



79TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

2020 Special Orders of Business as approved by delegates

1. Affordable Health Care
2. Resilient Agricultural Markets
3. Expanding Meat and Poultry Processing
4. Promoting Biofuels and Ending Attacks on the RFS
5. Pandemic Recovery and Broadband Investment
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Affordable 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 and are hit hard by high premiums and lack choice between health plans in rural areas;

Whereas people in rural areas often have a harder time accessing comprehensive health care, which includes mental health, chemical health, reproductive health, maternal and dental care;

Whereas, as rural hospitals, clinics and other providers were struggling prior to the pandemic and have now come under new financial pressure;

Whereas many farmers and others in rural MN already have to travel long distances to access care;

Whereas Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) policy calls for the state and federal government to create a comprehensive single-payer health plan;

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, businesses, rural residents and people across the state; while continuing to advocate for single-payer; and

Be it further resolved that state and federal officials support rural care providers, increase Medicare reimbursement rates, expand telehealth and otherwise improve access to care in rural areas.

Be it further resolved that whereas President-elect Biden is proposing lowering Medicare age to 60, MFU works to secure that as part of the single-payer system.

Resilient Agricultural Markets

Whereas family farmers depend on processors, distributors and retailers – whether they are meat processors, creameries, mills, seed suppliers, grocers, restaurants – to both produce food, fuel and fiber and bring those goods to market;

Whereas the food and agriculture sector has become increasingly consolidated. Over the last half a century, the United States lost 40% of flour mills and 88% of meat plants, so that today only 50 plants process 98% of the beef supply;

Whereas MFU has long held that this consolidation pushes down prices, increases input costs, stifles innovation and competition, and otherwise limits individual family farmers' voices in the marketplace;

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare how consolidation harms consumers, main street businesses, food workers and farmers alike;

Now therefore be it resolved that MFU calls on the state and federal governments to take swift and substantial steps to restore competition and resilience across local, regional and international agriculture markets including by:

- 1) Expanding access to local and regional meat and poultry processing;
- 2) Promoting the use of homegrown biofuels;
- 3) Rebuilding relationships with trading partners abroad, particularly with China, and bringing stability back to our nation's role as a reliable and trustworthy trading partner;
- 4) Investing in local and regional food systems and value-added opportunities that create wealth in rural communities;
- 5) Enforcing anti-trust laws in the food and agriculture sector;
- 6) And supporting cooperative development and access to financing, particularly for emerging farmers.

Expanding Meat and Poultry Processing

Whereas meat and poultry processing is essential for livestock farmers to bring food to market;

Whereas a severe shortage of small and mid-sized processors has put pressure on small producers, limiting their farm businesses;

Whereas this pressure has intensified with the shutdown of large packing plants due to COVID-19;

Whereas consumers have a heightened interest in buying locally sourced meat and poultry direct, which can boost and diversify farm income if farmers have access to processing;

Now therefore be it resolved that the state and federal government invest in expanding small and mid-scale meat and poultry processing, including through:

- 1) Funding an adequate number of inspectors;
- 2) Supporting the development of a meat processing training course at the Minnesota State college system;
- 3) Working with business development agencies and others to develop model business plans, financing options and other resources for people seeking to start meat and poultry processing businesses;
- 4) The state using its bonding authority to expand public and private investment in meat processing.

Promoting Biofuels and Ending Attacks on the RFS

Whereas biofuels are cleaner-burning, renewable and help boost farm income by providing an alternative local market for farm products;

Whereas the pandemic has devastated the biofuels industry, resulting in \$3 billion in lost revenue and causing many plants to shut down or idle;

Whereas the industry was already reeling from rampant use of 'small refinery exemptions' that undermine the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) and undercut the market for corn ethanol;

Now therefore be it resolved that MFU calls on the federal government to greatly expand the use of biofuels starting by halting the damaging use of 'small refinery exemptions' and restoring blend requirements consistent with the RFS;

Be it further resolved that MFU calls on the State Legislature and the Governor to immediately take the next step in increasing the state's biofuel blend standard from 10% to 15%.

Pandemic Recovery and Broadband Investment

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has hit Minnesota's economy hard, including many family farms who were already struggling due to an anemic farm economy;

Whereas family farmers rely on rural care providers, schools, processors, small business, local governments and other entities many of whom have been negatively impacted by the pandemic;

Whereas previous agricultural relief and trade aid, while critical, was often distributed inequitably, with those at the top making away with a significant portion of the aid;

Whereas many farms are facing uncertainty going into next year and those who are in mediation are still not able to meet face-to-face with their lender;

Whereas no one should be kicked off their farm during a global pandemic;

Whereas the special session of the Minnesota Legislature in October passed a special grant program prioritizing farmers in mediation;

Whereas, as many organizations, businesses and families have been forced to work and connect with others online in recent months;

And whereas even in an ordinary year high speed internet is vital for farmers and small businesses to monitor markets, connect with their customers and otherwise operate effectively in the 21st century;

Now therefore be it resolved that MFU calls on Congress and the President to pass a second substantial COVID-19 relief package that supports states and local governments, jumpstarts small businesses, fairly distributes agricultural aid without incentivizing overproduction and helps reimburse schools and families for costs associated with distance learning (i.e. computers, hotspots, etc.);

Be it further resolved that MFU calls on the Governor and the state legislature to further extend the deadline on farmer-lender mediations until at least the first of June, 2021;

Be it further resolved that the Governor, utilizing his executive authority, and State Legislature put significant dollars, including COVID dollars, toward providing relief to those farmers who are in mediation.

Be it further resolved that MFU calls on leaders on the state and national level to fund border-to-border broadband development, providing affordable connectivity to every residence akin to rural electrification in the 1930s.

Climate-Smart Agriculture

Whereas family farmers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, experiencing some of its early effects in the form of extreme weather, unpredictable growing seasons and increased risk of plant and animal diseases;

Whereas family farmers are also coming up with ways to remain resilient and even mitigate the worst effects of climate change, including through the use of cover crops, managed rotational grazing, nutrient management, on-farm renewable energy and a host of other practices;

Whereas it's critical that farmers have a seat at the table in climate discussions as they have an important role to play in innovating in response to challenges that pose a real threat to their livelihood, our rural communities and the economy of our entire state;

Now therefore be it resolved that MFU supports state and federal action to give farmers the information, tools and resources they need to continue pursuing on-farm climate action, including by:

- 1) Advancing coordinated efforts that enable agricultural producers to earn a fair return on voluntary investments in practices that sequester carbon and deliver other ecosystem benefits, including the use of perennial plants;
- 2) Building on voluntary state and federal programs that incentivize on-the-ground practices that promote soil health and improve the climate;
- 3) Ensuring that family farmers remain resilient by preventing the export of water from Minnesota;
- 4) Compelling private insurers to account for increased risk to crops due to climate change;
- 5) And expanding the use of biofuels and on farm renewable energy.

Affirming Agricultural Community

Whereas racial inequity persists in our food and agriculture system, as in other areas of life in the United States, and contributes to the harm of people of color, Indigenous people and others who want to build a life in agriculture;

Whereas women, veterans, immigrants, LGBTQ, and persons with disabilities also experience barriers to participating in agriculture;

Whereas ignoring this injustice contributes to ongoing harm to farmers and ranchers, agricultural workers, production and processing workers, and workers in food wholesale and retail;

Whereas Farmers Union has a history of standing up for social justice, as we were an early supporter of women's suffrage and the civil rights movement;

Whereas building a resilient and just agriculture system will require opportunities for everyone to participate, be heard, valued and respected;

Whereas a just food and agricultural system requires that people along every link of the food supply chain are paid a fair price or a living wage, offered secure benefits and have safe workplaces;

Whereas Minnesota is among the worst the nation when it comes to economic disparities between white people and people of color;

Whereas MFU would like to promote and fund an initiative to expand farm and bio-energy businesses owned and operated in the State of Minnesota;

Whereas Twin Cities farmers and rural farmers would like to form firm contracts where Minnesota farmers and renewable energy suppliers service local markets;

Whereas communities of color manage their own communities' COVID-19 supply and distribution operations in coordination with the State of Minnesota;

Now therefore be it resolved that MFU stands against racism and oppression in all its forms and is committed to confronting the systemic barriers and combating racial inequities in our organization, in agriculture, and in our communities.

Be it further resolved that MFU supports state and national policies and programs that remove barriers for emerging farmers and help them build successful agricultural businesses, including through:

- 1) Full public funding of the Minnesota Emerging Farmers Working Group;
- 2) Targeted programs and tax incentives, including extending capital gains exemptions, that support farmland access and farm transition;
- 3) Expanded access to credit, including by increasing the maximum loan amount for the FSA microloan program;
- 4) Ensuring that existing programs are accessible, useful and responsive to the unique needs of emerging farmers.