Happy Holidays from all of us at Minnesota Farmers Union!
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More about Bruce can be found on page 7, with photos from all the work he did. Memorials may be sent to the MFU State Office.

**Thanks for a great convention**

Despite missing Bruce, our annual convention was another success. Delegates engaged in cooperative, respectful policy debate as they do year after year. This is the epitome of our grassroots efforts to build a platform that supports all family farmers and rural Minnesotans. Members debated issues including agricultural anti-trust, renewable energy policy, drainage policy, transportation, health care, state ethanol requirements and much more.

**Vice President elections**

I want to congratulate Bryan Klabunde on his re-election as MFU Vice President. I also really want to thank Anne Schwagerl, Deborah Mills and Noreen Thomas who each stepped forward to run for the Vice President position as well.

We employed a weighted ranked choice voting procedure according to the MFU Bylaws. This means that on the ballot, the voters ranked their choices 1, 2, 3 and 4 in this case, as there were four candidates. To win, a candidate must reach the majority threshold of 50% + 1 vote. When the votes are counted, if no one meets the 50% plus one threshold, the candidate with the least amount of votes drops out and the voters’ second choices are factored in for the remaining candidates. Ballots are reallocated in this fashion until one candidate meets or exceeds the majority threshold.

It was a very close election. Our majority threshold was 999 votes. After three rounds of reallocation, Bryan Klabunde received 1025 votes and Anne Schwagerl received 889 votes. Because Bryan exceeded the majority threshold of 999 votes, Bryan was declared the winner.

**Happy Holidays!**

From all of us at Minnesota Farmers Union, I wish you a happy and peaceful holiday season, surrounded by your loved ones doing what matters most to you.

**Remembering Bruce Miller**

At our 78th (consecutive) annual MFU Convention last month, one person was missing: Bruce Miller, our longtime Membership, Outreach and Minnesota Cooks Director. He passed away on Saturday, Nov. 9 after an illness. The outpouring of memories of Bruce we’ve heard from you and leaders around Minnesota and the country has been incredible. It’s clear that he meant as much to many of you as he did to me and our team. We held a Celebration of Life for him on Nov. 26 – thanks to all of you who attended. We also paid tribute to him at the convention, including with an auction item from Forager Brewery, one of the Minnesota Cooks restaurants he loved.

Many of the speakers, including Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Commissioner of Agriculture Thom Petersen, U.S. Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN) and Reps. Angie Craig (D-MN02) and Tom Emmer (R-MN06), mentioned Miller in their remarks and recognized his strong advocacy for family farmers.

Another outcome of the convention was election of President and Vice President. I’m grateful to have been re-elected to continue serving Minnesota family farmers and rural communities in this capacity. We have to be at the table for policy makers to know what we stand for and what it’s been like out in farm country. I’m committed to representing MFU members and MFU policy in all discussions so our voices are heard.
Thanks to our Elections and Credentials Committee for handling this process fairly and smoothly. If you have any further questions about ranked choice voting, please reach out to our Operations Assistant, Molly Jansen, at molly@mfu.org.

**NFU Convention Delegates**

Members elected ten delegates to represent Minnesota at the National Farmers Union Convention, which takes place March 1-3 in Savannah, Ga. They are:

- Erik Hatlestad of New London
- Brent Imker of Lamberton
- James Kanne of Franklin
- Sarah Klabunde of Waubun
- Steven Koering of Fort Ripley
- John Larsen of Mantorville
- Deborah Mills of Lake City
- Melissa Roach of Cook
- Roger Schaefer of Frazee
- Harmon Wilts of Kerkhoven

**Keynote speaker highlights issues with USMCA**

The keynote speaker at the convention banquet was Lori Wallach, the Director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, speaking on how international trade agreements too often disadvantage U.S. farmers. She brought up some important statistics that support Farmers Union's policy positions on trade and reminded attendees of the shortcomings of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), including the problem with the prescription drug provisions in it. She specifically mentioned Rep. Craig and Rep. Dean Phillips (D-MN03), thanking them for consistently pushing back on the prescription drugs issue. MFU thanks them for their work on it as well.

The prescription drug provision was inserted by the United States during the trade negotiations. This provision would provide ten years of market exclusivity for biologic drugs to the pharmaceutical industry, which shows the power and influence of the industry. With the high costs of health care being unsustainable, it is important to get this provision fixed.

One thing we have to remember is that the current North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which the U.S., Canada and Mexico are operating under is still in place. Also, under NAFTA, there are already zero tariffs on major agricultural commodities being exported and imported by the three countries. Everyone seems to be in agreement and working to get the remaining concerns addressed and taken care of, with the ultimate passage of the USMCA late this year or early next year.

**Working with Gov. Walz on biofuels**

I was recently appointed to Gov. Walz's Council on Biofuels, an important opportunity to represent family farmers in the administration. Increasing the use of homegrown renewable biofuels has long been a priority for MFU and NFU, and I'm grateful that Gov. Walz has created this council.

Gov. Walz has also been serving as the Chair of the Governors' Biofuels Coalition since shortly after his election, and he has stepped up in a big way to press the administration on the issue. Along with coalition Vice Chair, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, he has written numerous letters to President Trump, calling for action to mitigate the damage caused by the unnecessary small refinery exemptions (SREs), which have negated billions of gallons of ethanol demand under the present administration's Environmental Protection Agency. The two governors also recently submitted a letter to the President urging him to consider E30 as a way to reduce the amount of harmful aromatics used in gasoline.

"The average gallon of gasoline is composed of nearly 30 percent toxic aromatics in order to increase octane required by today’s engines,” Walz and Noem wrote. “As oil prices have risen, aromatic costs have followed, with consumers paying the price. Aromatics are the most expensive, least energy efficient and most carbon intensive and toxic part of gasoline.

“One practical and cost-effective way to reduce aromatics is to use 30 percent ethanol
blends to reduce particulate matter and black carbon emissions by 45 percent, and hydro-carbon pollution by more than 20 percent.” Renewable fuels such as E30 are good for the whole country, and I’m grateful that the leaders of the Governors’ Biofuels Coalition are making that clear to the Trump administration. We are proud to work with Gov. Walz on his Biofuels Council and advocate for this important market that benefits rural and urban people alike.

**MFU, Birchwood to open new restaurant**

As I announced at the convention banquet, MFU is delighted to have a new opportunity in the restaurant business. Recently, Brenda Langton, the co-owner of Spoonriver in Minneapolis, announced her intention to retire. She reached out to Tracy Singleton, owner of the Birchwood Cafe, MFU’s longtime collaborator at the Farmers Union Coffee Shop at the Minnesota State Fair, wondering if she was interested in taking over the space. Tracy then reached out to me about building on the collaboration.

I have been working on this project for more than a year. After conversations with Brenda, Tracy, the MFU Executive Committee, consultant Jeff Larson and many others, and with approval from the MFU Full Board of Directors, we’ve officially signed a lease to take over the space and formed a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) with Birchwood as the MFU/Birchwood Alliance. The restaurant’s riverside space at 750 South 2nd St, Minneapolis, will focus on local, seasonal and sustainably sourced ingredients, benefitting Minnesota family farmers and eaters alike.

As Bruce showed us through his leadership of Minnesota Cooks, restaurants are a good market option for many family farmers. It is exciting to take this opportunity to re-connect people to their farmers through good food, just as we’ve been doing at the State Fair, and in a time where the average Minnesotan is multiple generations removed from the family farm and might not know much about agriculture and where their food comes from.

The restaurant will open in spring 2020, with a name and menu to be determined. Stay posted for details.

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**FUJA AGENT HIGHLIGHT:**

**Matt Peterson**  
(507) 726-2961  
134 S Main Street, Lake Crystal  
office@petersoninsag.com

**Why is working with Farmers Union Insurance Agency & MFU important to you?** Farmers Union Insurance Agency has expanded immensely in the almost ten years of partnership I have had with them. From technology and resources, to the wide variety of products and companies I now have access to. This provides me with the opportunity to work well with new and current customers alike because of the options we now have available.

**What community organizations are you passionate about?** I currently serve on the Board of Directors for Crystal Waters Project, which is dedicated to improving the water quality in the Lake Crystal Watershed. I recently completed a four-year term on the Lake Crystal Chamber of Commerce and seven years as Secretary of Masonic Bethel Lodge #103. I am a current member of Lake Crystal Ducks Unlimited, Minnesota Farmers Union, the Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial ISD Athletic Booster Club, the LCWM Wrestling Booster Club and the Lake Crystal Area Fastpitch Association.

**Please tell us a little bit about your family life.** I grew up on a crop and Duroc hog farm just north of Lake Crystal and still have family members involved in some capacity of farming. I still live in the Lake Crystal area with my wife, Holly, and daughter, Izzy. We enjoy camping with friends and family during the summer months, although we are spending more time at the ballfields with our daughter now as I help coach her softball team. With most of our family still living in the area, we spend a lot of time with them.

**What is your #1 concern when reviewing and selling farm insurance?** Working with farmers to understand what risks they actually have with their farm operation is critical, from the valuations to additional coverage needed on equipment and buildings, to liability exposures that are created by the daily farm activities. Having grown up on a farm, I remember how things “used to be” but in today’s world things have changed greatly, and it’s important to keep up with those changes.

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Matt joined Farmers Union Insurance Agency in March of 2010, and is licensed in Property, Casualty, Life, Accident and Health. Follow Farmers Union Insurance Agency on Facebook and Twitter at @MNFUIA, and visit our website at www.mnfui.com for more information about our Agents and the insurance services we can provide.

Photo © 2019 Katie Cannon Photography
It was great to be able to catch up with many of my MFU friends recently at the 78th Annual Convention in Minneapolis. I know many of you were still busy with harvest and were not able to attend. With the challenges this harvest presented, it was certainly understandable. I look forward to catching up with you soon.

The holiday season is now upon us. Though it may not be the optimal time to locally convene, it doesn’t mean that it isn’t the time to connect, put our heads together and start to organize for 2020. One of the objectives I have for the upcoming year is to continue jumpstarting local discussions, events or whatever you may have on your mind, around the state, throughout the year, continuing our advocacy for what is fair and right for family farmers and rural communities. But to do this I will need your help. We are lucky to have such great leadership throughout our organization, so let’s put it to good use. Over the past year I have had several opportunities to collaborate with members on different events, and I have talked with several others that have ideas on how to energize their local MFU membership. I have volunteered to help with many different events representing local Farmers Union organizations, ranging from drive arounds, local meetings and health fairs, even volunteering to help Brian Rohrenback and Linda Larson sell bratwursts at Von Hanson’s to benefit MFU’s scholarship funds. Contact me at 218-556-0634 or bryan@mfu.org. I’m looking forward to hearing from you about your ideas for the organization. At this last convention there were a lot of conversations about this very sort of activity to spur new interest in MFU and invite members to get involved in new ways.

I am sure that there are not many across the state that are going to miss the past year in agriculture. We all know that it’s going to be a tough loan renewal season. Financials across the ag sector are going to present great challenges to many. Remember there are resources available to help in these rough financial conditions. Also, it’s the time of year that families gather for the holidays. Hopefully you can take time and spend it with loved ones, enjoy their company and lift each other’s spirits.

Happy Holidays.

BRYAN KLABUNDE
VICE PRESIDENT
bryan@mfu.org

The 40 Square Difference
By Char Vrieze, 40 Square Executive Director

As an independent, agricultural cooperative offering health plans, 40 Square Cooperative Solutions is committed to helping farm families, agribusinesses and their employees get access to comprehensive health plan options. “Member-owned and member-governed” means 40 Square members are part of an empowered community of Minnesotans working together to find common solutions that help curb rising health plan prices, gain access to local doctors and tap into multiple health plan offerings without sacrificing quality. Any health care dollars left over in the co-op’s reserve at the end of the year go back to members in the form of enhancing benefits, decreasing premiums or curbing premium increases, not in the pocket of a large third-party company looking to gain profits.

When a member enrolls in a 40 Square plan, they get collective buying power that is like employer-group style coverage. They have seven health plan options that are designed specifically for farm families, as well as businesses that directly support production agriculture, and their employees. Health savings account-eligible plans are available as well. Benefits include a large network with providers in rural areas, plus a national network for individuals who travel or might doctor over state lines.

40 Square is proud to be the only independent agricultural health plan cooperative in the state and is committed to working on behalf of its members through education and resources to stabilize health plan costs and enhance every member’s overall health.

Open enrollment for the 2020 Plan Year is occurring now through Dec. 31!

To learn how 40 Square can benefit your family or employees, visit www.40Square.coop, contact info@40square.coop or call 844-205-9579.
The MFU family lost one of its members this month. Bruce Miller, who had been with the MFU staff since 2007, most recently as Membership, Outreach and Minnesota Cooks™ Director, passed away on Nov. 9, 2019. He was a friend to us all and a true advocate for rural Minnesotans. His Celebration of Life was held on Nov. 26 at Carpenters Local 322 in St. Paul.

Growing up on a dairy farm in Brooten in central Minnesota, then earning a degree in Political Science from the University of Minnesota-Morris, Bruce had a passion for family farmers and rural communities. He dedicated his life to working for social justice, building relationships all over Minnesota that ultimately benefited MFU as an organization. We were lucky to have him as a part of our team and as a friend.

Bruce was also an actor and a member of the film community. Under his guidance, the Farm Fresh Road Trip show on Twin Cities Public Television won an Upper Midwest Regional Emmy, and this year, he helped get MFU’s State Fair videos nominated for that award.

Bruce was well-regarded among family farmers, at the State Capitol, in the media and in food circles. He was always full of ideas for ways to increase MFU’s outreach to all kinds of people, and he served as the face of the ever-growing Minnesota Cooks program. At the countless trade shows and events MFU attends each year, you could count on Bruce to show up there and have a conversation with you.

Our hearts are heavy as we miss Bruce Miller. We hope to carry his legacy forward for years to come.

Memorials may be sent to the MFU State Office.
Updates to MFU’s policy that were debated and adopted at State Convention included those related to:

- Expanding the acres in conservation programs;
- Cracking down on corporate consolidation in agriculture;
- Opposing tariffs – particularly those that negatively affect farm families;
- Protecting farmers from losses when marketing facilities – like grain elevators – go under;
- Getting more kids introduced to farming through Ag in the Classroom;
- Increasing Minnesota’s ethanol mandate to 15 percent;
- Promoting on-farm renewable energy production from wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass; and
- Supporting immigration policy that recognizes and respects the role of immigrants in our ag communities.

Proposed changes that were subject to debate convention weekend had already been voted on and approved at county conventions across the state. From there, they were referred to MFU’s policy committee, who spent a weekend incorporating each proposed change into the policy document in the form of an amendment. Finally, each section of the policy as amended was brought up for debate before the floor of the convention.

On the floor, some amendments to policy were changed or voted down outright. However, while members debated passionately about issues they care deeply about, this discussion always remained respectful. In the end, this debate strengthens our organization and is reflective of our grassroots mission. Thank you to all of our delegates for their good work on this, and to MFU intern Marta Zurn for tracking policy debate on the document on-screen as changes were suggested.

If you have any questions about this process or MFU’s policy positions in general, don’t hesitate to reach out at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-3047.
Agricultural Markets
Whereas last year, Minnesota’s family farmers faced a median on-farm income of $26,000, the lowest since researchers started collecting data in the 1980s;
Whereas farm income is dependent on strong agricultural markets – local, regional, national and international – that help farmers get a fair price for their products, and by extension their labor;
Whereas the strength of these markets is critical with the host of challenges farmers are facing, including unpredictable weather, high input prices and the high cost of health care;
Whereas the vitality of Minnesota’s rural communities is linked with the financial health and viability of family farms;
Now therefore be it resolved that MFU supports that the state and federal governments take swift and substantial steps to repair, sustain and build upon agricultural markets that help ensure fair prices for farmers, including:
1) Rebuilding relationships with trading partners abroad, particularly with China, and bringing stability back to our nation’s role as a reliable and trustworthy international agricultural trading partner;
2) Promoting the use of homegrown biofuels, including by restoring blend requirements consistent with the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), to promote clean air, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help stabilize the ethanol market;
3) Investing in local and regional food systems and value-added opportunities that create new opportunities for farmers and help create wealth in rural communities; and
4) Expanding conservation programs that help address chronic oversupply, boosting the prices farmers can get for their products in addition to improving the quality of our environment.

Health care
Whereas no person should go bankrupt or risk losing their family farm or business because they cannot afford health care;
Whereas family farmers are small business owners who disproportionately purchase health insurance on the individual market, are hit hard by high premiums and lack choice between health plans in rural areas;
Whereas record-low median farm income leaves many farm families struggling to afford their health insurance and health care;
Whereas Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) policy calls for the state and federal government to create a comprehensive single-payer health plan that ensures all people have health care;
Whereas MFU policy supports the right for states to establish public health care options, like the OneCare buy-in option introduced by Governor Tim Walz;
Now therefore be it resolved that MFU supports the efforts of Gov. Walz to create a public buy-in option that will help control costs for farmers, rural families and people across the state while continuing to advocate for single-payer; and
Furthermore, as high prescription drug prices are a principal driver of high health care costs;
Be it further resolved that MFU strongly supports that the state and federal governments take bold action to hold big pharmaceutical companies accountable and bring down drug prices through efforts such as:
1) Opposing the inclusion of pharmaceutical provisions in international trade deals, like the USMCA, that would prevent congressional action to lower drug prices; and
2) Using the buying power of public programs or any expansion thereof to negotiate lower prices.

Bonding Bill
Whereas every other year, the Minnesota Legislature passes a bonding bill that defines how the state will invest in critical projects and programs through borrowing; and
Whereas the tough state of the farm economy necessitates that the legislature crafts this bill with farmers in mind and at the table;
Now therefore be it resolved that MFU calls on the Minnesota Legislature to pass a bonding bill that makes significant and needed investments that help strengthen the agricultural economy and rural communities, including by:
1) Ensuring that the Rural Finance Authority (RFA) has the funds needed to help small- and mid-sized farmers start and reinvest in their farm businesses;
2) Investing in quality, high-speed broadband infrastructure that connects rural businesses and residents;
3) Investing in emergency-preparedness and response capabilities as they relate to the food and ag sector in order to make our state’s producers more resilient;
4) Investing to upgrade the organic facilities at the University of Minnesota Morris dairy facility; and
5) Upgrading the processing facility at the Northeast Regional Correctional Center.
MFU 2019 Award Winners

These individuals were honored at the 78th Annual Minnesota Farmers Union Convention for their accomplishments.

Dedicated Service to Farmers Union Award: Dori Klein, former MFU Membership & Outreach staff member

Dori Klein joined the Membership & Outreach Staff of Minnesota Farmers Union in 2006, covering counties in southeast Minnesota through the end of 2018. She was often commended for her work in planning day camps and strengthening MFU youth education in her area, bringing young people out to dairy farms and connecting them with agriculture. Before working with MFU, Dori taught college courses and workshops. She lives with her husband Duane on a farm in rural Zumbro Falls. They have two children and two grandchildren.

Dedicated Service to Farmers Union Award: Don Knutson, former Green View, Inc. Executive Director

Don Knutson began his career with MFU in 1981, after he spent six years as a U.S. Navy Air Traffic Controller. He served as Congressional Representative and Assistant to the President before stepping into his role at Green View in 1991, where he has overseen the development of our non-profit that has hired more than 9,000 employees, performed tens of millions of hours of quality work at public facilities in Minnesota and welcomed hundreds of millions of visitors to state waysides. Don retired from Green View in October 2019 and looks forward to traveling and spending time with his family.

Minnesota Rep. Paul Anderson, R-Starbuck

Rep. Anderson was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 2008 after serving as a county commissioner, township officer and school board member. He is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and a fourth-generation family farmer, raising corn, soybeans and wheat in Pope County. He currently serves on the Agriculture and Food Finance and Policy Division, the Environment and Natural Resources Policy Division and is the lead on the Greater Minnesota Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division. During the 2017-18 biennium, Anderson chaired the Agriculture Policy Committee. He has been endorsed by numerous rural and agricultural groups during his time in the Minnesota House. He and his wife, Faith, have been married 48 years, have three grown children and four grandchildren.

Minnesota Rep. Jeanne Poppe, DFL-Austin

Rep. Poppe is the Chair of the Minnesota House Agriculture and Food Finance & Policy Division. She lives in Austin, Minn., and represents House District 27B in southern Minnesota. She is an educator and a counselor, with degrees in sociology and counseling. Now in her 8th term in the Minnesota House, she also serves on the Greater Minnesota Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division, Higher Education Finance and Policy Division, Housing Finance and Policy Division and the Ways and Means committee.

Rodney Allebach, Farmers Union Insurance Agency President and General Manager

Rodney Allebach joined Farmers Union Insurance Agency as a licensed Agent in the Menahga office in 1981, earned his Certified Insurance Counselor national designation in 1990, and became a District Manager in 1992. In April of 2012, he was elected as President and General Manager of FUIA, replacing Jim Frederickson, and has consistently grown Agency production by 8-10% annually. He has enjoyed mentoring and watching new Agents and employees grow in their careers. Rodney has been passionately involved in Minnesota Farmers Union and the perpetuation of the family farm throughout the years, earning special recognition in 1982 for his leadership in MFU, and participating in local and national legislative events throughout his nearly four-decade career. He has also served on many civic, business and church boards, including the St. Joseph Area Health Services Hospital Board, having served for 9 years. In his free time, Rodney enjoys traveling with his wife of 40 years, Linda. He will retire as President and General Manager at the end of 2019.

Dave Frederickson, Former MFU President, NFU President and Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture

Dave Frederickson grew up on a family farm near Murdock, Minn., where he farmed himself for many years with his wife, Kay, and daughters Anna and Emmy. He got involved in public policy in the 1970s, getting elected to the local school board, and later the Minnesota Senate, where he sponsored legislation mandating 10 percent ethanol to be blended in gasoline. In 1991, Dave was elected President of Minnesota Farmers Union, then in 2002, of National Farmers Union. After retiring from NFU in 2006, he joined the staff of U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, until then-Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton appointed him as Commissioner of Agriculture in 2011. He served in that role for both of Dayton’s terms, retiring in 2019.
Register now for the upcoming grower trainings brought to you by the MDA Produce Safety Program and the University of Minnesota Extension along with other partners. Attendees will learn food safety practices, Produce Safety rule requirements and answers to questions about the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety rule.

If your farm is not excluded or exempt from the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety rule, at least one supervisor or responsible party from your farm must complete a training course that uses FDA-recognized curriculum or an equivalent. The MN grower training course meets this requirement. The cost for the training is currently subsidized at $35 per attendee.

For more information on dates and locations of the Grower Trainings and to register online, please visit www.mda.state.mn.us/growertraining.

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.

Minnesota also has two rural mental health specialists you can speak to at any time if you need help. They meet with farmers one-on-one and free of charge. No paperwork or referral is necessary.

Southern MN: Ted Matthews, (320) 266-2390
Northern/central MN: Monica Kramer McConkey, (218) 280-7785

Farm & Rural Helpline

MFU President Wertish presenting Torchbearer Award to Lisette Amacher

The Torchbearer Award is the highest youth award given by Farmers Union. To become a Torchbearer a young person must complete four years of Senior camp and attend the National Farmers Union All-States Camp.

The 2019 Torchbearer recipients are:
Mercedes Lesmeister, McIntire
Isabella Brockhouse, Middle River
Sebastian Mott, Thief River Falls
Maria Fatz, Waubun
Jesse Kilen, Warren
Sydney Sanders, St Paul
Abigail Heacock, Grove City
Josiah Zapf, St Bonifacius
Lisette Amacher, St. Paul
Jaedin Ringler, Belgrade
Nicholas Foss, St. Bonifacius
Kylie Sieben, Eagan
Elizabeth Petersen, Wadena
Kaitlyn Rasmusen, Chaska
Brittany Rasmusen, Chaska
Anna Hren, Cottage Grove

Congratulations to all of these young people!
To see names of past Torchbearers, go to www.mfu.org/torchbearers.

In 1941 Minnesota Farmers Union presented their first Torchbearer Award to Verril Hagen of Polk County. Since then becoming a Torchbearer has marked the conclusion of a young adult’s work in the Farmers Union youth program and the beginning of their adult leadership role in Farmers Union. Today and every year since, we have honored that tradition, currently at the Annual MFU Convention banquet, where they each receive a plaque, recite the Torchbearer Pledge and light candles.
A monthly update from National Farmers Union

As 2019 comes to an end, family farmers and ranchers are still dealing with many of the same issues they were at the beginning of the year. Although the administration has come to a tentative trade deal with China, uncertainty still plagues agricultural export markets. Meat labeling continues to mislead and confuse consumers. And qualified and legal farm labor is dwindling, making it exceedingly difficult for some farmers to complete everyday tasks.

MFP helped wealthy, southeastern farms most

A minority staff report published by the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry highlights significant regional and financial inequities in the most recent round of Market Facilitation Program (MFP) payments.

MFP, which was designed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assist farmers and ranchers affected by international trade disputes, compensated most commodity grain producers based on a single county rate per planted acre. Although farmers in the North, Midwest, and West have experienced the greatest harm from trade disputes, 95 percent of counties receiving the highest payment rates are based in the Southeast. Even in adjacent counties, payment rates sometimes vary by two to three times, arbitrarily putting some farmers at a significant financial disadvantage.

Additionally, payments disproportionately helped large-scale operations. By some estimates, more than half of the first round of payments went to just one-tenth of the recipients. Since then, USDA doubled the payment limit for row crops from $125,000 to $250,000 and loosened income restrictions, paving the way for millionaires to claim an even larger share of assistance.

NFU was alarmed by the findings of the report, and urged the administration to find fairer, longer-term solutions to the difficulties caused by trade war.

“Trade assistance payments are not an economically sustainable way for farmers to make ends meet,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “We urge President Trump to work with Congress to establish policies that ensure that farmers no longer have to depend on outside help just to stay in business.”

Legislative measures would improve meat labeling

There is a great deal of confusion around meat labeling in the United States. Currently, country of origin labeling is required for several commodities, including fruit, vegetables, nuts, fish and chicken. However, as of 2015, it has been prohibited for beef, pork and lamb, meaning that consumers cannot identify where their meat comes from. To add to the confusion, beef that is raised outside of the United States but processed here can still carry a “Product of U.S.A.” label.

In the Senate, two measures were recently put forward to improve the accuracy of meat labeling. The first, introduced by Montana Senator Jon Tester, is a resolution to reinstate mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) for beef and pork. NFU has advocated for COOL for 35 years in order to provide more information for consumers and to allow American farmers to differentiate their products.

“Consumers deserve to know where their food comes from,” said Montana Farmers Union President Walter Schweitzer. “We are pleased to see the commitment on the part of Senator Tester to introduce this resolution.”

The second measure is a bill introduced by South Dakota Senators John Thune and Mike Rounds to limit “Product of U.S.A.” labeling to meat that was born, raised and slaughtered in the United States. NFU supports both efforts and will continue its decades-long fight for truth in labeling.

New bill a step towards a stable and fair farm workplace

A group of bipartisan Representatives, led by Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Dan Newhouse (R-WA), introduced a bill to reform the agricultural labor system in the United States. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which is the product of negotiations between a diverse array of agricultural stakeholders and farmworker advocates, includes provisions to both ensure a legal and stable workforce for family farmers and ranchers as well as protect the health and safety of farmworkers.

More specifically, the bill would make it easier for farmers to hire workers by simplifying the H-2A application process and increasing the availability of green cards and visas for year-round workers. It would also establish a program for workers who have been engaged in agricultural work for at least two years and plan to continue working in agriculture to earn legal status.

“It has become exceedingly difficult to find legal, qualified workers,” said NFU Vice President of Public Policy and Communications Rob Larew. “Without a workforce, farmers aren’t able to complete day-to-day work, forcing some to leave unharvested crops to rot in the field.”

He added that the organization has concerns on the other side of the equation as well.

“A large number of farmworkers are immigrants, a population that has historically been underserved and overlooked. These hardworking individuals who help us put food on our tables deserve greater protections and a pathway to citizenship.”

Because it would address the concerns of farmers and farmworkers, NFU supports the legislation and urged Congress to pass it swiftly.

NFU urges greater transparency in biofuels policy

In light of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) ongoing misappropriation of small refinery exemptions (SREs), the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change within the Committee on Energy and Commerce hosted a hearing on how those exemptions have undermined the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) and the American biofuels industry.

The exemptions have eliminated demand for 4 billion gallons of biofuels over the last three years. As a result, nearly 30 ethanol and biodiesel plants have halted production, stranding workers and cutting off an important market for farmers.

In addition to soliciting feedback on the waivers’ implications, the subcommittee is also considering H.R. 3006, a bill that would set an annual deadline for small refineries to petition for an exemption from the upcoming year’s volume requirements as well as require public disclosure of any information included in those petitions.

In written testimony, Larew emphasized the damage inflicted by the waivers.

“Family farmers have lost millions of dollars of hard-earned income, hundreds of rural Americans have lost their jobs, and rural communities across the country have lost local businesses that have contributed to economic growth.” In order to provide greater “transparency and predictability in the exemption granting process” in the future, he urged the subcommittee to support H.R. 3006. The Washington Corner can be found at www.nfu.org/corner.
After a difficult year on the farm with poor prices and uncooperative weather, our hope for our producers is that 2020 will bring better things. As this article goes to print, details of a general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are not known. Stay tuned and check your local FSA GovDelivery newsletter for details if interested in this program signup.

**ARC/PLC Signup Ongoing**
The 2019-2020 ARC/PLC Signup is going on in FSA offices. ARC provides income support payments on historical base acres when actual crop revenue declines below a specified guaranteed level. PLC provides income support payments on historical base acres when the effective price for a covered commodity falls below its reference price.

Farm owners also have a one-time opportunity to update PLC payment yields beginning with crop year 2020 with a deadline date of Sept. 30, 2020 to accomplish this task. Signup for the 2020 crop year closes June 30, 2020, while signup for the 2019 crop year closes March 15, 2020. Producers who have not yet enrolled for 2019 can enroll for both 2019 and 2020 during the same visit to an FSA county office.

**MFP Payment Status**
Also, the second tranche of 2019 Market Facilitation Program (MFP) payments were processed in county FSA offices the week of November 18, 2019. These payments are aimed at assisting farmers suffering from damage due to unjustified trade retaliation by foreign nations. With this announcement, producers of MFP-eligible commodities are now eligible to receive 25% of the total payment expected, in addition to the 50% they have already received from the 2019 MFP.

**Consider a MAL on 2019 Production**
As harvest concludes, producers should consider a Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) on 2019 production. The 2018 Farm Bill extends loan authority through 2023 for Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs).

MALs and LDPs provide financing and marketing assistance for wheat, feed grains, soybeans, and other oilseeds, pulse crops, rice, peanuts, cotton, wool and honey. MALs provide producers interim financing after harvest to help them meet cash flow needs without having to sell their commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows. A producer who is eligible to obtain a loan, but agrees to forgo the loan, may obtain an LDP if such a payment is available.

FSA is now accepting requests for 2019 MALs for all eligible commodities after harvest. Requests for loans shall be made on or before the final availability date for the respective commodities.

To be considered eligible for an LDP, producers must have form CCC-633 EZ, Page 1 on file at their local FSA Office before losing beneficial interest in the crop. Pages 2, 3 or 4 of the form must be submitted when payment is requested.

Marketing loan gains (MLGs) and loan deficiency payments (LDPs) are no longer subject to payment limitations, actively engaged in farming and cash-rent tenant rules. Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provisions state that a producer whose total applicable three-year average AGI exceeds $900,000 is not eligible to receive an MLG or LDP. Producers must have a valid CCC-941 on file to earn a market gain of LDP. The AGI does not apply to MALs redeemed with commodity certificate exchange.

For more information and additional eligibility requirements, please visit a nearby USDA Service Center or FSA’s website fsa.usda.gov.
Koller Family, Nicollet County

“'I'm glad we were raised on a farm,' 18-year-old Noah Koller said. If you’re a farm family, those are some of the best words you could hear from your children. Noah’s parents, Andrea and Chris Koller, have raised him and his four younger siblings – Caleb, 14; Charity, 11; Micah, 5; and Jonas, 2 – on their 170 acres near Le Sueur, Minn.

In addition to being active MFU members, Andrea and Chris were part of the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Couples program for the 2018-2019 session. They’ve successfully juggled parenting with participating in the program, transitioning their acres to certified organic grains and dealing with ever more dramatic weather. With the help of their faith and their kids, they’ve made it.

Network builders

The Koller farmland has been in Chris’s family since they emigrated from Germany. The couple bought it from his grandfather in 2004, after Chris spent his childhood visiting the farm often. They’ve come to realize the importance of building relationships with other farmers, since the work of agriculture can be isolating.

“It's not like you have a core group to talk to other than your family,” Andrea said. “I led a women's farming group for a few years, meeting once a month so we could talk with other farming women.”

MFU has been another source of networking for them, as they’re active participants in the annual conventions, Women's Conference and past Focus on the Future events. They became members after their children started attending MFU Leadership Camp. Lee Johnson, an MFU Membership and Outreach Staff member based in St. Peter, happens to be Chris’s uncle.

“He drove our kids to camp a few times,” Chris said.

Through the FUE program, they became close with the couples from Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin Farmers Union too. Even with Jonas being only six months old at the time they started sessions.

“’It was good for us to get away from the farm and meet other people,’ Andrea said. ‘It’s funny how you can bring in one couple from each of the five states and not know their background or their history but yet we all have kind of the same issues that we’re dealing with.’

Succession planning was one topic the Kollers said came up among the couples, particularly communication between generations on what they want to do.

“We used to farm with my dad so we had to work on sharing equipment and communication too,” Chris said. “Everybody has their own circumstances.”

Beyond finding this common ground, the Kollers and their fellow FUE couples spent their year learning about what Farmers Union stands for, its history and advocacy in Washington, D.C. They did workshops in the FUE states, at the National Farmers Union Convention and capped off the program with the 2019 NFU Legislative Fly-In. Caleb and Charity got to join them in D.C. and were recognized alongside U.S. Sen. Tina Smith during MFU’s meeting with her.

“You realize that Farmers Union is working to help these family farms out,” Chris said. “It's good to know they're fighting for farmers.”

Family-centered

Of all the policy issues that Farmers Union works on, they get back to supporting family farms like the Kollers. That's what's most important to them, especially being a relatively small farm in terms of acreage.

“We have 170 acres and I think that's pretty small, but 1,000 acres seems to be pretty small too for some people,” Andrea said.

“Our small towns are suffering because these smaller farms are disappearing,” Chris added. “We brought up farm sizes [at Fly-In] and they didn’t feel like they could do anything about it. It’s frustrating to see.”

Having a smaller acreage does make being certified organic a little easier, since it is so labor-intensive.

“There’s a lot of weed pulling because you can’t spray,” Chris said. “The ground froze up at one point this fall, but we got a second chance. And you have to wait for the weeds to die before harvesting.

“We get a few kids from town to help pull weeds. Luckily we have woods surrounding us so I don't have to worry about chemicals,” Andrea added. “You're constantly cultivating.”

There's still plenty of space for their five kids to be kids, while also learning how to farm. Andrea's had to learn some new skills herself during her 19 years of marriage to Chris, having grown up on a turkey farm in Gaylord, in contrast to the corn, soybeans, peas and buckwheat they grow now.

“As I get older, I’m enjoying the farm life more,” she said. “And you don’t have to worry too much about the kids.”

The kids get to help out on the farm quite a bit, driving tractor and pulling weeds. Though sometimes teaching them to use farm equipment is trying, especially if pieces break, they still get the work done that needs to be done.

“This fall was such a race against the weather, so they had to help,” Andrea said. “We couldn't have done it without them.”

Truthfully, providing a good life for their family is what helps keep the Kollers going through tough times in agriculture. They’re backed up by their Christian faith too.

“You do it for your kids, keep going for their future,” Andrea said. “They know that farming is not all flowers and roses, you’re going to go through some hard times and you've just got to keep going.”
The National Farmers Union Women’s Conference will be held Jan. 19-21, 2020 in San Diego, Calif.

Farming is never a one-woman job – it takes a village to run a successful operation. This conference will not only prepare attendees for success in agriculture, but it will also provide them with their own network of women farmers and ranchers they can reach out to throughout the year.

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

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

National Farmers Union Women’s Conference

The National Farmers Union Women’s Conference will be held Jan. 19-21, 2020 in San Diego, Calif.

2020 Keynote Speakers:
Kate Greenberg, Colorado Agriculture Commissioner
As Commissioner of Agriculture Kate leads a staff of 300 across eight divisions of Animal Health, Brand Inspection, Colo. State Fair, Conservation Services, Inspection and Consumer Services, Laboratory Services, Markets and Plant Industry.

Kate Greenberg’s key initiatives are to support and grow the next generation of Colorado’s agriculture producers, increase high value food and market opportunities, incentivize soil, water and climate stewardship and enhance mental health awareness and services in rural areas.

Alexis Taylor, Oregon Director of Agriculture
Alexis Taylor is an Iowa native, who moved to Oregon after working 12 years in Washington D.C. focused on U.S. agricultural and trade policy. As director, Alexis works to promote and regulate agriculture and food, always keeping ODA’s mission to ensure healthy natural resources, environment and economy for Oregonians now and into the future at the forefront.

Prior to Alexis’ appointment, she oversaw the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services.

Visit NFU.org/WomensConference for more information and to register.

Look for MFU at these upcoming events!

MFU will have a presence at several conferences, conventions and meetings coming up in the winter. Members are welcome to help us staff the booths during the events. If you are interested in doing this, contact Operations Director Molly Jansen at molly@mfu.org. Or, come and say hello and get some MFU swag!

Jan. 9-10 • Minnesota Organic Conference • River’s Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud
Jan. 16-17 • Northern Growers & Marketers Conference • River’s Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud
Jan. 19-21 • National Farmers Union Women’s Conference • Catamaran Resort, San Diego

Jan. 22-23 • Minnesota Ag Expo • Mankato Civic Center, Mankato
Jan. 24-25 • 15th Emerging Farmers Conference • Bloomington
Feb. 4 • UMN Extension Women in Ag Network Conference • Willmar Conference Center, Willmar
Feb. 8 • Sustainable Farming Association Conference • College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph
Feb. 19-20 • International Crop Expo • Alerus Center, Grand Forks, N.D.

Dec. 18 • Pine County Farmers Union Meeting • 12 p.m. • Pine City American Legion

UPCOMING EVENTS

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Now that the busy harvest season is over, it’s the perfect time to review your farm policy and ensure you have what you need covered. Give yourself the gift of peace of mind!

Are you interested in getting a new quote? Our Agents have access to many companies with competitive rates and prices to better serve your needs.

From all of us at the Agency, we wish you and yours a Happy Holiday season!

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Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers
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