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Meet new staff member – Stu Lourey, Government Relations Director

STU LOUREY, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIRECTOR
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I’m honored to have been named Government Relations Director for Minnesota Farmers Union, and excited to get to work on behalf of our members! I grew up as a member of MFU. My family farmed in Pine County, where I still own beef cows with my dad and brother. That experience has made me passionate about the future of family farms and the rural communities they support.

I’ve been on the job for just under a month and I’m already deep into work at the Legislature. During my first week, I testified on a bill that would extend the moratorium on enforcing rules on ditch mowing (SF1889), to help encourage agencies to develop a solution that works for farmers. Since then, I’ve testified on bills that would make health care more affordable, help farmers invest in renewable energy and met with policymakers on transportation funding, broadband and farm-to-school.

Prior to joining the team at MFU, I worked on policy for Minnesota Senator Tina Smith, where I focused on making health care more affordable and lowering the cost of prescription drugs. Before that, I served in Senator Al Franken’s Duluth office. In that role, I traveled across Northeastern and East Central Minnesota, working on a broad array of issues including broadband, transportation and, of course, agriculture.

In those roles, I learned that we’re often most effective at influencing policy when we’re able to share the stories and experiences of real Minnesotans – numbers and statistics can only do so much. This has proven true at MFU. For example, when I was testifying on the governor’s ONecare proposal – a plan that would allow people to buy into state health coverage – I shared the story of a dairy farmer I’d spoken to that morning who had trouble affording coverage on the individual market. Sharing stories helps legislators understand the experience of farmers and the impact their decisions will have on our communities.

Once the legislative session wraps up, I’ll be visiting farms, attending fairs and joining conversations around the state about what we want rural Minnesota to look like. I believe strongly that if rural people and farmers are at the table when important decisions are being made, our whole state will be stronger.

In the meantime, I want to make sure that I’m available to hear your thoughts, concerns and ideas about policy MFU is working on at the Capitol – don’t hesitate to reach out at stu@mfu.org or (651) 288-4067.
President’s Message

Lively NFU Convention
Thanks to all our members and staff who made the trip last month to the NFU 117th Anniversary Convention in Bellevue, Wash., just a few miles from Seattle, from March 3-5. The three days were filled with policy debate, awards, organizational updates, education and networking. MFU once again brought its Hot Wheels racing game to the NFU Foundation Fundraiser Game Night, which supported NFU education programs.

With the tough times in agriculture and rural communities, it’s vital that family farmers come together and think of solutions. The most pressing issues that came up at the convention were agricultural consolidation, climate change, the trade war, Farm Bill implementation and renewable fuels waivers. Guest speakers provided insight on these issues, including how some businesses are working to address climate change. These discussions provided framework for our policy debate, which produced eight special orders. Those can be read on the NFU website. More about the convention can be found on page 7.

I’d especially like to thank Meg Moynihan of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for serving as a speaker in a breakout session on helping farmers in crisis, as well as Steven Read of Rice County for representing Minnesota on the NFU Policy Committee.

Legislature, governor approve additional farm disaster relief funds
Weather-related farm damage has affected all parts of our state this winter. The Legislature passed a bill unanimously in March authorizing the Rural Finance Authority to declare market emergencies, unlocking funding for farm weather disaster recovery not covered by insurance. Gov. Tim Walz signed it, and the RFA acted. Farmers who have had damage to their buildings can apply for zero-interest loans for repairing them. Go to www.mda.state.mn.us/disasterloan for details.

Health care roundtable with Gov. Walz
We were pleased to be a part of a roundtable discussion with Gov. Walz and Minnesota Department of Human Services Assistant Commissioner Marie Zimmerman in March. Organizations such as the Minnesota AARP and Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid joined me, MFU Executive Committee Chair Carol Anderson and Stearns County President Mike Orbeck in the roundtable in St. Cloud, sharing about experiences with health care.

Mike, a dairy farmer, said that he’s grateful for MinnesotaCare, as it’s provided him reliable health insurance at a reasonable premium. Carol, also a dairy farmer in Benton County, told the story of a friend of hers who needs kidney dialysis each week and how much it would cost if she didn’t have insurance. THEIRS were just two compelling reasons why we need sustainable health care reform. The governor’s ONEcare proposal, which is effectively a MinnesotaCare buy-in, is a good option to start with. Some have suggested taking the reinsurance route again, as we did in 2017, but that doesn’t do enough to make health care affordable and accessible to everyone. Reinsurance simply buys down the insurance premiums with payments to insurance companies, rather than reforming the costs of care. It has worked in lowering insurance premiums but is not sustainable long-term. Farmers and small business owners need more options, because in many areas, there’s only one insurance provider available, and that drives up the cost.

Rural Voices Discussions and Dairy Together Roadshow
Last month we invited you to participate in our annual Rural Voices Discussions. By the time you are reading this, we’ve held our first one.
It’s encouraging each year to see members attend these discussions and speak their minds. There are several more coming up, and we invite you to attend the discussions nearest you. Dates and locations are on page 15. Thank you to the officials who are joining me on the listening panels.

If you can’t make it in person, you can watch each Rural Voices Discussion livestreamed on the MFU Facebook page. On social media, keep up with the conversation with the hashtag #RuralVoices.

We are also hosting a session of Wisconsin Farmers Union’s Dairy Together Roadshow on April 16 at the Greenwald Pub. WFU has been working with industry experts at the National Farmers Organization and the University of Wisconsin to come up with ideas for a dairy supply management system. Learn more about Dairy Together on page 14. To RSVP for the roadshow, contact Membership & Outreach Director Bruce Miller at bruce@mfu.org.

MFU part of diverse coalition for Farm Bill soil health pilot

During the development of the 2018 Farm Bill, we joined with the American Coalition for Ethanol, Environmental Entrepreneurs, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the National Corn Growers Association in advocating to include a pilot incentives program for soil health. Farmers who sign up would use methods such as no-till planting and cover crops, while measuring how much carbon dioxide is kept out of the atmosphere because of this. From that measurement, the United States Department of Agriculture would pay the farmers under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). It’s like a state program established in California. MFU submitted written testimony in support of this pilot program and signed on with the joint testimony of the coalition. We are very pleased that it is included in the Farm Bill that is now law. It had the support of then-Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, Collin Peterson (D-Minn.), who is now Chair of the committee. We worked closely with Rep. Peterson’s staff on the language and thank him for this work.

In February, I traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with USDA staff and provide our input on implementation. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will oversee administration of the funds, as they already do with EQIP. Minnesota is challenged by weather cycles in using some conservation practices, but many producers already do. Our next steps are working with NRCS to determine things such as how many acres per state will be included and how it could work with different crops and soil types, as well as soil carbon building practices.

Agriculture should be a significant partner in our society’s work to mitigate climate change. Not only is this Soil Health Pilot a good place to start with that, we hope it will lead to a market where farmers can be paid for the added value of stored carbon in their land. If you are interested in this program or have any questions, please contact us.

World Farmers’ Organisation work

In late February, the World Farmers’ Organisation provided me the opportunities to represent MFU in discussions about global family farming. NFU is a member of the WFO, which is made up of family farm organizations worldwide. I’m currently the facilitator of a livestock working group in the WFO.

I traveled to Canberra, Australia from Feb. 16-23 for a workshop titled “Animal-Sourced Food, Gender, Sustainable Food Systems and Facilitating Policy Frameworks.” The workshop focused on food policies in various countries, what’s working and what’s not. One point that came up was from a nutritionist, who said that removing meat, dairy and eggs from the diets of people in low-income countries, the population’s health would be adversely affected. Some reports have said that eating less meat and dairy is better for both human health and the planet. This is not entirely accurate, as meat and dairy are valuable sources of protein, and livestock can be part of healthy farm ecosystems.

I realized while there that dairy farmers in Australia are facing the same economic hardships as in the United States. Their input costs have increased dramatically since 2011, but the price they receive for their labor and products has remained the same. This is because supermarkets such as Cole’s and Woolworth’s have put a price of one dollar per liter for milk, which has put a cap on what the farmers are paid. So many of them are exiting the business, a detriment to their rural communities.

Additionally, Australian farmers rely on exports for a large portion of their products. The uncertainty of the world trade environment is concerning to them just as it is to us, as Australia National Farmers Federation CEO Tony Mahar and GM Prudence Gordon told me. It shows that we have much in common with farmers everywhere; therefore it’s good for us to work together in the WFO to advocate for better policy.

The WFO also arranged my travel to a policy discussion on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) at the United Nations Foundation in New York City. The UN’s Interagency Coordination Group is drafting a policy on AMR and will be submitting it to the UN in July for the member nations to adopt. This all ties into one health policy initiative, which looks at the use of antibiotics in human and animal health. There are huge differences between developed and developing countries around the world in the use of antibiotics. Good stewardship with the use of antibiotics in both humans and animals was emphasized as both humans and animals need to be able to be treated when sick. I was glad to be able to make sure family farmers are represented in this conversation.
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Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen.

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Ethanol is the lowest cost, highest quality

fuel additive available to gasoline refiners

and marketers today. That’s why we have a

Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS). Consumers

will benefit from more competition and greater

savings as E10 (gas with 10 percent ethanol) is

replaced by E15 and increasingly higher fuel

blends. Auto manufacturers have already

approved the use of E15 for 9 out of 10 cars

on the road today and provide full warranty coverage for E15 in

approximately 85 percent of the vehicles sold. Farmers and industry

experts recognize how our organization has helped champion a cause that can make a real difference in our rural communities.

“Farmers Union has been a strong partner in helping us advocate for higher ethanol blends because it’s good for family farmers, ranchers and rural communities. And, let’s not overlook the clean air and health benefits,” explained Jim Seurer, pointing to a recent study conducted by the consulting group Life Cycle Associates, and commissioned by the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) that finds greenhouse gas reductions from the use of biofuels has exceeded what EPA has predicted by 37 percent.

E15 is a high-quality fuel that helps keep prices down at the pump and secure America’s energy independence. The Environmental Protection Agency says it will fulfill President Trump’s commitment to make E15 available year-round before June 1. We hope they’re right, and we’re counting down the days left for them to keep this promise.

“Producing higher levels of ethanol does not only benefit farmers but consumers as well,” explains Marc Rauch of the Environmental Defense Fund. “The more ethanol we use the cleaner the air is and the better our engines run. My own tests and tests conducted by others show that E30 blends produce the best miles per gallon results in most current gasoline-optimized vehicle engines, including E85 flex-fuel vehicles. This means that consumers save money and get better mileage.”

We know that biofuels are beneficial for many. Unfortunately, EPA has undermined the RFS several times over by issuing “hardship” waivers to some large, profitable oil refineries, so the demand for ethanol has decreased. A recent report from the RFA found that ethanol consumption in the U.S. declined from 2017-18, the first time it had declined in 20 years. This came in response to a spike in the number of waivers issued.

Governor Walz, Rural Finance Authority clear way for disaster loans

The Rural Finance Authority Board has issued a Disaster Declaration for the State of Minnesota which now makes low interest loans available for Minnesota farmers whose operations suffered barn collapses or other damage due to the record winter snowfall. Gov. Walz signed a bill on March 18 allowing the RFA to declare a disaster due to excessive snowfall. The funds are available to farmers for expenses not covered by insurance.

“Gov. Walz and the RFA board members acted quickly to make these disaster recovery funds available,” said Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen. “This zero-interest loan program is especially important for farmers who suffered damage from the heavy snowfall and were not insured or were underinsured.”

The Disaster Recovery Loan Program can be used to help clean up, repair or replace farm structures and septic and water systems, as well as replace cropping inputs, feed and livestock.

The program offers affordable financing to repair existing agricultural buildings to pre-disaster conditions. Eligible farmers must have received at least 50 percent of their annual gross income from farming for the past three years and will work through their bank to secure the loans from the RFA.

More information on the Disaster Recovery Loan is on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture website: www.mda.state.mn.us/disasterloan.

BRYAN KLABUNDE
VICE PRESIDENT
bryan@mfu.org

As a crop producer, I need to know that there will be markets available for what I work hard to grow. Biofuels have been a successful market for us for many years. Ethanol and biodiesel are not only good uses for corn and soybeans, they burn cleaner than fossil fuels and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change.

There’s been a lot of talk recently about E15, a renewable fuel that is a blend of gasoline that contains 15 percent ethanol. E15 is the lowest cost, highest quality fuel additive available to gasoline refiners and marketers today. That’s why we have a Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS). Consumers will benefit from more competition and greater savings as E10 (gas with 10 percent ethanol) is replaced by E15 and increasingly higher fuel blends. Auto manufacturers have already approved the use of E15 for 9 out of 10 cars on the road today and provide full warranty coverage for E15 in approximately 85 percent of the vehicles sold. Farmers and industry experts recognize how our organization has helped champion a cause that can make a real difference in our rural communities.

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Governor Walz has been working hard to put an end to these unnecessary waivers, so the RFS can sustain markets for farmers as it was meant to. Summer E15 wouldn’t make up for these losses.

Our organization has long supported a strong renewable fuels market. We shouldn’t be cutting back on them, but rather moving ahead with higher blends such as E30. Year-round E15 is a good place to start. I’ll be working alongside all of you to gain more victories for homegrown biofuels.

E15

Digging out after one of the March snowfalls at the Wertish farm

More information on the Disaster Recovery Loan is on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture website:

www.mda.state.mn.us/disasterloan.

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Minnesota Farmers Union continues to have an active presence at the State Capitol, especially with new Director of Government Relations Stu Lourey coming on board on March 11. Stu joins me, MFU President Gary Wertish, Programming Director Michelle Medina and intern Emily Pliscott in testifying on priority legislation and monitoring bills to make sure family farmers and rural communities are heard in policymaking.

First, MFU is working hard to make health care more affordable on two main fronts:
- Advancing Gov. Tim Walz’s ONEcare health care proposal in the Legislature. This would allow Minnesotans to buy into a state plan, like MinnesotaCare, and includes cost controls like using the state’s purchasing power to negotiate with prescription drug companies. As part of this effort, MFU testified on Rep. Tina Liebling’s HF3 bill, which would establish ONEcare; joined letters to legislators as part of a broad coalition; and had members participate in three health care roundtables with the governor and Department of Human Services leaders in St. Cloud, Duluth and Rochester. A special thanks to Carol Anderson, Mike Frost, Deborah Mills and Mike Orbeck for participating in these roundtables along with President Wertish and Vice President Klabunde.
- Repealing the sunset of the provider tax, which is the main funding source for MinnesotaCare, the Office of Rural Health and Primary Care, the Health Care Access Fund and other important programs.

As the new administration works to make needed changes to our health care system, MFU is eager to partner with them to make sure that farmers are at the table.

MFU is advocating for a responsible transportation funding package that makes needed investments in rural infrastructure, which would include raising the gas tax. President Wertish shared agriculture's perspective in a recent press conference put on by a coalition of organizations seeking to work on this issue. He told media, “We can’t keep kicking this can down the road. It will just fall in to a pothole on a road that needs repair.” Others of you have talked with us about what you’ve seen in your community’s roads and said you support raising the gas tax as a sustainable investment in transportation.

We have been calling for additional rural mental health counselors and increased funding for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Farm Advocate program. Legislation for this passed unanimously in the House but has yet to get a hearing in the Senate. We encourage you to contact your state senators about why it’s important to give this issue a hearing and to vote in support of it.

Other issues that we’ve testified on include:
- Farmland property tax relief
- Tax conformity with Section 179 of the Federal Tax Code
- Rural broadband funding
- Farm to School program funding
- Good Food Access Program funding
- UMN Forever Green Program funding
- Ditch mowing moratorium
- Compensation for farmland buffer installation
- Right to Repair
- Beginning Farmer Tax Credit modifications to support socially disadvantaged farmers
- Support for effective pollinator habitat and research
- Support for industrial hemp
- Renewable energy programs
- Support for Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Community solar energy expansion

We have been meeting with House and Senate committee chairs now that budget information is coming out to make sure that programs which address MFU’s priorities are included. You can keep up with our team at the Capitol by following them on Twitter at @stulourey (Stu Lourey) and @wispingdoctor (Bruce Miller). You can also call or email us anytime.
MFU members discuss climate change, consolidation, trade at NFU Convention

From March 3-5, we attended the lively National Farmers Union 117th Anniversary Convention in Bellevue, Wash., where forty of our members and staff convened with more than 460 Farmers Union members, staff and friends from across the country. Minnesota is one of NFU’s 33 state and regional divisions.

As at the state level, most of the time spent at the NFU Convention was in policy debate and special orders. The policy document approved by the delegates will guide the NFU’s policy goals with Congress and the Trump administration. Delegates also passed eight special orders, which are available online at the NFU website.

Delegates spent a great deal of time discussing the need for farmers to be involved in mitigating climate change, the need to better enforce antitrust laws and the need for fair trade policy that benefits family farmers. These policies will guide the D.C. staff’s positions and priorities for the year ahead and ensure that NFU continues to advocate on behalf of its members, family farmers, and rural communities. It’s always a treat to hear from Farmers Union members from states vastly different from Minnesota. Every state is a farm state!

NFU President Roger Johnson gave his annual State of the Farmers Union address, covering topics such as the currently depressed farm income, climate change, consolidation in the ag sector and the trade war.

Andrew Winston, a globally recognized expert on environmental sustainability in businesses, gave the keynote address. Other speakers included USDA Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation Bill Northey, Michael Stumo of Coalition for a Prosperous America and Kathy Baylis of the University of Illinois Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics.

The NFU convention always provides opportunities for members to delve into topics they are interested in. This year included breakout sessions on the environmental benefits of E30 gasoline, regenerative agriculture, soil health, grassroots organizing, farmers markets, fighting rural consolidation and farm stress crises. The last of these had Minnesota Department of Agriculture Senior Advisor for Strategy and Innovation (and MFU member) Meg Moynihan as a panelist, reminding attendees that you are not alone.

The National Farmers Union Convention is always a good reminder that Minnesota agriculture isn’t on its own, separated from the rest of the world. We stand together with our fellow members to lift the collective voice of family agriculture. We aren’t alone, but united in the work to achieve a thriving countryside.
USDA offers disaster recovery assistance
This year has brought Minnesota extreme cold, blizzard conditions and plenty of snow. February’s record snow has resulted in a flood equation that favors an increased flood risk this spring. Adverse weather can be tough on farmers and ranchers. Barns can collapse due to excessive snowfall, cattle can die due to extreme cold and floods can result in the loss of harvested forage. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers disaster assistance and low-interest loan programs to assist agricultural producers in their recovery efforts following qualifying natural disasters.

Available programs and loans include:

- **Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)** – provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters including freeze, excessive wind and moisture. Eligible producers must have purchased NAP coverage for 2019 crops. A notice of loss must be filed within 15 calendar days of when the loss is apparent or 15 calendar days after the normal harvest date.

- **Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)** – offers payments to eligible producers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather. Eligible losses may include those determined by FSA to have been caused by wildfires, hurricanes, floods, blizzards, tropical storms, tornadoes, lightning, extreme heat and extreme cold. Producers will be required to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent.

- **Tree Assistance Program (TAP)** – provides assistance to eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers for qualifying tree, shrub and vine losses due to natural disasters including excessive wind and qualifying drought.

- **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)** – provides emergency relief for losses due to feed or water shortages, disease, adverse weather or other conditions which are not adequately addressed by other disaster programs. ELAP covers physically damaged or destroyed livestock feed that was purchased or mechanically harvested forage or feedstuffs intended for use as feed for the producer’s eligible livestock. In order to be considered eligible, harvested forage must be baled; forage that is only cut, raked or windrowed is not eligible. ELAP also covers up to 150 lost grazing days in instances when a producer has been forced to remove livestock from a grazing pasture and for beekeepers, ELAP covers colony losses. Producers must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent.

- **Emergency Loan Program** – available to producers with agriculture operations located in a county under a primary or contiguous Presidential or Secretarial disaster designation. These low interest loans help producers recover from production and physical losses.

- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** – provides emergency funding for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate land severely damaged by natural disasters; includes fence loss.

- **HayNet** – is an internet-based Hay and Grazing Net Ad Service allowing farmers and ranchers to share “Need Hay ads and “Have Hay” ads online. Farmers also can use another feature to post advertisements for grazing land, specifically ads announcing the availability of grazing land or ads requesting a need for land to graze. [www.fsa.usda.gov/haynet](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/haynet).

For more information on these programs, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/disaster](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/disaster) or contact your local FSA office.
Family farmers take pride in being rooted in their land. Decades of parents, grandparents and children growing food together, while cherishing community life, are the foundation of American agriculture.

Gene and Jane Paul are part of that foundation. The couple were both born and raised in rural Delavan and continue to live on Gene’s family farm, which his parents bought in 1936. They were Minnesota Farmers Union members, just like Gene and Jane are today.

As a teenager, Gene thought of three career paths for himself: “Farmer, priest or accountant.” Instead, he’s ended up working with the National Farmers Organization for the past 50 years, a group that Farmers Union works closely with. He is a past state and national president of NFO and currently a policy consultant. He’s lent his expertise to many MFU Lobby Days and National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-ins. And he does what he does because he knows our world is a better place with more family farmers.

“Farmers deserve a fair price for what they have to sell, and it’s a matter of social justice keeping them out here and making sure they get a fair price,” he said.

It’s his lifelong commitment to these values that earned Gene the National Farmers Union Meritorious Service Award to Humanity this year at the NFU Convention.

Renowned expertise

Gene and Jane got married in 1959 and took over the farm. At the time, it was a dairy farm. That background made Gene a good candidate to work in the NFO’s dairy department when he began employment there in 1968. They also raised hogs and grain, as well as six children: Judy, Joanne, Jackie, Jerry, Jan and Joe.

“They are all interested in the farm, but not in coming back to farm,” Jane said.

Jerry was the only one to express serious interest in taking over the farm, but sadly he died about 30 years ago when he was hit by a car in Minneapolis. The other five are scattered across Minnesota and successful in their careers.

The Paul farmland is currently rented out to a couple of their neighbors.

“They’re a couple of former dairy farmers who recently sold their cows,” Gene said. “They used to do some work for me while I was traveling across the country with NFO.” These travels included many trips to Washington, D.C. Gene became more active on the legislative front during the 1980s and spent time on Capitol Hill, where he’d also see people from Farmers Union. He noticed the ways the two organizations could work together. Notably, when he was state president for the Minnesota NFO, he connected with then-MFU President Cy Carpenter.

“We were at a meeting together in Mankato and realized we really hadn’t talked to each other,” Gene said. “We worked out a marketing agreement between Farmers Union and NFO. We had an arrangement that Farmers Union members could use the NFO livestock marketing program, and some of them did.”

Concern for the family farm

Like many of us, Gene is dismayed by today’s farm economy and its effect on family farmers.

“I don’t like to see this trend where we’re getting grain, pork, milk concentrated in just a few hands,” he said. “I don’t think that’s good for the country. I think that’s a food security issue, and I like to see family farmers in these various areas because they support the schools, the local businesses, keep the infrastructure going in our country.”

Agricultural consolidation was a big topic of discussion at the NFU Convention, where Gene led the prayer before the banquet prior to receiving the award.

Dairy supply management has also been on people’s minds. MFU policy supports it, and our colleagues at Wisconsin Farmers Union have been running the Dairy Together campaign since last summer. They have worked with NFO on researching the possibilities of supply management policy. Gene was instrumental in creating the policy proposal that’s part of the Dairy Togetherness Roadshow, coming to Minnesota on April 16.

“What we’ve been working on in dairy, we’ve been trying to do something because the price is too low,” he said. “But if we just work on price, the larger farmers will keep getting bigger. We need some kind of a structure that will get the small dairies on a level playing field with the bigger ones.

“That’s what I like about both organizations, they’re really working to keep family farmers out here. That’s what this country needs.”

Fulfilled by faith, art

Gene and Jane are active members of their local Catholic church. In the mid-1990s, as his work with NFO slowed down, Gene’s interest was piqued by the diocese’s bishop announcing the start of a deaconate program. He decided to take the path to become a deacon. That required attending a class one weekend a month for five years, which both he and Jane had to attend. Now ordained, he officiates weddings, funerals and baptisms, occasionally preaches and visits parish members who are sick. He’s also a member of Catholic Rural Life.

Jane, on the other hand, spent years running the farm while Gene traveled, and still does chores today with the plants and animals they keep for the love of it – sheep, pheasants, chickens, peacocks, apple trees, berries.

“We save them up for the kids so they can have them with their smoothies or whatever they’d like to do with them,” she said.

Just a sampling of some of Jane Paul’s beautifully decorated Easter eggs

She also sews and paints Easter eggs, which they display in their home.

Managing the stress

Having seen the toll of a depressed farm economy on their community, Gene and Jane are no strangers to the stresses in rural Minnesota right now. Gene encourages farmers to reach out where they can.

“They can call the Farm & Rural Helpline at MDA, get some help as far as thinking through the best ideas for their situation,” he said. “I think some of these programs that are part of the Farm Bill, they need to make sure they can get some help from that. It’s not the answer, it’s not going to solve all their problems, but if they can get some financial help from these programs, so be it.”

Congratulations again to Gene Paul on the NFU Meritorious Service Award to Humanity, and thank you for your dedication to MFU and family farmers.
**A monthly update from National Farmers Union**

**Trump budget ignores state of farm economy**

In mid-March, President Donald Trump released his fiscal year 2020 budget proposal. It marked the third straight year that the President's budget proposal includes steep cuts to farm, food and rural development programs. Though Congress is unlikely to adopt most of the President's recommendations, the budget reflects the administration's priorities for the coming year.

Under Trump's proposal, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) would receive 15 percent less funding in 2020 than 2019. Some departments would be hit harder than others; for instance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – also known as food stamps – would lose 20 percent of its budget.

This would theoretically be achieved by both switching the flexible EBT card to a prepackaged “Harvest Box” as well as by tightening existing work requirements further.

The White House also proposed cutting crop insurance and commodity program spending by $28 billion. These cuts would be achieved by changing eligibility criteria for commodity programs, capping maximum adjusted gross annual income at $500,000 and reducing the average premium subsidy for crop insurance from 62 percent to 48 percent.

The proposal deprioritizes spending across several other USDA agencies as well. Rural Development would lose 12 percent of its funding, largely from programs that assist with rural housing and economic development. The Rural Energy for America Program, a Farm Bill program that supports renewable energy production in rural communities, would lose all its mandatory funding. Furthermore, the proposal would eliminate the Conservation Stewardship Program.

“Despite the rapid decline in the farm economy, additional damages from self-inflicted trade disruptions, increasing demand for credit, overloaded farm hotlines and deteriorating infrastructure in rural communities, the White House called for significant cuts to the one department tasked with serving farm families, rural residents and those struggling with food insecurity,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “Major relief is needed to weather these tough times in agriculture. It’s time the President’s policy proposals and rhetoric acknowledge the financial pain in farm country.”

**Ethanol consumption declines, EPA issues E15 waiver**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a proposed rule in March that would allow for the year-round sale of E15, or gasoline blended with 15 percent ethanol. E15 has previously been banned during summer months due to concerns about smog, despite evidence that E15 and E10 have comparable effects on air quality. The timing of the proposed rule will hopefully allow EPA to issue a final rule by June 1, thus allowing for the summertime use of E15.

Because higher level blends of ethanol, like E15, play an important role in cutting into corn surpluses and creating markets for farmers, NFU has long advocated for policies that expand their use. However, it is important to note that even if year-round E15 is implemented promptly, it will do little to offset the EPA’s ongoing misappropriation of small-refinery waivers, which have allowed refineries owned by multi-national corporations to shirk blending requirements under the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

According to the Renewable Fuels Association, ethanol use dropped by 103 million gallons last year, marking the first time consumption has decreased since 1998.

In total, the Trump Administration waivers have eliminated demand for at least 2.6 billion gallons of ethanol. To add insult to injury, on March 14, National Agriculture Day, EPA announced that it had approved five additional petitions for RFS waivers from the 2017 compliance year.

“The actions on the part of the Trump administration to subvert the will of Congress, undermine the positive growth of the U.S. biofuels industry and destroy demand for U.S. farm products are appalling,” Johnson said. “The handing out of these waivers to large corporations must end immediately, and the demand that has been destroyed to date must be accounted for in future RFS obligations.”

**Appropriations bill funds Farm Bill programs, delays ERS/NIFA move**

Congress thwarted another government shutdown by passing an appropriations bill in mid-February.

*Chippewa Valley Ethanol Company in Benson*
In addition to providing funding for nine government agencies – including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission – through Sept. 30, the bill has other significant implications for food and agriculture. Perhaps most notably, it delays the proposed relocation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Economic Research Service (ERS), pending thorough justification, including cost-benefit analysis, from the USDA. Additionally, the bill indefinitely postpones the proposed reorganization of ERS under the Office of the Chief Economist. Both the relocation and reorganization were opposed by several agricultural organizations, including NFU, due to concerns that it would undermine the functions and objectivity of both agencies.

Several programs NFU advocated for in the 2018 Farm Bill received funding through the spending bill. It appropriates $2 million for a pilot program like the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN). This will serve as an on-ramp for full implementation of the program in 2020. Furthermore, the Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP), which funds food safety training and education for small and mid-sized producers and processors, will receive $8 million, a $1 million increase over FY18 appropriated funds. The bill similarly provides $15 million, plus $2.5 million for technical assistance, for the Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) program, which provides competitively awarded grants to establish or develop value-added producer-owned businesses. This is in addition to the $17.5 million in mandatory funds for this program provided by the 2018 Farm Bill’s Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP).

The bill also directs USDA and FDA to formalize a joint framework for regulating cell-based protein production within 60 days of enactment. This decision aligns with NFU’s support for joint regulation and will ensure continued progress in USDA’s and FDA’s efforts to oversee these products.

The Washington Corner can be found at www.nfu.org/corner.
The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has extended its “Crisis Connection” telephone hotline service for another year. The program has renamed the service Farm & Rural Helpline, with the toll-free number (833) 600-2670. You are encouraged to call this line if you need any kind of assistance. It’s available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

If you or any farmers you know would like to speak with Ted Matthews, the state rural mental health specialist based out of MnSCU, his number is (320) 266-2390. He meets with farmers one-on-one and free of charge. No insurance card, paperwork or referral is necessary.

**Farm Advocates**

Farm Advocates provide one-on-one assistance for Minnesota farmers who face crisis caused by either a natural disaster or financial problems. They understand the needs of agricultural families and communities. They are trained and experienced in agricultural lending practices, mediation, lender negotiation, farm programs, crisis counseling, disaster programs and recognize the need for legal and/or social services. Most Farm Advocates are MFU members.

The Farm Advocate Program has been supported by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture since 1984. There is no charge or fee for Farm Advocate assistance.

**Farm Advocates:**

- **Jan Boll**
  - Trail
  - (218) 268-4472

- **Bruce Lubitz**
  - Perham
  - (218) 346-4866

- **Connie Dykes**
  - Lake City
  - (651) 345-5149

- **David Ellisson**
  - Isle
  - (320) 676-3559

- **David Hesse**
  - Comfrey
  - (507) 877-3012

- **Dean Hetland**
  - Eagle Bend
  - (218) 639-9302

- **Dan Hunz**
  - Monticello
  - (320) 743-5660

- **Ruth Ann Karty**
  - Clarkfield
  - (320) 669-7135

- **George Bosselman**
  - Fostoria
  - (218) 200-9432

- **Steve Zenk**
  - Danube
  - (320) 894-2517

[www.mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates)

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**Cup N’ Saucer & Elm Creek Veggies**

**Oven Roasted Elm Creek Asparagus with Villa Rustica Olive Oil, Sauce Gribiche, Garlic Scape Pesto, Welcome Meats Bacon Powder N’ Cherry Lane Farms Micro Lemon Balm**

**Yield:** 4 servings as a side dish

**For asparagus:**

- 1 lb asparagus
- Villa Rustica olive oil
- salt, to taste
- fresh ground black pepper, to taste

Liberally coat asparagus in Villa Rustica olive oil (or any other high quality extra virgin olive oil) n’ season with salt and fresh ground black pepper. Lay asparagus on a baking sheet in a single layer n’ roast at 400°F for 5 minutes or until slightly browned n’ tender, depending on size of asparagus.

**For sauce gribiche:**

- 1/2 t salt
- 1 T Dijon mustard
- 1 T red wine vinegar
- 3 T olive oil
- 1 T capers
- 2 cornichons, finely chopped
- 1 hard-boiled egg, finely chopped
- 1 T chopped parsley
- pinch of red chili flakes
- freshly ground pepper

In a bowl, mix all ingredients together except parsley. Taste and adjust seasonings to your liking. When ready to serve, mix in parsley.

**For garlic scape pesto:**

- 1 cup finely chopped garlic scapes (or 2/3 cup finely chopped chives, plus 1/3 cup finely chopped garlic)
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup finely grated Parmesan
- 1/3 cup roasted, salted cashews

Pulse garlic scapes, oil, Parmesan n’ cashews in a food processor until finely chopped. Season with salt and pepper.

**For bacon powder:**

- 3 T bacon fat
- 1 cup tapioca maltodextrin
- salt, to taste

The process of transforming bacon fat into powder is very simple. First, ensure the bacon fat is chilled, but liquefied. Then, mix with tapioca maltodextrin in a food processor. To make a “fluffier” powder, add more tapioca maltodextrin. Season to taste with salt.

**To plate:**

First, place warmed roasted asparagus on the bottom of a serving dish. Top with sauce gribiche n’ garlic scape pesto. Garnish with bacon powder and fresh micro lemon balm.
Minnesota Farmers Union Leadership Camp is affordable and open to everyone, regardless of your connection to farming.

It’s all about helping young people become good citizens by planting the seeds of responsibility, leadership and cooperation in an environment where those qualities can grow and flourish. While at camp, participants have many opportunities to develop positive qualities through some of the simple day-to-day tasks. These activities provide a foundation for all campers to share the responsibility of making camp a fun, safe place to be, and develop cooperation skills that can last a lifetime.

Leadership and cooperation happen at all levels of Farmers Union Leadership Camp, and sometimes these skills are demonstrated in an act as simple as helping a younger camper with a craft project or assembling a costume to wear at a theme night. Campers develop strong leadership roles by participating in groups where campers are taught the importance of legislation and how it can affect their community, and how to become an effective leader. Farmers Union Leadership Campers can make a difference in their communities.

Farmers Union strives to provide an environment that continually fosters young people. One of the many ways the organization achieves this is by allowing campers to take an active role in shaping the educational component of camp. During the year, the Youth Advisory Council, elected by their peers at Senior Camp, discuss, select and build the base for the annual educational theme.

But camp isn’t only about education. It’s also about providing a safe environment where campers can hang out, be kids and have fun. Campers get to sing at campfires and dress up in crazy costumes for theme nights. They can swim, play games, go on nature hikes and much more.

Most of all, campers can meet other young people from throughout the state, both urban and rural, with whom they can build lifelong friendships.

### Weeklong Camps

**Northern Elementary Camp (Ages 8-11)**
June 18-22 (Mon-Fri): Farmers Union Lake Sarah Campground near Erskine

**Northern Junior Camp (Ages 11-14)**
June 24-28 (Mon-Fri): Farmers Union Lake Sarah Campground near Erskine

**Southern Elementary Camp (Ages 8-11)**
July 16-20 (Tues-Sat): at Sibley State Park near New London

**July 22-26 (Mon-Fri): at Sibley State Park near New London**

**July 28- Aug 2 (Sun-Fri): at Sibley State Park near New London**

### Day Camps

- June 10-14 and July 8-12
- Various locations in Minnesota

Early bird rates (available through May 1):
- $90 Elementary
- $115 Junior/Senior High

For camp updates, check our website: [www.mfu.org/camp](http://www.mfu.org/camp).
SAVE THE DATE

MFU Women’s Conference

June 8 • 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

Minnesota Farmers Union will host a Women’s Conference on June 8 at L’Etoile Du Nord Winery!

Join us for a day of connecting with women agriculturalists from around the state, empowering one another. You will not only learn technical skills, but build relationships too.

L’Etoile Du Nord Winery is located at 16451 NW Irene Ct. NE in Parkers Prairie.

Dairy Togetherness Roadshow

Farm groups from across the country are joining together this spring for the Dairy Togetherness Roadshow, a series of meetings aimed at rebuilding a viable dairy economy for family farms.

In conjunction with the meetings, the Dairy Togetherness coalition will share data models on a two-tiered pricing proposal. The groups also will unveil research on an analysis of selected dairy programs to reduce volatility in milk prices and farm income.

The research, conducted by Mark Stephenson from the University of Wisconsin and Chuck Nicholson from Cornell University, makes a compelling case for Supply Management:

- Increased net farm operating income
- Increased average milk price
- Reduced volatility
- Reduced rate of farm losses
- Reduced government expenditures

The Minnesota edition of the Dairy Togetherness Roadshow will take place on April 16 at 10 a.m. at the Greenwald Pub in Greenwald.

Invite your friends and neighbors! Lunch will follow the meeting.

RSVP is requested at www.dairytogether.com or by contacting MFU Membership & Outreach Director Bruce Miller at (651) 288-4064 or bruce@mfu.org.

Nominees needed for 2020 Beef Board

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service is requesting nominations by June 17 to fill positions that will become vacant on the Cattlemen’s Beef Promotion and Research Board (Board) in January 2020. There will be one position open for Minnesota.

Any beef producer who owns cattle or any importer that imports cattle or beef may be nominated. Producers and importers must be nominated by a USDA certified producer organization (of which MFU is one) and submit a completed application. USDA will select appointees from the nominated producers and importers. Nomination forms and a list of certified producer organizations in each state or unit are available on the Cattlemen’s Beef Board page on the AMS website. If you have suggestions for whom MFU should nominate, please contact us.

The Cattleman’s Beef Board is authorized by the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 and is composed of 99 members representing 34 separate states, five units of geographically grouped states and one importer unit.

For more information, contact Barbara Josselyn at (202) 690-2611 or Barbara.Josselyn@usda.gov or fax (202) 720-1125. You may also send mail to: Research and Promotion Division; Livestock and Poultry Program; AMS, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Room 2610-S, STOP 0251; Washington, D.C. 20250-0251.
Get social with Minnesota Farmers Union!

Follow Minnesota Farmers Union on social media to find out about events, policy happenings, photos and more.

Facebook: Minnesota Farmers Union
Twitter: @mnfarmersunion
Instagram: mnfarmersunion

Tag us in posts we should see and we’ll like and share them.

Rural Voices Discussions

We encourage all members to attend the discussion nearest them, and to bring family and friends. The Rural Voices Discussion are free and open to the public. You are welcome to discuss any topic you feel is important to family farmers and rural Minnesotans. These are important for us to get more ideas about how we can help advocate for you. ▲

Apply for the 2019-20 NFU Beginning Farmer Institute

The application period for National Farmers Union’s Beginning Farmer Institute is open

National Farmers Union’s Beginning Farmer Institute (BFI) is a free training program that prepares beginning farmers of all ages and operation types for a successful future in agriculture.

Participants will attend three in-person learning sessions over the course of the year, one each in Washington, D.C., Northern California, and Savannah, Georgia. The sessions include farm tours as well as seminars on a variety of beginning farmers issues, such as business planning, USDA programs and acquiring land. Each year’s curriculum will be tailored to the participants’ needs as determined by a pre-attendance survey. ▲

Applications for the 2019-2020 BFI cohort are open through 4/15/19. Learn more and apply: nfu.org/education/beginning-farmer-institute/

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 10 • Pine County Farmers Union Meeting • 12 p.m. • American Legion, Pine City • Speaker: MFU Government Relations Director Stu Lourey (invited) FFI: Pine County President Kay Hills, (715) 635-9521

April 15 • Crow Wing County Farmers Union meeting • 12 p.m. • Northwind Grille, Brainerd • FFI: Crow Wing County President Steven Koering, (218) 251-8650

April 16 • Dairy Together Roadshow • 10 a.m.–12 p.m. • Greenwald Pub, Greenwald FFI or RSVP: MFU Membership & Outreach Director Bruce Miller, (651) 288-4064 or bruce@mfu.org

April 28-30 • Minnesota FFA Convention • University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

June 8 • MFU Women’s Conference • L’Etoile Du Nord Winery, Parkers Prairie FFI: MFU Programming Director Michelle Medina, (651) 288-4096 or michelle@mfu.org; MFU Public Relations & Communications Director Brita Moore, (651) 288-4068 or brita@mfu.org

Call us at (651) 639-1223 if you have any questions.

April 5 • Saint Peter • 10 a.m.-Noon The Woods Golf Course 43779 Golf Course Rd., St. Peter

April 8 • Winthrop • 10 a.m.-Noon Hahn’s Dining and Lounge 206 N Main St., Winthrop

April 17 • Little Falls/Alexandria Location TBD

April 26 • Cannon Falls • 10 a.m.-Noon Artisan Plaza 1223 4th St. S, Cannon Falls

April 12 • Granite Falls • 10 a.m-Noon Pioneer Public Television One Pioneer Drive, Granite Falls

April 17 • Little Falls/Alexandria Location TBD

April 26 • Cannon Falls • 10 a.m.-Noon Artisan Plaza 1223 4th St. S, Cannon Falls
Tax season is upon us. Do you need an IRA or similar retirement plan? We offer a number of Annuity options that could benefit you at tax time.

Our Agents can offer you guidance on these and many other financial planning products with options from reputable insurance companies that have strong financial ratings.

Contact one of our knowledgeable Agents and make your money work for you.