Happy Holidays from all of us at Minnesota Farmers Union!

Wolcyn Tree Farm in Isanti County

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Buy local for the holidays

We’re fast approaching the winter holidays. I know many of you are concerned about what this will mean for COVID-19 spread – we still don’t know how much Thanksgiving affected it. I encourage you to stay home and catch up with extended family over the phone or video chat, and of course mask up and wash your hands frequently. No matter what or how you’re celebrating, MFU wishes you a warm and joyful holiday.

The holiday season is a great opportunity to support local family farms and businesses for gifts. MFU continues to update the Buy Local While Social Distancing list found on minnesotacooks.org, to name one resource. You can also check out the Minnesota Grown Holiday Gift Guide on minnesotagrown.com, or your local farmers’ markets if they are operating over the winter. Many of them offer electronic, no-contact purchasing options so you can stay safe. Or, consider purchasing a gift card to a local restaurant.

Virtual convention highlights

I certainly had never imagined before 2020 that Farmers Union would hold a state convention completely online. Yet, it was clear to us that it was the right thing to do, and our delegates were very flexible. We held it on the Zoom platform on Saturday, Nov. 21, with great success. I want to recognize the hard work of the MFU state staff working quickly to pivot to a virtual event when we’d originally planned to be in-person, and for their behind-the-scenes work that day to make everything go smoothly.

I also appreciate the patience of everyone in attendance, both in dealing with the technology and for holding such a respectful debate. It’s harder to have the kind of robust policy discussion we enjoy in a virtual setting, but we came up with a method that worked. MFU General Counsel Dave Velde once again chaired the debate, and we thank him for his dedicated service now and over the many years he’s served our organization.

The agenda was abbreviated from what we normally do, consisting of guest speakers, rules and bylaws change discussion, re-affirmation of MFU’s current policy document, debate and passage of seven Special Orders of Business and election of delegates to the next National Farmers Union (NFU) Convention. The Policy Committee spent great effort crafting the special orders, based on the myriad policy resolutions we received from county unions this fall. We will work for these grassroots policy resolutions in the next legislative session and beyond.

The Special Orders can be found in full on pages 6-7. They are: Affordable Health Care; Resilient Agricultural Markets; Expanding Meat and Poultry Processing; Promoting Biofuels and Ending Attacks on the RFS; Pandemic Recovery and Broadband Investment; Climate-Smart Agriculture; and Affirming Agricultural Community.

Our guest speakers all joined us live in the Zoom meeting and were well-received. Thank you to Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz; U.S. Senators from Minnesota Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, members of the Senate Agriculture Committee; Congresswoman Angie Craig from Minnesota’s 2nd District, a member of the House Agriculture Committee; NFU President Rob Larew and Vice President Patty Edelburg; and Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen for their time and support – they are all important partners in the work we do and members of MFU themselves.

Lastly, we also took time to recognize outgoing Congressman Collin Peterson and State Rep. Jeanne Poppe with a vote to award them the Leadership in Agriculture Award for their contributions to agriculture policy. More details about the award can be found on page 8.

GARY WERTISH
PRESIDENT
gary@mfu.org

(continued on page 4)
Mediation extension letter

Among the many policy provisions called for in the Special Orders, one was a request to further extend the deadline for Minnesota Farmer-Lender Mediation. The deadline had been extended to Dec. 1 already, as I called for in a March 31 letter to the Governor, Attorney General and legislative leaders. Following the direction of the Special Orders, I sent another letter to this same group on November 30, asking that they extend the mediation deadline to June 30, 2021. COVID-19 consequences have strained the resources family farmers rely on to make a living. Minnesota’s Farmer-Lender Mediation program has been a lifeline for so many since its inception in the 1980s and is more important than ever – unfortunately, COVID-19 also prevents farmers, lenders and mediators from meeting in person. Extending the deadline could give more of them a chance to do so when conditions are safer. I’m also hopeful that an extension could provide farmers some certainty during the holiday season and even offer some tax liability relief.

If you have any questions about this, contact Stu Lourey.

New legislative committee leaders

With new elections often come new chairs for committees in the Minnesota Legislature. Rep. Poppe’s loss means a new House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee Chair, Rep. Mike Sundin (DFL-11A). In the Senate, Sen. Torrey Westrom (R-12) will chair the Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee. Both Sundin and Westrom have been allies in support of MFU policy in the past, and I’m looking forward to working with them in this capacity.

The 2021 regular legislative session begins on Jan. 5, 2021. We look forward to our Lobby Day at the Capitol every year, and as you might expect, it will be held virtually this year Jan. 19-21. Save the dates and stay posted for more information.

Winter virtual programming

In addition to a virtual Lobby Day, we are planning to restart virtual programming again this winter. We had several successful events earlier in the spring. The staff and I have spent a good amount of time brainstorming topics for virtual conversations – we want to keep them fairly open so you can feel free to share what’s on your mind and stay connected. Some ideas include health care, agricultural marketing, advocacy training, county officer training and Minnesota Cooks demonstrations. We’ll post these in the e-news, Minnesota Agriculture and on social media when they’re set up.

We’ve held our first winter virtual event already – the Minnesota Cooks team put together a Virtual Happy Hour for participants to learn about cocktail making and cheese pairing with Loon Liquor, Little Hill Berry Farm and Shepherd’s Way Farms (see below). It was incredibly well-attended, and I look forward to seeing you on screen at many more of these.

Many of the winter conferences we look forward to have also transitioned to online formats. For one, the National Farmers Union Women’s Conference will be held virtually on Jan. 17-18, 2021. I encourage you to attend if you can – there is a registration cost, but it’s much less than usual and we’ll help cover it. Register at nfu.org/womensconference. (See page 11 for more information.) ▲

Minnesota Cooks Virtual Happy Hour • Dec. 3

Mark Schiller (right) and Simeon Rossi (below), owners of Loon Liquor Co. in Northfield, a farm-to-bottle distillery, demonstrated the art of making cocktails during the Minnesota Cooks happy hour held virtually Dec. 3.

Jodi Ohlsen Read from Shepherd’s Way Farms in Nerstrad, a farmer and artisan sheep’s milk cheesemaker, shared some cheese pairings and tips.

Aaron Wills from Little Hill Berry Farm in Northfield, a dedicated organic berry farmer, talked about ways to incorporate fruit with the cheese and cocktails.

Look for more virtual events coming soon!
Meanwhile, agriculture will lose a prominent champion in Congress – Collin Peterson of Minnesota’s 7th District. The Democratic House Agriculture Committee Chair lost to Republican Michelle Fischbach, former State Senate President and, briefly, Lieutenant Governor. We’d like to thank Chair Peterson for his years of service in Congress and leadership on agriculture. His insight was crucial to many Farm Bills. He has 16 Golden Triangle Awards from National Farmers Union, most recently in 2019.

Fischbach, recognizing the importance of agriculture in Western Minnesota, has expressed interest in joining the Ag Committee. Rep. Peterson will be replaced as Chair by Rep. David Scott (D-Ga.), who will be the first Black Chairperson of the House Ag Committee.

In other races, House Ag Committee members Angie Craig (D-MN02) and Jim Hagedorn (R-MN01) won their races for re-election, as well as Senate Ag Committee member Tina Smith (D-MN), Reps. Tom Emmer (R-MN06), Pete Stauber (R-MN08), Ilhan Omar (D-MN05), Dean Phillips (D-MN03) and Betty McCollum (D-MN04) also kept their seats. The House remains in Democratic control, while control of the Senate depends on two runoff elections in Georgia in January.

On the state legislative side, Rep. Jeanne Poppe (DFL-Austin), who served as House Ag Committee chair for the past two years, lost her race for re-election to Republican Patricia Mueller. Like Congressman Peterson, she has been a strong supporter of MFU policy in the Legislature. Her voice will be missed. Rep. Jeff Brand (DFL-St. Peter), the Vice Chair of the same committee, also lost in a close race to Republican Susan Akland. We would like to thank Reps. Poppe and Brand for their hard work on behalf of Minnesota’s family farmers.

The DFL did retain control of the House (70-64) and re-elected Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) as Speaker. The GOP still controls the State Senate, but they now only hold a one-seat majority (34-33). The Legislature’s Agriculture Committees will be chaired by Rep. Mike Sundin (DFL-11A) in the House and Sen. Torrey Westrom (R-12) in the Senate, both of whom have supported MFU policy priorities in past sessions. We look forward to working with all these elected officials and advocating for Minnesota’s rural communities.

At this point, we’re planning to hold virtual Lobby Days from Jan. 19-21. If you have any questions about it, don’t hesitate to reach out to me. ▲
2020 Special Orders of Business as approved by delegates at the 79th Annual Minnesota Farmers Union Convention

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 Minnesota 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.

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 in 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.
At the virtual 79th Annual MFU Convention, members took a moment to recognize Congressman Collin Peterson and State Representative Jeanne Poppe for their contributions to agriculture policy. With a unanimous vote of the delegates, MFU honored the two outgoing elected officials with the Leadership in Agriculture Award.

Rep. Peterson, a Democrat from Minnesota’s 7th District, has served as either Chair or Ranking Member on the House Agriculture Committee for much of his 30-year tenure in Congress and has been Chairman for the past two years. His leadership was vital in the completion of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Rep. Poppe, a DFLer from Austin, has been Chair of the Minnesota House Agriculture Committee for the past two years and has long championed rural Minnesota. She has led on agriculture policy and finance bills, farmer mental health support and the importance of agricultural education in schools.

Both lost bids for re-election this fall, but their influence in government is sure to be well-remembered.

“Chair Peterson and Chair Poppe have been reliable lawmakers when we need to get things done for family farmers,” MFU President Gary Wertish said. “They’ve consistently worked across the aisle and held up agriculture’s reputation as a bipartisan policy area. We will miss working with them but know their work will be meaningful for years to come. MFU thanks them for their dedicated service with the Leadership in Agriculture Award.”
Low interest loans available for storage facilities, handling equipment, trucks and more

Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program provides low-interest financing to producers to build or upgrade storage facilities and to purchase portable (new or used) structures, equipment and storage and handling trucks.

“One of the greatest advantages for operations utilizing the FSFL program is the wide variety of projects that it can support. Loans have been approved for projects including; cold storage for fruit and vegetables, bulk tanks for dairy, dryers and propane tanks for grain, skid steers for handling, semi-trucks, trailers, and more” said Joe Martin, State Executive Director (SED).

Since its inception in May 2000, more than 33,000 loans have been issued for on-farm storage in Minnesota, increasing storage capacity by 900 million bushels. FSFL is an excellent financing program for on-farm commodity storage and handling for small and mid-sized farms, and for new farmers. Loan terms vary from three to 12 years. The maximum loan amount for storage facilities is $500,000.

Commodities eligible for an FSFL include corn, grain sorghum, rice, soybeans, oats, peanuts, wheat, barley, minor oilseeds harvested as whole grain, pulse crops (lentils, chickpeas and dry peas), hay, honey, renewable biomass, fruits, nuts and vegetables for cold storage facilities, floriculture, hops, maple sap, rye, milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, meat and poultry (unprocessed), eggs and aquaculture (excluding systems that maintain live animals through uptake and discharge of water). Acceptable storage facilities include but aren't limited to grain bins, hay barns and cold storage facilities for eligible commodities.

Loans up to $50,000 can be secured by a promissory note/security agreement while loans exceeding $100,000 require additional security. Loans require a minimum down payment of 15%. FSA also provides a microloan option eligible to all farmers and ranchers where there is a need for financing options for loans up to $50,000 with a minimum down payment of 5 percent.

Producers do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply. The loans are designed to assist a diverse range of farming operations, including small and mid-sized businesses, new farmers, operations supplying local food and farmers markets, non-traditional farm products and underserved producers.

Current low interest rates are particularly valuable to a broad range of Minnesota farm operations. The interest rate for a FSFL loan is determined based on the approval date of the loan.

Interest rates for Farm Storage Facility Loans approved for November are as follows:

- 0.125% with three-year loan terms,
- 0.25% with five-year loan terms,
- 0.5% with seven-year loan terms,
- 0.75% with 10-year loan terms,
- 0.875% with 12-year loan terms,

For many of FSA programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. This includes the FSFL program.

Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

To learn more about the FSA Farm Storage Facility Loan, visit fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport or contact your local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including some that are open to visitors to conduct business in person by appointment only. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Our program delivery staff will be in the office, and they will be working with our producers in the office, by phone and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.
Minnesota receives $106 million in federal funds for Energy Assistance Program

The Minnesota Department of Commerce announced this week that the state’s Energy Assistance Program is receiving more than $106 million in federal funding to help income-eligible Minnesotans pay their heating bills this winter. The funds from the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) reduce home heating costs by making payments directly to utility companies and heating fuel vendors on behalf of eligible Minnesota homeowners and renters.

Energy assistance is available for homeowners and renters who earn less than 50% of the state’s median income ($54,357 for a family of four). Last year the program served nearly 118,000 Minnesota households with an average grant of approximately $500. Some households also received help to address no-heat crisis situations or repair broken heating systems.

Minnesotans should submit an application to the local service provider in their area. To find your local service provider, call (800) 657-3710 or visit mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/eap-provider.jsp. Local service providers are situated across Minnesota and cover every corner of the state. There is still plenty of time to apply; however, funding is limited and administered on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications will be accepted until May 31, 2021 or until energy assistance funds run out.

Minnesotans who use delivered fuels such as propane, fuel oil or wood to heat their homes are not covered by the Cold Weather Rule, but they may get help from the Energy Assistance Program. More information on shut-off protection and the Cold Weather Rule is available on the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission website, mn.gov/puc/consumers/help/shut-off-protection, or by calling (651) 296-0406 or (800) 657-3782.

Minnesotans are also encouraged to contact their utility and seek protection under the state’s Cold Weather Rule. The Cold Weather Rule is in effect from October 15 to April 15 and protects residential utility customers from having their heat shut off, but they must first contact their utility to establish and maintain a monthly payment plan. Households that need to reconnect for winter should contact their utility now to take advantage of payment options.

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 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. Plus, most of the 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:
Wayne Pike, Rochester (507) 251-1937
Bruce Lubitz, Perham (218) 346-4866
Connie Dykes, Lake City (651) 345-5149
David Ellason, Isle (320) 676-3559
David Hesse, Comfrey (507) 877-3012
Dan Hunz, Monticello (763) 772-6687
Ruth Ann Karty, Clarkfield (320) 669-7135
George Bosselman, Fosston (218) 200-9432
Steve Zenk, Danube (320) 894-2517
Bob Stommes, St. Cloud (320) 443-5355

www.mfu.org
Upcoming Virtual Events

Virtual Produce Safety Rule Trainings
Tuesday & Wednesday, Jan. 12 & 13 • 8:45 a.m.-1 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021 8:45 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday, Mar. 13, 2021 8:45 a.m.-5 p.m.
(see page 15 for more information) • sign up at psp.tix.com

National Farmers Union Virtual Women’s Conference
Jan. 17-18, learn more at nfu.org/womensconference

Virtual MFU Lobby Days • Jan. 19-21

16th Annual Emerging Farmers Conference:
Reclaiming Our Voices • Jan. 29-30 •
sign up at www.emergingfarmers.org

Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual
Conference • Feb. 8-13 • sign up at www.sfa-mn.org/conference/

Growing Stronger Collaborative Conference • Feb. 22-27
(combination of MOSES Organic Farming Conference, GrassWorks
Grazing Conference, OGRAIN Organic Grain Conference, Midwest
Organic Pork Conference, Organic Vegetable Production Conference) •
sign up at bit.ly/GrowingStronger2021

MFU Educational Webinars • Dates TBD during the winter

2021 National Farmers Union Women’s Conference: The Future is Female Farmers

Virtual
Jan. 17-18, 2021

There are more women farmers and ranchers today than there ever have been before! It’s exciting to see better gender representation in agriculture, but because the vast majority of farm operators have often been men, women farmers still face unique barriers when it comes to accessing land, acquiring loans and finding appropriately sized tools and machinery.

To address these and other concerns, National Farmers Union hosts a conference for women and nonbinary farmers every year. This year’s conference, which will be held virtually on Jan. 17 and 18, will cover a variety of subjects including business management, marketing, cooperative development, succession planning, food safety and leadership. In addition to gaining relevant skills, attendees will also go home with a network of women farmers across the country who they can reach out to throughout the year.

The cost for registration is $25 for MFU members and $45 for non-members. MFU will help cover costs for members to attend – please consider it!

Register and learn more about the presenters here: nfu.org/womensconference

Speakers

Linda Emanuel, R.N., AgriSafe Network and Ag Producer
Dr. Antomia “Mia” Farrell, MANRRS National President
Erin Link, EB Ranch LLC Farm Owner
Yolanda Gonzalez, Cornell Cooperative Extension Urban Agriculture Specialist
Gianna Banducci, California Center for Cooperative Development (CCCD) Cooperative Development Specialist
Caitlin Joseph, American Farmland Trust Women for the Land Outreach Coordinator
Esther Lin, USDA-FSA Outreach Program Manager
Kristin Woods, Alabama Regional Extension Agent
Lindsay Mutegi, USDA-FSA National Stakeholder Engagement & Program Education Specialist
Gabrielle McNally, PhD, American FarmLand Trust Women for the Land Initiative Director
Josefina Lara Chavez, MPA, Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) Farm to Market Specialist
Carolyn Jones, Mississippi Minority Farmers Association (MMFA)
Kristine Tidgren, Iowa State University Dolezal Adjunct Assistant Professor & Director of the Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation
A monthly update from National Farmers Union

Following the November election, it’s clear that there are big changes in store for U.S. agriculture. We’ll have a new administration in January, one that will likely take a vastly different approach to most issues.

But the changes extend far beyond the executive branch – there are big shakeups in Congress, too. Representative Collin Peterson of Minnesota, who has been serving as Chair of the House Agriculture Committee, did not win another term, leaving his leadership spot vacant. Two other Congressional agriculture committee leaders – Senate Agriculture Committee chairman Pat Roberts and House Ag ranking member Michael Conaway – are retiring this year. Whoever takes their places will significantly shape agriculture policy in the years to come.

Biden wins Presidential race

After several days of ballot counting and much anticipation, the Associated Press projected that former Vice President Joe Biden had secured enough electoral votes to clinch the 2020 presidential election.

On the campaign trail, President-elect Biden has indicated he supports many issues that are of great importance to NFU. He has committed to mitigate climate change by rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and implementing an economy-wide strategy to reduce carbon emissions and increase sequestration. This strategy incorporates financial and technical support for climate-smart agricultural practices and on-farm energy production as well as robust funding for climate research, which NFU has prioritized in its own climate agenda.

In his plan to “build back better in rural America,” Biden outlined how he will expand rural broadband and improve other critical infrastructure, address racial inequities in agriculture, revitalize rural economies, improve access to health care (including mental health care and drug abuse resources), invest in homegrown biofuels, support emerging farmers, pursue fair trade deals and strengthen antitrust enforcement. Over the last several years, these issues have numbered among NFU’s top concerns.

In a statement, NFU President Rob Larew voiced optimism about President-elect Biden’s platform, saying his vision for America “overlaps, in many respects, with National Farmers Union’s vision.” He then indicated his willingness to work with the next administration to “ensure that its policies and programs adequately represent the interests of family farmers and rural communities.” Since then, President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have launched a transition website, which outlines their approach for top four priority areas – pandemic response, economic recovery, racial equity and climate change – and lists members of “agency review teams,” which will help prepare the next administration to take the reins right after inauguration. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) transition team includes a number of notable leaders from former President Barack Obama’s administration as well as organizers, researchers and advocates who work on issues related to food access, wildlife protection, alternative proteins, food chain workers and environmental stewardship.

In the coming weeks, President-elect Biden is expected to announce cabinet appointees, including Secretary of Agriculture, which will reveal more details about what’s likely in store for U.S. food and farm policy over the next four years.

U.S. withdraws from Paris Climate Accord

The United States formally withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement on the day after Election Day, making it one of just eight countries worldwide that have failed to ratify the accord. The agreement was drafted in 2015 in an effort to keep “a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels,” a threshold that scientists have determined that exceeding would have severe and irreversible consequences. NFU applauded the international commitment as it recognizes the threats of climate change to food production and takes significant strides towards avoiding the worst-case scenario for farmers, ranchers and food security.

However, in June 2017, President Donald Trump announced he would withdraw the U.S. from the agreement, claiming that participating would result in “lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories and vastly diminished economic production.” Given the rising frequency of catastrophic weather events, NFU was displeased with the decision, saying it was “nearly inconceivable that the U.S. would repudiate sound science that the rest of the world has accepted and abdicate our leadership on an issue of such great importance.”

Following the U.S.’s official exit, President Larew reiterated the sentiment and called the move “disappointing and dangerous.” In addition to undermining “critical climate action,” Larew said withdrawing is actually a “missed opportunity” to create jobs, stimulate economic growth and revitalize rural communities.

Supreme Court hears challenge to ACA

Shortly after the November election, the Supreme Court heard a case challenging the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Originally, ACA required most Americans to have health insurance coverage – and if they didn’t, they were required to pay a tax penalty. This requirement, which is known as the “individual mandate” was repeatedly challenged by Republican lawmakers. Though the Supreme Court upheld the individual mandate in 2012 on the grounds that it fell within Congressional powers to levy taxes, the penalty was reduced to $0 by the 2017 tax bill. As such, the mandate is now essentially unenforceable.

The elimination of the individual mandate, however, has opened the ACA to additional challenges. In 2018, a group of 18 state attorneys general and two governors, representing 20 states, sued the federal government to have the entire legislation revoked. According to the plaintiffs, the mandate without a penalty is unconstitutional because it fails to produce revenue for the federal government.

(continued on page 13)
40 Square health plans available to MFU members without investment

Being a member of Minnesota Farmers Union now comes with an additional benefit. Members of Minnesota ag trade associations and cooperatives were unable to access health plans through 40 Square Cooperative Solutions – until now. Starting in fall 2020, members of Minnesota Farmers Union can now join 40 Square – with no stock investment cost – as part of their member benefits.

“We’re extremely excited to offer this benefit to our members,” Minnesota Farmers Union President Gary Wertish said. “This is a special opportunity for our organization, and we encourage all of our members to look at the range of health care options 40 Square offers.”

40 Square Executive Director Char Vrieze said the group’s ability to offer members of ag trade associations and cooperatives another health care option could be a game-changer for Minnesota farm families and agribusinesses.

“We’ve worked for so long to see this become a reality,” Vrieze said. “We’re eager to now have the ability to offer our health plans to members of Minnesota Farmers Union without the potential barrier of a financial investment.”

As the state’s only independent agricultural cooperative which exclusively offers health plans, 40 Square is truly first among equals. 40 Square plans are member-owned and member-governed. Unlike large insurance companies, with 40 Square any health care dollars remaining at the end of the year go back to members in the form of enhancing benefits, decreasing premiums and/or curbing price increases.

“The difference with 40 Square is we can take ownership in our plan,” 40 Square Chair and Minnesota farmer Robby Gieseke said. “We can provide a comprehensive health plan at a competitive price for my employees and our families. What’s great about 40 Square is we can sculpt the plan that we see benefits us the most.”

The Minnesota-based cooperative, which began offering health plans in 2018, offers its members a variety of seven comprehensive health plans to choose from, including health savings account (HSA) eligible plans. Similar to traditional health insurance, 40 Square’s self-funded plans have an annual deductible, coinsurance and copays that members are responsible for. The amount of coverage received depends on the plan selected. A large local and national provider and pharmacy network with Aetna supports personal, live customer service. Benefits also include a 24-hour nurse line, as well as 24/7 telemedicine included, with optional mental health and dermatology benefits. Vision, dental and life coverage are all offered as additional optional benefits. Other non-insurance products to enhance the health plan include: hearing benefits, and AgriPlan and BizPlan at a discounted rate, which helps farmers and agribusinesses declare medical expenses as a business expense on taxes, and more.

“We’re confident our members will see that with 40 Square, members can truly own their health,” Wertish said. “This new benefit is a win-win for all.”

For more information and health plan details, contact 40 Square at (844) 205-9579 or info@40Square.coop or visit www.40Square.coop.

Washington Corner (continued)

The Supreme Court is not expected to come to a final decision on the case until next spring or summer, but given their line of questioning and reactions during the arguments, it seems unlikely that they will overturn the ACA, even if the penalty for individual mandate is not reinstated.

NFU, which “strongly affirms the right of all Americans to have access to affordable, quality health care,” has consistently opposed attempts to repeal or pare down the ACA. Instead, the organization has urged Congress to address weaknesses in the current legislation. Specifically, NFU has recommended mechanisms to lower premiums, stabilize the Health Insurance Marketplace and protect rural hospitals while maintaining funding for Medicaid and coverage for individuals with pre-existing conditions.

Judge strikes down ABAWD Rule

A federal judge struck down a rule that would have made hundreds of thousands of Americans ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps.

Under current regulations, able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) can receive food assistance no more than three months out of every three years, unless they work at least 20 hours per week or meet other education or workforce training requirements. States can waive work requirements when jobs are unavailable or don’t match workers’ skills – which is particularly important right now following the disappearance of millions of jobs from pandemic-related closures. The rule in question would have made it more difficult for states to waive these rules, a change that by USDA’s own estimates would prevent 755,000 people from accessing assistance through SNAP. Since the rule was introduced last year, NFU has consistently expressed opposition to it on the grounds that it would “erode food security in rural and urban communities alike.” As such, the organization was relieved by the judge’s decision. In recent months, NFU has urged Congress and USDA to expand SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs to address rising hunger rates.

The Washington Corner can be found at www.nfu.org/corner.
Grandma’s Kuchen
from Chef Jessica Pettingill of Café Thyme, Chanhassen

Chef Jessica is the featured chef of December in the 2021 Minnesota Cooks™ calendar, and she’s also a new member of Minnesota Farmers Union. When asked if she would share a holiday dessert recipe with our membership, she enthusiastically and generously sent this one with the following notes: “Grandma’s Kuchen is a traditional German-Russian cinnamon and sugar custard pie. Variations include layering peaches, apples and prunes into the pie, but my cousins and I enjoyed the custard version over the fruit filled ones.”

Yields two 9” pies

Dough:
2-1/2 cups flour
1 heaping teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup shortening
approximately 1/2 cup milk – enough to form a soft dough

Filling:
1 quart heavy cream
6 whole eggs beaten
1 cup sugar + more for sprinkling
1 tablespoon flour
1 teaspoon vanilla
cinnamon for sprinkling

Dough Instructions:
In a medium bowl mix the dry ingredients for the dough. Using your hands, cut in the shortening and add enough milk to form a soft – but not sticky – dough (start with approximately 1/2 cup of milk, adding slightly more or less to achieve desired soft dough). Cut dough into 2 equal pieces and roll into balls, then roll each out into a circle large enough to fit into pie dishes. Dough should cover the bottom and the sides of the dish and should be thicker than a typical pie dough. Lay the dough into greased pie dishes and prick the bottom and sides of the dough with a fork.

Filling Instructions:
In a medium bowl mix together the cream, eggs, 1 cup of sugar, flour and vanilla. Pour the filling into the pie shells and sprinkle the top of the filling generously with sugar and cinnamon. Bake pies at 325 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until the custard is just set. Chill custard and serve chilled.

For fruit variations you can layer your fruit of choice on the dough before pouring in the filling.
FSMA PRODUCE SAFETY RULE TRAININGS

Beginning in December, University of Minnesota Extension, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and other partners will host 100% virtual FSMA Produce Safety Rule Grower Trainings. These courses are led by a team of MDA staff, UMN Extension staff and experienced fruit and vegetable growers.

Who should participate?
This virtual training course is for produce growers and those interested in learning about produce safety, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and 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 that uses FDA-recognized curriculum or equivalent. (Visit extension.umn.edu/growing-safe-food/fsma-and-produce-safety-rule-does-rule-apply-me to learn whether or not your farm is covered by the Produce Safety Rule.)

This course will satisfy this requirement. While training is required for farms covered by the Produce Safety Rule, all growers interested in learning about produce safety, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and the FSMA Produce Safety Rule are encouraged to attend. Learning about and implementing produce safety practices can help protect your farm and business, can help you get a GAP audit if needed and helps keep our local food safe and healthy for all.

Key topics covered in the course:
• Requirements of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule and information to help you meet them
• Potential sources of contamination on the farm and microorganisms of concern
• Water management and testing; worker hygiene; application and use of biological soil amendments
• Practices that reduce food safety risks, and practical methods to implement these practices on the farm
• Your questions on the rule and how it’s being implemented in Minnesota

Training dates – Zoom virtual meetings
Tuesday & Wednesday, Jan. 12 & 13, 2021 • 8:45am–1:00pm (Joan Olson, Prairie Drifter Farm)
Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2020 • 8:45am–5:00pm (Sara George, D & S Gardens)
Saturday, Mar. 13, 2020 8:45am–5:00pm (Jane Jewett, WillowSedge Farm, David Abazs, Round River Farm)

Registration:
Register: www.psp.tix.com • Cost: $20
Registration Deadlines: Two weeks before each class date, or until full. Preregistration required.
Registration includes: Training materials (mailed to you in advance) and a certificate of course attendance.

Certificate: Participation for the entire training is required to receive the certificate.
**Requirements: Individuals must have a web-cam, two-way audio (speakers & microphone), reliable internet and will be required to have the web-cam on during the full course of the training. This is to verify participants’ presence and participation.
Training participants are eligible to receive a certificate of completion. Farms covered by the rule only need to have a responsible party complete training once to meet the rule’s requirements.

Questions?
Visit the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Program page, mda.state.mn.us/fsma-produce-safety-rule-grower-training-courses, call (651) 539-3648 or email producesafety.mda@state.mn.us.

Resources:
UMN Extension On-Farm GAPs Education Program: learn more about Good Agricultural Practices and the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, extension.umn.edu/safety/growing-safe-food
Minnesota Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Program: learn more about Produce Safety Rule implementation in Minnesota, including On-Farm Readiness Reviews and inspections, mda.state.mn.us/food-feed/produce-safety-program
Produce Safety Alliance: Our national partners helping prepare fresh produce growers to meet the regulatory requirements included in the Produce Safety Rule, producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu

The Farmer and the Chef: Farm Fresh Minnesota Recipes and Stories
by Bruce Miller, Claudine Arndt & Katie Cannon – Minnesota Farmers Union
Recipes from breakfast to dessert accompanied by stunning photography showcasing Minnesota farmers and the bounty they harvest. Recipes are created by some of Minnesota’s finest chefs and professional cooks who serve up local food at popular restaurants around the state.

The release date is May 1, 2021. You can find all the places to pre-order by going to minnesotacooks.org/the-farmer-and-the-chef.

2021 Minnesota Cooks Calendars
Calendars are complete and will be sent to every member household in early December. If you would like to order additional copies, or for a list of locations where copies are available, visit minnesotacooks.org/store.

Note: Supplies are limited and calendars are available on a first come, first served basis. There’s a $5 fee to cover shipping and handling.
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 local Agents do business with multiple insurance companies to find you the best coverage at the right price.

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

Our Agents are located in offices across MN to better serve our communities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
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Check out our newly-redesigned website! www.fuainsurance.com