

Two lawmakers talk about new session

As part of The Leader's ongoing coverage of the General Assembly, this month we talked to an active NCFB member who serves in the N.C. House and a new member of the N.C. Senate whose background is in rural efforts.

Both Rep. William Brisson, who represents Bladen and Cumberland counties, and Sen. David Rouzer, who represents Johnston and Wayne counties, serve on agriculture committees.



Rep. William Brisson

Brisson, now in his second term, has been a member of Bladen County Farm Bureau for almost 40 years and has almost 2,000 acres of row crops. His wife Brenda is a member of NCFB's State Women's Committee.

He said he decided early on that political pressure wouldn't sway him from serving his constituents. He paid for his first House campaign with the checks he saved from his two terms as a county commissioner.

Through Farm Bureau, tobacco meetings and as chairman of the agriculture committee for the N.C. County Commissioners Association, Brisson, a Democrat, got to know farmers of all types and wanted to serve them in the legislature.

"Farm Bureau are good people, and I'm just glad we've got them," he said.

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Waterkeeper Alliance wants to wipe out hog farming

Editor's Note: This is another installment in our occasional series on the state and nation's many well-funded, non-governmental groups that campaign for measures that adversely impact different types of agriculture.

During a House Judiciary Committee hearing in February, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, was asked by Iowa Rep. Steven King to confirm if he did, in fact, give this quote to the Des Moines Register newspaper: "Large-scale hog producers are a greater threat to the United States and U.S. democracy than Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network."

His response? "I don't know if that's accurate, but I believe it, and I support it."

And he continued, citing a Raleigh News and Observer editorial that accuses every relevant public official in the state of being corrupted by the pork industry.

The exchange can be found on the video-sharing site YouTube, at the address www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWQ8KHj8Az4.

Farmers rely on a healthy, abundant water supply in their operations, and grow foods that support health and the public well-being. The Waterkeeper Alliance, led by Kennedy and carried out in North Carolina by 12 affiliated Riverkeeper and Coastkeeper chapters, makes no secret of its desire to end hog operations, like

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N.C. Farm Bureau hosts three-day AFBF Rural Development Conference

Thirty-eight Farm Bureau staff and presidents from 22 states spent three days in North Carolina for American Farm Bureau's Rural Development Conference, March 31- April 2.

Attendees heard about funding avenues for rural projects, visited some of those projects, and then plotted to take what they'd learned back to their states to advance rural life.

NCFB President Larry Wooten said Farm Bureau and farmers are crucial for rural development to succeed.

"Farmers have to be involved and lead in the effort," Wooten said. "They are part of the community, and they need to be at the table and involved in the discussion. Agriculture is still the growth engine for the economies of small-town America. We have to be involved."

Sabrina Matteson, AFBF's director of rural affairs, said North Carolina has been a leader in rural development, and was an easy choice for the conference site.

"Everywhere I went, everybody said North Carolina is way ahead of the curve," Matteson said.

The event kicked off with an update on rural efforts around the state from a number of representatives from agencies that plan, fund and implement projects for the good of rural communities.

Attendees also heard about community college, broadband, healthcare and estate planning initiatives that boost rural communities.

Bryan Alvey is director of local affairs for Kentucky Farm Bureau, and said Kentucky has a problem common in rural areas: Young people go off to the cities to get their education and then stay there.

"If they leave our counties, we want them to come back," Alvey said.

Alvey said attracting healthcare providers to rural areas is a priority in Kentucky, too.

The conference included a daylong trip through several counties, visiting businesses, downtowns, aid organizations and a farmers market to see how



N.C. Community College System President Scott Ralls, left, talks with NCFB President Larry Wooten at AFBF's Rural Conference.

rural revitalization has taken place here.

Attendees also participated in a workshop to help them lead rural efforts in their states.

BUREAUBRIEFS

Local Food Web Site--Farmers are urged to register with NCFarmFresh.com, a Web site where consumers can search by type of commodity or geograpy to find locally grown farm products.

The site directs shoppers to roadside stands, farmers markets, nurseries and other outlets that sell goods direct from nearby farms.

An ad campaign is coming soon for the site, which is run by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

New I-9 Forms--Employers must now use a new version of Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, for all employees.

The new form reflects a rule change: Expired documents are no longer acceptable forms of identification or employment verification.

Older versions of the form will no longer be accepted. More information can be found on the web at www.uscis.gov.

**THE
VOICE
OF AGRICULTURE®**

North Carolina Farm Bureau (NCFB) is the unified, statewide Voice of Agriculture®. Working through our grassroots organizations to enhance and strengthen the lives of rural North Carolinians, we strive to build strong, prosperous agricultural communities. We are a private, non-profit, grassroots organization that has been actively promoting farm and rural issues since 1936 through legislative and policy initiatives, member services, field representation, agricultural education, public relations and other programs.

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American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman speaks at Rural Conference

The critical issues facing agriculture and rural America are preserving quality of life, dealing with challenges presented when urbanites move into rural areas, and maintaining infrastructure.

That's what AFBF President Bob Stallman told attendees at the Rural Conference last month. He added that Farm Bureau members have said they want improving the quality of rural life to be part of the organization's mission, and staff and programs are committed to that goal.

"We want a community where our kids and grandkids can come back and live and work and continue the farming operation," Stallman said.

He said that off-farm income accounts for more farm-family income, and rural towns need more employment opportunities to supplement farm income.

A few things can help keep farm offspring working the family land, he said. Rural communities must

be able to offer the same educational opportunities students in suburban and urban areas get, and must have doctors and healthcare facilities. Both of those elements could be aided by broadband Internet.

"That broadband availability is really going to be critical for success in a number of areas," Stallman said.

These goals for rural communities will not be met without leadership to promote them, and Stallman encouraged the group to go back to their rural communities and put ideas into action.

"America's farmers and ranchers need strong, prosperous and vital rural communities that will continue to prosper for generations to come," Stallman said.

"In all of these issues, Farm Bureau—at the county, state and national levels—is ready to lead the way."

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Sen. David Rouzer

Recently, Brisson voted against a smoking ban in workplaces and restaurants.

"In a rural area, there are a lot of small businesses, and I just felt we didn't need to tell them what to do with their own private business," he said.

He added that he doesn't think it's right that supporters of the smoking ban also want revenue from a proposed \$1-per-pack tax on cigarettes.

Brisson said Farm Bureau is right to be worried about animal rights groups. He sees their influence starting in local animal bills.

"The Humane Society has got all the answers for us, but they obviously don't know about nature," he said.

Rouzer, a Republican, is new to office but known for his work with USDA Rural Development and with U.S. Sens. Jesse Helms and Elizabeth Dole.

Rouzer said the session so far has centered on the budget and a few local bills.

He said he opposes a budget that includes any tax or fee increase, including on cigarettes.

"It will have a huge impact on farming," he said.

"That's just piling on in a way that's going to be detrimental."

He's also against the statewide smoking ban, and thinks businesses should have the right to allow smoking or not.

"To mandate for everyone the will of some is not proper government policy," he said.

Rouzer said he knows agriculture's value to the state's economy, and that farmers need lawmakers to stand up to animal activist groups, protect ag research funding, and protect private property and water rights.

Rouzer said he wants to cut government waste to maintain agriculture funding. He recently introduced a welfare reform bill toward that end.

ACTIONREQUEST

Contact your state representatives and senators today and ask them to oppose Senate Bill 907 and House Bill 1101, which would take away our water rights, require permits, charge water users and create a new bureaucracy.

Instead, ask them to support House Bill 1337, a more reasonable approach to improving our water resources. Remind lawmakers that water resources are best managed locally.

Water monitoring rules subject of upcoming public hearings

A recent combined meeting of North Carolina Farm Bureau's Natural and Environmental Resources, Poultry and Swine advisory committees left members with an insight into a regulatory tussle going on among activist organizations, state officials and farm advocates.

A particularly disturbing example is the subject of upcoming public hearings late this month or in early June.

A new proposed rule would require farmers to collect up to three water samples per year from three different sites. The samples are intended to monitor the level of animal waste discharged into farm drains, ditches and streams. Farmers would need to contract with outside commercial laboratories and it would cost livestock farmers about \$2,200 annually to comply.

The public hearing schedule was not set at publication deadline. "We have policy in opposition to this rule, and we will be asking you to come to the public hearings, to write letters, and to comment on this rule," said Anne Coan, environmental affairs director with NCFB. "What upsets us the most is this is going to be a worthless box of data."

The Waterkeeper Alliance (see article about this activist group on Page 1) petitioned the N.C. Environmental Management Commission (EMC) for the rule in Fall 2007. The EMC did not accept the petition as presented, but rather directed the North Carolina Division of Water Quality (DWQ) to write a proposed rule.

Farm Bureau's alternative proposal would ask for a scientifically controlled, watershed-based study conducted by the state. This would provide more accurate and useful data than thousands of mandated grab samples that would simply pile additional expense and labor on farmers for what would ultimately be data collecting dust in boxes.

Keith Larick, DWQ supervisor, has been working with environmental groups and farm advocates on the proposal.

"The way state law is set up, if a group or a person has a real problem with how our rules are written, they are allowed to petition our Environmental Management Commission to change the rules," Larick said. "The EMC heard their case in May of 2008 and essentially agreed with the petitioners that we should go back and take a look at our

rules."

The EMC did not accept the petition as written, but directed the Division of Water Quality to gather more input, hold stakeholder meetings and talk about what the proposed rule should look like. Four stakeholder meetings included industry groups, environmental groups, university staff and research groups.

"We went back to the EMC in November of last year, and the EMC at that point gave us permission to proceed to the public hearing process," Larick added. "In order for that to happen we had to do a fiscal analysis of the rule."

The proposed rule consists of two parts: (1) visual observations done during waste applications, which would require tile drains to be observed after every application event, and (2) routine surface water sampling.

"There was a lot of discussion about this (routine water sampling) in stakeholder meetings," Larick said. "What the DWQ settled on is three sampling events per year, taken at three locations per farm."

If approved, the DWQ would work with farmers to determine the sampling locations. One sample would be a background or upstream sample to determine what is coming onto the farm. The other samples would be downstream from the farm.

The rule would be implemented on a watershed-by-watershed basis, starting with the watersheds that currently have nutrient impairment, which are the Neuse, the Tar-Pam and the White Oak.

The rule would mainly impact the Piedmont and Coastal Plain, and it contains a provision covering expanding and new facilities, Larick added.

Currently, there is no time frame for implementation of the rule beyond DWQ's best effort and annual status reports to the EMC.

There will be four public hearings, which will each include a DWQ presentation followed by stakeholder comments. The division will then take that input into account and evaluate comments, look at the rules and determine whether changes need to be made. After the hearing officers' report is evaluated, the EMC will decide whether to approve the rule, deny the rule or go back and work on it further.

A final decision on the proposed rule is expected in September or November.

Farm Bureau Bee Barn is backdrop for Beekeeper, Pollination and Honey Committee meeting

The Farm Bureau-sponsored honeybee exhibit at the North Carolina Zoo in Asheboro opens June 26.

Farm Bureau's Bee Barn and Bee Garden will have displays teaching the public about honeybees and their hives, the history of beekeeping, and how bees work within a system.

The Bee Barn will also contain "Hive Talking," an explanation of the jobs done by honeybees, types of bees identified, and bee pollination as explained by Dr. John Ambrose, of N.C. State University, through an interactive touch screen and video.

"With the economy, the Zoo offers an economical vacation, especially with new exhibits such as the honeybee," said Cheryl Turner, director of development with the North Carolina Zoological Society.

A tour of the under-construction exhibit was the backdrop for a recent meeting of NCFB's Beekeeper, Pollination and Honey Advisory Committee, which toured the site, reviewed plans and

discussed its design.

Committee chairman Norman Jepsen attended a recent American Farm Bureau Honey and Apiary Advisory Committee meeting and said they discussed Colony Collapse Disorder and the issues of imported honey.



NCFB members tour the honeybee exhibit.

NCFB's committee discussed the interaction between hobbyists and commercial beekeepers, and proposed state budget cuts that could hurt honeybee and other agriculture research.

Don Moore, of Alamance County Farm Bureau, said his county board voted to establish a cost-share program that helps defray hive expenses for beginning beekeepers. Moore said the program helped the county add 15 beekeepers.

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the ones responsible for the prosperity of southeastern North Carolina.

Kennedy, son of Robert F. Kennedy and nephew of John F. Kennedy and Sen. Ted Kennedy, lends a high profile to the organization. The television show Entertainment Tonight recently aired a segment, under the upbeat headline "Skiing With The Kennedys!," that touted a glitzy celebrity skiing fundraiser for Waterkeeper Alliance, which the program described as an organization that "protects and cleans 180 waterways around the world."

Through its celebrity friends and others, the group raised \$3.34 million between 2006 and 2007 and spent \$3.64 million, and held \$806,125 in net assets at the end of the year.

In addition, Waterkeeper Alliance has the support of the Humane Society of the U.S. and the Sierra Club in its efforts.

Kennedy has said he intends to lead Waterkeeper Alliance against all large farms, not just hog farms. He's using the group to pursue lawsuits of billions of dollars (more than enough money to put them out of business) against hog operations.

Hog producers in North Carolina and other states

are required to meet environmental rules. Despite following those rules, in 2001 Waterkeeper Alliance lead legal action against the pork industry, citing Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations guidelines. A judge threw out the claims and said a trial was unwarranted.

The group is having better luck in Maryland, where livestock farmers must now get new permits to meet stricter requirements that many farmers say are prohibitively strict. Waterkeeper Alliance is challenging the new rules there for not being strict enough.

Waterkeeper Alliance lists a U.S. Blueprint Call To Action on its Web site that broadens its attack on traditional agriculture by promoting only organically grown foods. "Corporate-farm food leaves a legacy of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and sediment pollution on its way to your table," it states.

Pesticides are regulated and have been proven safe when applied appropriately, and organic produce uses some forms of pesticide, too.

In January, Waterkeeper Alliance hosted its "Pure Farms, Pure Waters" National CAFO Summit in New Bern, and the agenda was developing legal and non-legal strategies for fighting CAFOs.

FIELDNOTES

by Larry Wooten, NCFB President

Ag stability threatened by 'piling on'

The state's agricultural industry has been called a bright spot in today's dark economy. But rather than protecting this industry, many are intent on "piling on."

Farmland is being lost at unprecedented rates, and some farmers have been forced to cease operations because credit has dried up and input costs are at bankruptcy levels. From 2002 to 2007, North Carolina lost 1,000 farms and more than 600,000 acres of farmland, according to the latest Census of Agriculture.

During each legislative session, North Carolina Farm Bureau sees attempts to increase the red tape and restrictions on agriculture. At the same time entities are criticizing the farmer, they are also wringing their

hands over the loss of farmland.

How will the modern economy adjust to a world with more people and less farmers and land to grow their food and fiber? It won't, without the results of research and scientific advances.

How did people survive before there were thousands of regulations and hundreds of groups out there to protect them? They survived because the people who grew food cared about the land and did their best to protect it. But, they cannot continue to do so with their hands tied by regulatory handcuffs.

When our farmers go out of business, will your family's next meal come from Africa, China or India? We've seen how exporting our energy production has worked out for Americans. Imagine relying on other countries for our food.

It's time to stop piling the punitive regulations on agriculture and use common sense to protect farmland, green space and farm families. Environmental protection can be achieved through profitable agriculture, a logical regulatory structure and adequate funding of agricultural research.



6 The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission has approved bow hunting on Sunday on private lands, effective July 1.

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