpayers and the public at large should be compensated for the loss of wetlands, farmland, and green space when property is acquired via eminent domain.
- Investigate eminent domain statutes in other states, such as Minnesota's “Buy the Farm” law.

Recognizing it could take years for Wisconsin's eminent domain statutes to be revised, WFU calls on Wisconsin counties and towns to explore the option of passing Community Rights ordinances that would immediately prohibit the use of eminent domain not in keeping with these principles.

EXECUTING STABLE TRADE PRACTICES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE: Wisconsin Farmers Union prefers open market access, to the extent that it does not destabilize market supply management, where farmers can compete with other exporters of agricultural products, rather than relying on US government compensation subsidies. The USDA and the federal government should provide compensation payments to farmers in an amount that actually covers farmers' market losses and their lost income in commodity prices when the federal government causes farmers' lost revenue because of deficient policy. WFU advocates that the U.S. Administration, the U.S. Trade Representative, and the U.S. government use more conciliatory approaches in resolving trade disputes with traditional and major trade partners, rather than ineffective practices like tariffs and embargoes. WFU requests that the USDA increase its appropriations for expanding traditional

U.S. agricultural product export markets that have been harmed because of imprudent U.S. trade policy resulting in loss of market share and for developing new markets.

Other highlights included support for:

- Greater safeguards to end abuse of commodity checkoff programs and ensure that organizations engaging in lobbying activities do not receive or derive benefit from checkoff dollars.
- Amendments to the milk pricing formula so that farmers' pay price reflects a blend price of all cheeses, including specialty cheeses, rather than the CME price of cheddar. WFU further supports alternative product price formulas that provide a profitable pay price to dairy farmers.
- Approval of new high-voltage transmission lines only when demand for electricity is clearly demonstrated by a publicly transparent assessment process carried out by an independent public agency and not a private developer. Increased energy needs should first be addressed by development of non-transmission alternatives and local resources including energy efficiency, wind power, solar power, demand response, and energy storage.
- Asserting the rights of farmers to repair equipment and related technologies without violating warranty.
- Lifting the current 9pm limit for winery and cider-house hours, as well as granting tasting rooms the ability to sample and sell wines and ciders made by other producers.
- More robust efforts by Department of Natural Resources to control and contain chronic wasting disease and adequate remuneration to farmers if animals and livestock need to be destroyed.

“Given the weak state of our farm economy, strong agricultural policies that ensure a future for family farming are more important than ever,” Von Ruden said. “WFU will continue to work to strengthen our voice for family farmers and rural Wisconsin.”