

2014 WFBF Policy Development Underway



WFBF Policy Development Committee has proposed two resolutions and four issues for county Farm Bureaus to consider during their upcoming policy development process. Please note that the Policy Development Committee has not taken formal positions on these resolutions and topics; but rather, wants to encourage discussion among Farm Bureau members during our policy development process.

“These questions are just a starting point. You may have other issues that you would like to see Farm Bureau advocate. The choice is yours. As a Farm Bureau member, you have access to one of the most unique grassroots policy development structures of any organization in the country.”

- Richard Gorder, WFBF Vice President

Proposed Resolutions

State Issue: Invasive Species

Background: Under current Wisconsin law, the Department of Natural Resources has the authority to regulate invasive species. The DNR is directed to establish and update a list of invasive species and develop plans to either eliminate or limit the spread of invasive species. The DNR has the authority to regulate the potential use of an invasive plant such as reed canary grass. The DNR recently solicited comments about potentially prohibiting the use of reed canary grass in Wisconsin.

Proposed Policy: **The state Policy Development Committee encourages discussion on the following language that could be added to the end of our current policy on page 13, line 45 regarding invasive species: “We oppose regulating agricultural crops as an invasive species in Wisconsin.”**

Federal Issue: Road Weight Limits

Background: Current law establishes an 80,000 pound weight limit for vehicles traveling on the interstate, provided they have the proper number of axles and spacing between axels. Semi-tractor trailers meet this requirement. Vehicles exceeding this weight may be eligible for an overweight trip permit provided that it is not a divisible load. Wisconsin law allows vehicles with six axels to exceed 80,000 pounds if they are traveling within Wisconsin. However, this provision does not apply to vehicles leaving the state.

Proposed Policy: **The state Policy Development Committee proposes the following federal policy recommendation to AFBF: “We support increasing road weight limits on the interstate system to 97,000 pounds for trucks with six axels.”**



Policy Development Season

By **Richard Gorder**, *WFBF Vice President*



Just as agriculture is guided by the changing seasons, so is Farm Bureau. Summer marks the beginning of the policy development season for Farm Bureau members.

While membership is the foundation for a strong and vibrant organization, it is Farm Bureau's Policy and Development (PD) process that makes it an effective grassroots group. Just as there are crops to grow each summer, there are also legislative or regulatory issues that impact the way we farm. Specifically,

environmental, taxation and regulatory issues impact our farms just as much as the weather does. Last year, Wisconsin's 61 county Farm Bureaus submitted more than 450 resolutions for the state PD Committee to consider.

Actually, the PD process began earlier this year when the state PD Committee reviewed WFBF's existing policies and addressed emerging issues that may affect our farms. The committee identified topics and developed issue backgrounders to help facilitate discussions at county PD meetings. This year the committee identified three issues for Farm Bureau members to discuss and develop policies.

Technical College System and Structure:

Does our technical college system reflect the changes that have occurred in the business world? Does it reflect local needs? Is the system's structure, governance and funding still relevant? With property taxes funding 55 to 60 percent of your district technical college, do you want to have a greater voice in any of these discussions?

Agriculture Sustainability:

Sustainability has become a buzzword with 100 different definitions. More than ever there is a demand to define the word and the management practices associated with it. Do you want to define the context of sustainability or do you want the food industry and consumers to develop the framework and compliance mechanisms for you?

Water Resources:

Wisconsin is an agricultural state in large part because of the abundance of water here. Yet, as the demand grows for this limited resource, the issue of who controls water is moving into the legislative arena. There is no doubt that this could have significant implications on not just agriculture as a whole, but your farm's ability to survive. What policies on water should Farm Bureau's lobbyists be advocating for in Madison and Washington, D.C.?

These questions are just a starting point. You may have other issues that you would like to see Farm Bureau advocate. The choice is yours. As a Farm Bureau member, you have access to one of the most unique grassroots policy development structures of any organization in the country. Therefore, I hope you will take the opportunity to let your voice be heard. Please take time this summer to attend your county's PD meeting.

Issue Backgrounders

Technical Colleges

There are over 30 technical colleges within 16 districts throughout Wisconsin that offer more than 300 career programs. These programs include two-year degrees, one and two year technical diplomas and short-term technical certificates. There are also customizable training programs offered directly to businesses and industries.

Technical college districts are defined by local school district borders and are typically governed by nine-member boards. Resident-student enrollment in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) for 2011-2012 was nearly 363,000. There were 78,000 students that were considered full time (30 credit hours).

In 14 of Wisconsin's 16 technical college districts there are agricultural programs offered, serving a combination of ag or natural resources professions. Program areas with the most growth include horticulture and food manufacturing. There are currently articulation agreements between some high schools and four-year institutions for credits within WTCS.

Policy Questions to Consider

1. How can agriculture locally support their technical college programs?
2. Should all technical colleges offer all programs?
3. Should programs rotate college locations from year to year?
4. Should local industries that are benefitting from this trained workforce help support these programs?
5. How do technical colleges keep quality teaching staff in an environment of tight budgets, a slow economy and competition with the private sector?
6. How do we maintain programs that go through lean enrollment years without eliminating them?
7. Is there an opportunity for the Wisconsin Technical College System to provide a "further education/training" program to farmers for job stability/enrichment and continuing education?

Issue Backgrounders

Sustainability

Sustainability is a buzz word that is gaining popularity but has not yet been defined. Consumers talk about wanting food that was grown sustainably. Farmers practice sustainability on their farms. Food companies want to purchase ingredients that were produced sustainably so they can market their processed product as sustainable. But what does sustainable really mean? Discussions about sustainability often mention three components: Economic, Environmental and Social.

Economic - The fact is that producing food is a business. Farmers have to make sound business decisions for their farm so they can continue farming. Issues like labor, expansion, economies of scale, diversification and specialization are all part of a farm's economic business plan.

Environmental - Farmers make their livelihood by growing crops on the land and caring for their animals. Good stewardship is beneficial to everyone. Manure application, animal and crop rotations and improved management practices all encompass the effort farmers make to their farms to do more with less.

Social - Farming is also a way of life. Values associated with farming make farmers one of the most trusted demographics for consumers. How do we portray the modern farming practices that provide safer and higher quality food that is more economical to produce and is environmentally better for our farms through this sustainability discussion?

The demand for farmers to meet the highest possible standards of environmental stewardship and efficiency while maximizing their productivity and profitability will dominate future food discussions. Agriculture must be a part of this discussion.

Policy Questions to Consider

1. How do we want to define sustainability?
2. Who should determine what practices are considered sustainable? Farmers? Consumers? Food processors? Government?
3. Should there be a sustainability standard to use the term when marketing products?
4. How can farmers lead the way in setting sustainability standards?
5. Should Wisconsin Discovery Farms be used as an example of sustainable farming practices to continue researching scientific, on-farm data?
6. How can farmers engage with consumers to demonstrate that their farming methods are sustainable?

Wisconsin State Budget

Wisconsin has a two-year state budget. The current budget began July 1, 2011 and will expire June 30, 2013. For these two years, it is estimated that the State will spend \$66 billion.

Going into the 2011-13 state budget, there was a projected budget deficit of \$3.6 billion. In order to balance the state budget, funding was reduced for numerous state programs. One area of reductions that received extensive media coverage was education. Funding for education, K-12, technical colleges and the university system, was reduced by \$1.2 billion over the two-year budget. It should be noted that an additional \$1.4 billion was put into medical assistance, primarily BadgerCare. This was necessary to replace the one-time federal stimulus money that was used for medical assistance in the previous state budget.

Going into the 2013-15 state budget, there is a projected surplus of over \$400 million. Corrections, education, medical assistance and transportation are the four biggest areas of expenditures in the state budget. These four categories have requested additional funding in the 2013-15 budget in order to maintain services. It is expected that additional funding will be provided to each. However, each area will claim that even more money is needed.

An increase in taxes or fees within the current political environment is not realistic. Note: increasing the sales tax by 1 percent from 5.5 percent to 6.5 percent would generate about \$900 million per year. The next state budget will need discussions about prioritizing the expenditure of existing tax collections.

County Farm Bureaus and members are not expected to solve or rewrite the state budget. However, many members are on local governmental boards. With this experience, there may be budget items that they see can be improved upon or reprioritized to better serve Wisconsin farm families. WFBF policy has numerous items related to taxes, fees and spending. Do we need to change or add policy statements?

Current WFBF Policy: *Spending Caps* – We support legislation or a constitutional amendment limiting the amount of taxes or fees that can be levied and/or establishing spending caps for units of government. *Fees* – We oppose the indexing of fees. *Lapses* – We believe that when a fee or state tax is collected for a specific purpose that the fund should not be transferred or raided for other uses. *Income Tax* – We support incorporating federal income tax deductions into Wisconsin income tax laws. *Death Tax* – We oppose reinstatement of the state death tax.

Policy Questions to Consider

1. Does WFBF have the appropriate policy to address state budget issues?
2. Does WFBF have adequate policy regarding fee increases? Do we support certain fee increases? If so, which ones?
3. Does WFBF need policy to address spending priorities for agriculture or the state in general? What state programs are most important to farming?
4. Are there other suggestions pertaining to the state's fiscal situation?

Groundwater

Historically, it was believed that Wisconsin was abundant with both surface and groundwater. Recently there have been areas of the state where the availability of groundwater has become an issue. Some areas around Milwaukee and Green Bay are now using water from Lake Michigan for some of their water needs. There are also groundwater concerns in Wisconsin's central sands area.

Given these developments, during the 2009 legislative session, bills were introduced to revise Wisconsin's groundwater law with regard to use of high capacity wells and surface water diversions. The legislation would have transferred authority over groundwater from the state to local groundwater management councils. These councils would have been given the authority to allocate water usage for new uses and existing uses. The legislation did not pass, but the groundwater issue remains.

In 2011, the State Supreme Court, in an unanimous decision, ruled in favor of two conservation organizations that had sued the DNR for issuing a permit to the Village of East Troy to install two high capacity wells. In the ruling, the court stated that the DNR has over-arching authority to insure that groundwater withdrawals do not adversely affect the environment. This ruling has implications to existing high capacity withdrawals.

In light of the Supreme Court ruling, it is anticipated that the DNR will need to update existing regulations pertinent to high capacity well permits for both new wells and existing wells, and that new legislation will be introduced.

WFBF groundwater policy states: "There is a need for increased monitoring, research and education relating to groundwater problems. We believe that the present law regarding the installation of high capacity wells serving municipalities should be amended to require that there be no adverse impact on the quality and supply of other local wells. We support grandfathering in existing high capacity wells under the laws in which they were installed or upgraded. In areas where groundwater quantity is an issue, we support the Department of Natural Resources establishing groundwater management areas (GMAs). We support allowing the DNR to regulate usage of water in GMAs in consultation with an approval from a local advisory committee comprised of representatives from agriculture, industry and municipalities."

Policy Questions to Consider

1. Is our current policy with respect to groundwater appropriate or does it need to be modified?
2. Should the Legislature continue to have the authority to determine groundwater management areas or should that responsibility be given to a groundwater coordinating council and local government?
3. What should our policy be with respect to existing users of groundwater versus new users?
4. What should our policy be with respect to determining who gets to use groundwater? Existing versus new? Municipalities versus agriculture?
5. What should our policy be with respect to high capacity wells? Should the DNR have the authority to limit the usage of an existing well? ■

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