

Raise **YOUR** Voice



for Agriculture

Wisconsin
**Farm
Bureau**
FEDERATION

**Grassroots
Advocacy
Guide**

Why Advocate?

Inside...

Because YOUR Voice Matters...

Farm Bureau has been a grassroots organization since its beginning. Its strength does not lie in Madison or Washington, but rather in each and every one of its members in counties throughout the nation.

Farm Bureau leaders and staff work tirelessly on behalf of members, but no one's voice is more effective and powerful as yours. Real world examples of how decisions made by elected officials impact agriculture are best shared by the people with boots on the ground every day.

Farmers and agriculturists wear so many hats. Running your business requires knowledge and practical skills in so many areas. But in order to continue to operate, we must also speak up on behalf of agriculture. The smallest effort made by individuals to raise their voices

can be amplified when united together behind the common goal of ensuring a bright future for agriculture.

Farm Bureau provides an avenue for you, as a member, to stay informed on issues that impact our state and nation. Further, many of Farm Bureau's policies originate at the local level. Your voice and input at policy development meetings shape ideas proposed at the state and national levels.

Farm Bureau members must take action on a personal level to ensure future success. Wisconsin Farm Bureau created this guide to aid you in your efforts and to provide you with tips that can make you more effective. **Will you raise your voice for agriculture?**

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A Voice for Farmers. A Vision for Agriculture.

Calling Elected Officials

Speaking Up for Agriculture

When you need to make your voice heard on an issue and you don't have time to write a letter or email, a call can be a great means to let your legislator know how you feel about an issue. While it's likely you will not speak directly to your legislator, your call is important to legislators as they try to judge public opinion on specific pieces of legislation.

Plan your call. Know what you're calling about, and write down key pieces of information before the call. While it's important that your call sound relaxed and personal, you should also be prepared with the information you want to communicate. Your call could last less than a minute, especially if you are calling in a period when there are a high volume of calls coming in to your legislator. Know what to expect and try to find out the position of the legislator before you make the call.

Be concise, direct and brief. Time is limited, so get right down to business.

Introduce yourself as a constituent. Legislators are interested in what people like you think. For example, you might start your call off with: "My name is John Doe, and I own a dairy farm near Monroe." Including your address lets the legislator's staff know that you are a constituent.

Clearly define the key message of your call. This is likely the piece of legislation you are calling about, so be sure to know the bill's official number. To continue the earlier example, you might say: "I'm calling about Senate Bill 123, a proposal to increase the nutrition of food. Proper nutrition is important to long term health for all Americans. I would like to see Senator Smith support Senate Bill 123. Can you tell me where she stands?"

Persuade. Make your case for why the legislator should support your position using one or two key local examples, anecdotes, or studies.

Thank them. If your legislator agrees to support or continue their support, thank them. If not, ask him

or her (or staff) to consider what you have discussed. Regardless of their position, thank the individual who spoke to you for their time and tell them you will monitor the issue. Take down the staff member's name, so if you call back and speak to them again, you can develop rapport.



Recruit others. Calls, like any form of grassroots advocacy, are much stronger when large numbers of constituents get involved. Persuade others to make similar calls. The more times staff hear about an issue on the phone, the more likely they are to share your concerns and arguments with the legislator.

Report. If you are a part of a mobilization effort, be sure to let the appropriate leader know that you have made a call. This allows leaders to know the quantity of calls that have been made through the grassroots lobbying effort.

Call back. Monitor the issue, and as it progresses through the legislative process, call back to ask for support of a specific action as appropriate.

Writing Your Legislators

Tips for Writing Emails and Letters that Spur Action

Writing a letter is the classic method of contacting your elected officials, but hard copy letters have largely been replaced by email. Letters and emails can be effective ways to make your case in a relatively inexpensive way that reaches your legislator quickly.

Salutation. Address your letter or email with the formal title of the legislator (i.e. Dear Representative Jones, Dear Senator Smith).

Begin by stating that you are a constituent. Make sure you include where you are from, so that the legislator's office staff immediately know that you are a constituent.

Add credibility. Farmers are highly respected; research shows that they remain one of the most highly regarded occupations. No one is more qualified to speak about agricultural issues than farmers, so do not forget to introduce yourself and tell about your operation in terms your legislator can understand.

Don't forward chain emails. Emails and letters should always be personal. Forwarding these messages can cause you to lose credibility. The effort you show in writing your own words and experiences will pay dividends in the form of a more effective email or letter.

Clearly outline the reason for your email or letter. If your communication is in response to a particular bill, be sure to include the bill or resolution's number in the letter.

If the legislator has supported agricultural or other ag-related issues in the past, acknowledge this—but don't assume that support will continue. Thank them for their past support, and make your argument why they should continue or intensify their support.

Be concise, and don't forget to use local examples. Use the body of the email or letter to

state your case for your position. Stick to one issue and develop your argument using personal stories and examples from your local community. Show that your issue has real impacts for constituents like you. Be sure to hit all your key points and use language that your representative and his/her staff will understand.

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Email, Email, Email...

Electronic communication (email) is strongly recommended if possible. Heightened security in both Washington, D.C., and Madison means that letters sent via mail can take long periods of time before they reach your legislator's office. **Therefore, emails are strongly preferred by congressional and state legislative offices.**

Short emails allow you to urge action on a particular issue or policy. These emails can be more informal and brief in nature if you like.

Do you prefer writing longer, more formal letters? Submit your letter as an attachment to an email. This gives you the flexibility to write longer, more detailed letters while still making it to the elected official's office in a timely fashion. Be sure to reference your attachment in the body of the email.

Always put the bill number or topic you are emailing about in the subject line.

Regardless of how you choose to structure your email, your communication effort is important.

Need information?

Need to know who your elected officials are at the state and federal level? Want to find out how to contact them?

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau's website, www.WFBF.com, features a variety of resources useful in your grassroots advocacy efforts.

The website's **State, Federal and Major Ag Topics** pages all feature information on issues impacting agriculture and rural Wisconsin. You can track the status of current state legislation and regulations as well as learn about policies important to Wisconsin agriculture from these pages.

All of these resources are available under the 'Government Relations' tab of the WFBF website, wfbf.com.

Use the news. Watch for news stories in your local communities that illustrate your point. Using a local news item as a springboard for your issue can add credibility and provide a local touch that will set your communication apart.

Keep the tone upbeat. Be polite and informative in all your communication efforts. Do not criticize past actions or engage in attacking your legislator.

Ask for a response. Politely ask for a response to better gauge your elected official's position and become more informed on the current status of legislation.

Close on a positive note. Restate your main objective and key supporting items.

Persuade a friend, other Farm Bureau members or family to write. The more communications your elected official receives on an issue, the better. Every message counts.

Follow-up and communicate more than once. As with all forms of legislative communication, stay in touch. Make sure your emails are part of an ongoing relationship, so that when new issues arise, you're viewed as a trusted, available source.



Making Legislative Visits

Tips for Effective Meetings that Make a Difference

The most effective means of letting your legislators know where you stand on issues is to speak to them in person. While carrying out effective meetings takes effort and patience, the end result—more informed lawmakers and staff—can pay huge dividends in the future, if not immediately, for agriculture. Farmers and constituents from the district bring huge credibility and trust with them to both the statehouse in Madison and Capitol Hill in Washington.

Before

Make an appointment ... but don't be surprised if it changes. The legislative schedule is extremely fluid. Legislators often have last-minute hearings or committee meetings. In making your appointment, be sure to mention that you are a constituent.

Consider meeting in your home district. A great option for meeting with elected officials is when they are back in their districts. Meetings during these times are often less hurried than meetings in Madison or Washington, D.C. Many legislators hold "office hours" or similar times when the legislature or Congress is out-of-session to meet with constituents at district offices or community facilities. However, if time and circumstance dictates, you may need to travel to the Capitol for your visit.

Do your homework. Know the issues that are pertinent to your meeting well. Be informed on the status of current bills relating to issues you are concerned about. Utilize resources from your county Farm Bureau, district coordinator, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, American Farm Bureau or government agencies.

Know your audience. Make sure you know the legislator you are planning to meet. Find out what key issues the legislator is passionate about, and see if you can connect your issues with these. If possible, find out his or her position on the issues you're focusing on.

Plan your meeting. Especially if you are meeting with legislators as a group, make sure you know what the flow of the meeting will be and what each person is contributing. Be sure to define your key messages (no more than three) and come up with two or three supporting observations or personal accounts for each. Planning ahead will eliminate awkward silences and will ensure that you hit all of the key points you want to cover. Remember your time may be limited, so plan accordingly.



Did you know?

Wisconsin Farm Bureau, in coordination with other state agricultural groups, hosts Ag Day at the Capitol each year. The event provides farmers with a forum to visit with their elected representatives at the Capitol in Madison. Following an issue briefing session, members head to visits with lawmakers. Farm Bureau members are encouraged to attend and speak with legislators about issues important to Wisconsin agriculture. Look for registration information in Rural Route or online at wbf.com.

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Prepare a leave-behind. A letter summarizing key points, along with contact information of everyone who visited is a great idea. An information hand-out detailing key information is also effective. If you plan to cover multiple issues, prepare a separate handout for each issue.

Dress professionally. A good rule of thumb is to wear something you would wear to a job interview. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes, especially if you are making visits in Washington, D.C., as you may be walking.

Be on time. If you are late, your appointment will likely be shortened or cancelled. If you know you will be late, call ahead to notify the office and possibly reschedule.



Be flexible. Don't take schedule changes personally. Meetings with staff can be very effective, as they have a huge influence in helping legislators make decisions. Don't be surprised if you meet in the reception area or hallways, as space is sometimes limited.

Recognize the value of staff.

The staff member you speak with could be a top aide in a few short years. Staff play a vital role in the legislative process. Always treat them with the same level of respect and friendliness you would pay to your legislator.

During

Make the connection. Find something you have in common and engage in a little "small talk" to break the ice and become comfortable. Relax. Remember, your legislators are people just like you who just happen to have an extraordinary job.

Stay on message. Remember that your meeting time will be brief, and you want to maximize the time you have. Getting sidetracked or including extraneous information can distract the legislator from your key concerns.

State only what you know. Don't overstate your case, fudge the facts or guess.

Go local. Legislators want to know the feelings and experiences of constituents back in their districts. Add personal stories from your farm or household. If using statistics, try to use ones that are "closer to home" (i.e., for a state senator use county statistics or accounts; for a congressman, use state or regional figures instead of national studies).

Invite comments, questions, and discussion.

Engage your legislator in dialogue. It's okay to admit you don't know the answer to a question. Offer to find out and contact the office when you have obtained that information.

Make "the ask." Ask for a commitment from your legislator. If you don't ask your legislator for action, you won't see any. If they decline, encourage them to think about it and let them know that you'll keep in touch.

Get contact information. Remember to pick up staff member business cards and offer to serve as a resource on issues that are important to you if further questions arise for the legislator.

Above all, be courteous and positive at all times.

Listen to the legislator or staff member's concerns about your issues. Do not become defensive or angry if they seem opposed to your position.

After

Follow-up. Send a thank-you email to your legislator. Let them know that you appreciate their time. If you promised additional information, be sure it gets to them in a timely fashion.

Visit more than once.

Establish yourself as a reliable source of information on agricultural issues, and visit again to discuss issues and make requests. Invite legislators to your farm or business, if appropriate, to continue your relationship and further their understanding of agriculture.



Writing Letters to the Editor

Tips for Writing Letters that Get Published

One of the easiest ways to inform the general public about issues is to compose a letter to the editor. Writing letters to the editor can be effective, but only the best letters will make it into print. Studies show that letters to the editor are often more widely read than some news sections of papers, so it's clear that great letters can influence opinion-shapers and elected leaders in your community.

Read the newspaper's guidelines. Papers will often specify a word limit for letters, so be sure to adhere to this limit. Some papers have rules regarding email submission of letters. If you are considering this, be sure to find out if they accept these letters. Sign your name. Most papers won't accept anonymous letters.

Keep it short and stick to one issue. Papers, especially large publications, will rarely print letters more than 250 words. Help out your local newspaper editor and keep your letter brief and concise. If you send in a letter that is too long, you run the risk of having your letter be rejected without even being considered or printed with key points edited out.



Be clear. This seems obvious, but many letters are rejected simply because they don't make sense. Don't assume that readers will know the background of an issue. Don't use agricultural jargon that people outside of the industry won't understand, especially in popular press publications. Have a friend, family member or colleague

unfamiliar with the issue read your letter to check for clarity. Another set of eyes can often see things you overlooked.

Where To Send Your Letter

Don't overlook local papers and neighborhood weeklies. These papers often have very large readerships and more room for letters.

If you send your letter to larger papers, don't be discouraged if your letter is not published. Often one letter is published as representative of many they may have received on a particular side of an issue.

Capitalize on the hot stories. Find ways to tie recent stories in with your issue. If you can use a recent article as a springboard, it provides a source for readers to get background you cannot always provide in a letter.

Use word cues to underscore key points. Flagging key messages and supporting details will make your letter easier to follow and more likely to get printed. For example, preface key messages with, "The important thing is..." or a key piece of science with, "Research shows that..."

Use a personal angle. All grassroots strategies rely on local perspectives and personal angles underlying an issue. Tell others how your issue affects you and why they should care.

Be passionate, but not poisonous. There is a difference between "fire in the belly" and righteous indignation. Avoid sarcasm and never level insults in letters. If you're angry, give yourself some time to cool off and then revisit your letter.

WFBF Resources

Stay Informed on Agriculture’s Most Critical Issues

Farm Bureau strives to serve its members and keep them informed on issues impacting agriculture, food and rural life. A variety of resources exist to aid members in staying up to date on current legislation, regulatory issues, news and public perceptions of agriculture.



Rural Route, the official publication of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, is packed full of news about Wisconsin agriculture. Published six times annually, the graphic-rich magazine is mailed to all voting

members as a member benefit.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau’s website, wfbf.com, provides a one-stop location for daily headlines about agriculture and Farm Bureau, as well as commodity market information. The government relations section provides key background information

on policies under consideration by legislators. All Farm Bureau publications are also made available on the website.

Ag Newswire is Farm Bureau’s weekly news briefing sent via email to subscribers each Friday. Daily updates are made available on the WFBF website. Sign up at wfbf.com.

Farm Bureau’s governmental and public relations staff aim to serve members and educate the public about agriculture. Questions can be directed to WFBF staff at any time.



Governmental Relations Staff



Karen Gefvert
Executive Director
Governmental Relations
kgefvert@wfbf.com
608.828.5713



Debi Towns
Senior Director
Governmental Relations
dtowns@wfbf.com
608.828.5712



Tyler Wenzlaff
Director
Governmental Relations
twenzlaff@wfbf.com
608.828.5703

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Farm Bureau Center
1241 John Q. Hammons Dr.
P.O. Box 5550
Madison, WI 53705
866.836.5575 (General) | wfbf.com