

WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION

Special Orders of Business – 2021

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DAIRY POLICY REFORM

WHEREAS, U.S dairy farms are an important segment of our nation’s economy. As one of the world’s largest dairy-producing nations, the industry provides roughly \$140 billion in economic output, \$29 billion in household earnings, and more than 900,000 jobs; and

WHEREAS, despite dairy’s economic contribution to our nation, federal programs are failing producers who face difficult economic conditions. Between 2014 and 2020, over 11,000 U.S dairy farms went out of business as low milk prices failed to cover the average cost of production. Meanwhile, total cow numbers increased slightly and milk production remained relatively stable. The overproduction of milk and the inability for the market to stabilize following an economic downturn accelerated the loss of dairy farms throughout the U.S, particularly in dairy-heavy states like Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin Farmers Union recognizes efforts made by Congress to improve federal dairy programs, but the Dairy Margin Coverage program does not address the fundamental problem of oversupply. Federal dairy policy must provide *both* a safety net for family dairy farms in all regions and of all herd sizes, *and* a mechanism to manage milk supply to meet profitable demand; and

WHEREAS, a 2019 economic analysis of programs to improve dairy farm profitability showed that a system of managed growth in dairy production would have had a positive impact on the dairy economy. The results show increased milk prices, reduced price volatility, fewer dairy farm exits, and reduced government expenditures; and

WHEREAS, there is growing support among U.S dairy farmers, farm organizations, and members of congress for managing dairy production growth without issuing a strict quota, prohibiting expansion, or halting trade.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, WFU calls on Congress to establish a mandatory program for managed growth based on market demand and price stability. Such a program should increase farmer profitability by:

1. Elevating milk prices
2. Preventing overproduction
3. Reducing milk price volatility

Such a program should also:

1. Allow for beginning farmer entry
2. Reduce government expenditures
3. Respond to global market conditions
4. Be national and mandatory so that all dairy producers participate
5. Allow for planned growth when the market can accept additional milk
6. Be designed in such a way that any production base does not acquire value
7. Have meaningful farmer input in development, implementation, and governance

CONCENTRATION IN THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

WHEREAS, deregulation of industries has been a commonplace occurrence over the past four decades which has rolled back many of the protections to independent agricultural interests and farmers that were established to foster competition and a healthy marketplace; and

WHEREAS, enforcement of federal antitrust laws has diminished over the past few decades, with very few meaningful investigations into mergers and acquisitions of large scale agricultural producers, suppliers and processors; and

WHEREAS, a decline in the vitality of rural communities has coincided with this concentration in agricultural and retail food markets with family farms bearing the brunt of this injustice; and

WHEREAS, the movement towards fewer bigger suppliers of Ag inputs and markets for farm products has been accelerating in the past decade.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Wisconsin Farmers Union strongly demands that the Wisconsin Department of Justice (WI DOJ) and the United States Department of Justice (US DOJ), as well as other regulatory agencies, aggressively investigate this situation and initiate action to level the playing field for family farmers and return meaningful competition to the marketplace; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that WFU calls on the WI DOJ and US DOJ to follow through on the antitrust investigation and to aggressively prosecute violators of antitrust laws; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that WFU urges the federal government to increase its oversight of consolidation and vertical integration in the agriculture industry and to establish a constant dialog within agriculture about market control and antitrust concerns; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that WFU opposes the investment in arable lands in all countries by institutional investors (corporations, commercial and investment banks, pension funds, life insurance companies, endowments, high net-worth individuals, sovereign wealth funds, all of which apply to both domestic and foreign entities, amongst others). These lands should primarily be owned, managed, and farmed, if so desired, by domestic family farmers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that WFU urges DATCP to vigorously enforce the law limiting ownership by foreign entities to 640 acres of land in Wisconsin.

FAMILY FARMERS SHAPING CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

WHEREAS, food security, a healthy landscape, climate mitigation, and a prosperous rural America can only be attained through a strong family farm system of agriculture; and

WHEREAS, a bold proposal to transform our society is needed to address the effects of climate change. However, current bills before Congress such as the Green New Deal (H.R. 109) and the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (H.R. 763) appeal primarily to an urban voter base and do not recognize the essential contribution of rural America. The farming community recognizes that current bills include proposals that could either help or harm agriculture. However, we believe doing nothing will lead to far greater harm and that national climate change legislation has the potential to unite urban and rural communities under a common vision for a just and sustainable society; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin Farmers Union urges Congress to make passing legislation to address climate change a national priority. Further, we believe climate legislation must include all forms and interpretations of sustainable agriculture as a pillar. For example, regenerative agriculture protects and enhances natural resources and farming communities through healthy soils, farm biodiversity, and farmer economic stability and resilience. These ground-proven methods benefit farmers through healthy yields, higher profits, more control over the future of their operations and less dependence on agribusiness for inputs purchased in a highly consolidated marketplace. These practices also help mitigate the impact of climate change on rural America and food security; and

WHEREAS, farmers and rural communities are uniquely positioned to meet the goals set forth in any future climate change legislation. We have the available land base for alternative energy and the opportunity to transform farming practices to sequester excess carbon and improve the health of the environment. We need to have a seat at the table as the climate change legislation is being developed; and

WHEREAS, family farm agriculture must be protected under and included in any climate change legislation. For example, National Farmers Union Policy has no less than 30 individual positions that align with the core values of the Green New Deal.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, WFU supports:

1. Research, cost share, and other voluntary incentives to help family farmers adopt practices and infrastructure that mitigate climate change and sequester carbon without placing additional regulatory burdens on farmers
2. Efforts to ensure that regenerative agriculture policies increase market opportunities for family farmers.
3. USDA Climate Hubs coordinating climate information, agronomic and risk management support, and programs that enhance marketing options to allow family farmers to effectively utilize opportunities to enhance profits while mitigating climate change.
4. Energy efficiency, renewable energy production, and further development of the bioeconomy on family farms and in rural communities
5. Cooperation and collaboration among family farmers to build and expand market infrastructure that will allow consumers to choose agricultural products that create climate benefits.
6. New opportunities for family farmers to articulate their climate mitigation efforts with consumers through food processors and retailers
7. Protecting family farmland from carbon-intensive suburban sprawl development
8. Protecting competition in the markets that family farmers buy from and sell into, allowing for more prescriptive demands of excessively consolidated markets.

WFU urges Congress to appoint a Climate Change Rural Task Force to inform and articulate a Rural and Agricultural Plank in the emerging Climate Change legislative platform.

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MEAT PROCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE

WHEREAS, livestock farmers form an important part of our rural economies and are essential to meeting an increasing consumer demand for Wisconsin meat; and

WHEREAS, throughout Wisconsin rural communities lack infrastructure to support and encourage more of these farms to form and to grow in production, and specifically many meat processing facilities that serve local farms have closed in recent years; and

WHEREAS, existing meat processing infrastructure is under strain with slaughter of certain classes of livestock needing to be scheduled more than a year in advance; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin farms are in a position to grow in market share and economic importance, and farmers in many chapters identify lack of access to processors as a barrier to viability and serving demand; and

WHEREAS, this lack of access to meat processing services for small and mid-scale farms gives additional market advantage to corporate-owned, vertically integrated operations over family farms; and

WHEREAS, in 2020 the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation created an Office of Rural Prosperity and is in a position to help support economic development that enhances agriculture and rural communities in Wisconsin; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that in order to foster an environment in which family farms have equitable market access and the ability to be economically sustainable and grow, Wisconsin Farmers Union advocates for the WEDC to offer financial support to increase the capacity of and start new state and USDA-inspected meat processors throughout the state.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that farmers of all sizes seek and need meat processors that farmers can custom order, slaughter, butcher, and package their livestock to meet their and their customers' desires; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that WFU urges increased support from County and Regional Economic Development agencies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that WFU urges DATCP to streamline regulation and offer increased education and support to help local processors remain viable, as well as processors that offer USDA, organic, Halal, and Kosher certification; as well as mobile and other on-farm processing facilities and find end users of animal by-products and waste; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that WFU supports allowing meat and poultry products sales across state lines if they have been inspected through state, Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that WFU supports the formation of cooperatives and other business structures that form to address specific local and regional processing needs, and offers assistance to chapters to do so.

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PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

WHEREAS, Wisconsin leads the nation in farm bankruptcies, and this detrimental loss to rural, social, and economic livelihoods has only increased since the onset of COVID-19. The CARES Act has provided critical support to farmers, but this assistance has not been distributed equally. Farmers also rely on the Small Business Administration (SBA) programs, as well as state and government funds. These programs have not been used to their full potential, though, as some farmers are not eligible for SBA programs, and many state agencies are strapped for cash; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has increased the risk of many food system and farmworkers, especially those working in the close quarters of meatpacking and food processing plants. This is particularly concerning as farmworkers are ineligible for many worker protection laws. Farmworkers remain excluded from federal overtime requirements to this day, and in many states, farmworkers are excluded from worker's compensation laws and many occupational health and safety protections; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has created an unprecedented new food security threat to households in Wisconsin. The Department of Workforce Development estimates that over 700,000 residents are out of work due to the pandemic, with unemployment estimated around 27%. The impact of income loss during COVID-19 is compounded by the loss of routine access to breakfast and lunch at school. The Census Household Pulse Survey has shown that food insecurity has doubled overall and tripled among households with children. Demand for charitable food assistance has also greatly increased during this time; and

WHEREAS, recent increases in FoodShare benefits (Pandemic EBT) provided a temporary increase in food purchasing power for some households, but these increases have now ended. The federal government gave the Wisconsin Department of Health Services a deadline of September 30, 2020 to provide P-EBT benefits for the 2019-20 school year. At this time, the state is not able to provide P-EBT benefits for the 2020-21 school year based on current guidance from the federal government; and

WHEREAS, while the pandemic will have lasting consequences on our state and national food system, this is also a time of great opportunity to imagine and create alternatives to our current system that better serve our farmers and our communities.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, WFU calls on Congress to:

1. Oversee the implementation of economic recovery assistance for agriculture to ensure funding is distributed equally and fairly, and that such programs do not contribute to the glut of agricultural commodities by incentivizing overproduction.
2. Provide family farmers with the financial support they need to withstand the pandemic by:
 - a. Directing funds to state governments to respond to the agricultural effects of the pandemic
 - b. Increase funding for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff and demand that the USDA prioritize increased staffing levels for FSA county offices.
3. Support infrastructure that would create a more stable and distributed food chain. In particular, we support:
 - a. Increased investment in small and medium meat processing facilities to manage the immediate processing bottleneck and create a more resilient processing infrastructure beyond the pandemic
 - b. Restoring competition and improving transparency in livestock markets by demanding stronger enforcement of antitrust laws and competition regulations on agricultural markets.
4. Demand hazard pay and safety protections for food system and farmworkers, particularly those working in meatpacking plants and other processing facilities.
5. Reinstate Pandemic-EBT and continue this program until the pandemic has ended.
6. Increase SNAP monthly minimum from \$16 to \$30 and boost the monthly benefits by 15%.
7. Support acts which facilitate the distribution of surplus food from farms to food banks.