

Wilson County young farmer wins AFBF Discussion Meet

In addition to the policy process and seminars offered during American Farm Bureau's 93rd Annual Meeting in January, one major highlight of the event was the victory of North Carolina Farm Bureau's representative in the YF&R Discussion Meet.

Heather Barnes, of Wilson County, won the national competition. For her efforts, Barnes earned a 2012 Chevy Silverado, plus paid registration to the 2012 AFBF YF&R Leadership Conference in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Barnes bested 40 participants with her take on the topic, "Do renewable energy policies benefit all of agriculture?"

Barnes discussed North Carolina's foray into anaerobic digesters at hog operations and the work of the Farm Energy Efficiency Project (FEED).

She said competing with farmers and ranchers from across the country offered a number of chal-

lenges from her three previous state discussion meets where all competitors share farm issues common to North Carolina.

"You've got a lot of different perspectives," Barnes said. "In most of my rooms, with the other competitors, it was more of a discussion. You almost have to know so much more."

The list of potential questions Discussion Meet participants might be asked was made available months before the state competition. Barnes said she made a folder to collect information and news about the potential topics, learned about NCFB programs such as Healthy Living for a Lifetime and FEED, talked to other farmers and met with NCFB staff.

Barnes said she was shocked to hear her name called, first as a finalist in a field of four, then as the overall winner.

Although it was her first time



Heather Barnes, Wilson County, makes a point during American Farm Bureau's Discussion Meet.

attending an AFBF annual meeting, the competition left little time for many of the other activities. Barnes said a highlight was meeting Farm Bureau members from across the country.

"It was a great opportunity to meet people and see that we have some of the same issues and different issues," Barnes said. "It was great to make new connections."

NCFB voting delegates help set AFBF policy

North Carolina Farm Bureau was well represented during American Farm Bureau's 93rd Annual Meeting last month in Honolulu.

NCFB's 28 voting delegates helped determine the policy posi-

tions of the nation's largest general farm organization for 2012.

North Carolina Farm Bureau was also among the state organizations that earned the coveted Awards of Excellence. NCFB earned recognition in three of the

five award categories: Leadership Development, Member Services and Public Policy Implementation.

"Navigating the Waves of

.....**AFBF page 2**



American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman, left, congratulates North Carolina Farm Bureau President Larry Wooten on the organization's three Awards of Excellence during AFBF's 93 Annual Meeting, Jan. 8-11 in Hawaii.

Change” was the theme of the 2012 meeting, and AFBF President Bob Stallman focused his annual address on the challenges and victories for America’s farmers and ranchers in 2011 and in the year ahead.

He highlighted a successful trade year, discussed the cost of regulations and encouraged attendees to open conversations with consumers.

“We must engage directly with the consumers as an industry in ways we haven’t before,” Stallman said. “Only by both listening and sharing, will we fully connect with the values of the consumers that we serve.”

America’s farmers and ranchers are more productive than ever and are providing a solid economic foundation for our nation, Stallman said.

“We are the 1 percent that is producing food and fiber for the other 99 percent,” he said during his annual address.

Approximately 7,000 Farm Bureau members traveled from

across the nation to gather for AFBF’s 93rd Annual Meeting.

Farm and ranch families are growing more food with fewer resources than ever before, Stallman said.

“Over a 20-year period, corn yields are up 41 percent. Per bushel, soil loss has fallen by 70 percent. Water use per bushel of corn is down 27 percent. All major crops show similar trends,” Stallman said.

He also highlighted the record-breaking growth in U.S. agricultural exports over the past year.

“We sold \$42.5 billion more in agricultural products than we imported in 2011,” he said. “That number will stay strong into this year, and I am convinced into the foreseeable future.”

American agriculture’s successes have come in the face of challenges, Stallman said, including droughts, doubts about the future of agricultural policy, floods, a deluge of government regulatory actions, storms, and

an often tempestuous public conversation about the farmer’s role in feeding our nation.

Stallman discussed Farm Bureau’s Systemic Risk Reduction Program proposal as the best option to the farm bill’s countercyclical safety net structure, which he said would help protect farmers from catastrophic losses while recognizing today’s budget realities.

Stallman said the cost of federal regulations falls the hardest on small businesses such as family-owned farms and ranches.

He commended Farm Bureau members for their grassroots engagement to push back against government overreach.

Just as important as these policy concerns is the conversation with consumers, he said.

“And while we must fully engage in this ongoing national dialogue about food and the devoted care we take when we grow it, we must also never ever forget to listen,” Stallman said.

He also explained how the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance, a group of 77 agricultural organizations and companies including American Farm Bureau Federation, is helping lead the effort. The alliance is listening to and answering Americans’ questions, as well as giving farmers and ranchers an opportunity to lift their voices.

“From the environment to the economy, trade and jobs, we have a great story to tell,” Stallman said.

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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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Farmers end support of direct payments

Voting delegates at American Farm Bureau's 93rd Annual Meeting approved policy that officially ended the organization's long-time support of the farm bill's direct payments program.

They also defeated an amendment that would have supported taking a "patchwork" approach to supporting multiple programs for different commodities and regions.

Instead, delegates gave their approval to a simpler plan that includes a new catastrophic revenue loss program that works with a flexible range of crop insurance products and amending current

marketing loan provisions to better reflect market values.

"While the majority of Americans think farmers need help, they don't agree on just writing checks," American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman said. "We want to flip that around. Government should accept systemic risk, which would lower insurance premiums for farmers and allow them to choose their own coverage at a much lower cost. Our proposal is a new approach to farm policy."

During the event, Mary Kay Thatcher, senior director of congressional relations at AFBF, pro-

vided an update on the farm bill.

"The next farm bill will probably not include direct payments, ACRE or SURE programs, but there will be higher target prices and crop insurance," she said. "Without direct payments, crop insurance is the most important safety net."

Thatcher said Farm Bureau is not pleased with the idea of a shallow loss program that would make the farmer responsible for the first 13 percent of revenue losses.

The current farm bill expires on Sept. 30, and for a moment, it looked like the Congressional deficit-cutting super committee would go along with a proposal to cut \$23 billion from farm bill spending and approve a 2012 farm bill along with a broader federal deficit-reduction plan.

However, the bipartisan commission's failure to reach an agreement triggered what will be deeper cuts across government.

"If we can get by with \$23 billion in cuts in 2012 we'll be doing very well," Thatcher said. "Virtually everybody, every study committee, House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, the administration, virtually everyone talked about wanting more than \$23 billion in cuts, and so I think that those numbers are very, very plausible as we move forward in the next year."

Thatcher also explained that the longer it takes to approve a farm bill, the deeper the cuts are likely to be. She also said finishing 2012 with the farm bill completed will be a challenge, due to disagreement in Washington and fewer funds from which to pull a plan together.

U.S. Ag Secretary addresses farmers

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack delivered a clear message to the farmers who attended the American Farm Bureau Federation's 93rd Annual Meeting.

Vilsack had high praise for agriculture's impact on the economy. He said it is responsible for sustaining one in every 12 jobs in America, and he focused on the need to address challenges facing the United States and the world.

He also announced a reallocation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's facilities and resources in light of the government's budget challenges.

That reallocation includes a workforce decrease of more than 7,000 employees, streamlining of services and the consolidation and closing of 250 USDA offices across the country. Of those offices, 131 are Farm Service Agency offices, Vilsack said.



U.S. Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack

Of those, 35 already had no staffing and the remainder had either one or two employees. All were within 20 miles of another FSA office.

Vilsack expressed optimism that providing service online would become a more viable option and assured farmers that USDA service would not be sacrificed.

Farmers needed for hearing project

NCFB is partnering with the Farmers' Hearing Loss Project, a study being conducted by Dr. Marjorie McCullagh and the University of Michigan.

"Hear on the Farm" is a FREE program to help farmers:

- Save their hearing.
- Earn cash for participating.

Participant eligibility requirements:

- Ability to read and write English.
- Have Internet access and an email address.
- Be exposed to noise in production agriculture.
- Be at least 18 years of age.

Enrollment procedures:

1. Log on to www.hearonthefarm.org.
2. Enter your email address and an access code (saveears).
3. Answer the simple eligibility questions.
4. Information about your rights as a research participant are presented: you are offered the opportunity to indicate "I agree."
5. You will find 5 to 10 minutes' worth of questions about your noise exposure and use of hearing protection. After that, the computer will randomly assign you to one of five study groups; some participants will be directed to an opportunity to learn more about noise on the farm and hearing protection. You will then be eligible for the first incentive of \$10.

After six months and again after 12 months, at the end of your participation, you will receive an email message asking you to complete a questionnaire.

Winter: busy meeting season for NCFB volunteer leaders

Winter is prime meeting season for North Carolina Farm Bureau's volunteer leaders.

State Young Farmers and Ranchers program participants will attend American Farm Bureau's YF&R Leadership Conference, Feb. 18-20, in Grand Rapids, Mich. In March, YF&R members will hit Chicago, where they'll have the opportunity to visit the Chicago Board of Trade.

NCFB's Board of Directors has a Kentucky agricultural tour scheduled for Feb. 13-16, while the 2011-12 LEAD Team has a California ag mission set for Feb. 26-March 3.

The County Presidents Leadership Conference is Feb. 29-March 1 in Raleigh. Public policy staff will brief county leaders on policy issues. In addition, political analyst and consultant John Davis will discuss the 2012 elections.

Attendees will also be briefed on NCFB's new member service programs, including identity theft protection and the new partnership with GM motor vehicles.

President Larry Wooten recently announced the establishment of a new policy implementation team to help facilitate increased public policy involvement on the county level. More information will be offered during the County Presidents Leadership Conference.

The Women's Advanced Communications Techniques workshop, which will focus on social media training, will be held March 13-15 in Raleigh, while the annual Women's Conference is April 3-4 in Raleigh.

Daily Briefing, eLEADER help inform farmers

North Carolina Farm Bureau is always searching for ways to reduce the amount of paper-based traditional mail and also email to members.

As part of that ongoing effort, the Daily Briefing and eLEADER were created as two ways to keep members informed, while reducing the amount of paper hitting their mailboxes.

The Daily Briefing was launched in 2009. It is emailed Monday through Friday to the organization's core group of volunteer leaders and other friends of Farm

Bureau. It summarizes the agriculturally relevant news from a wide-variety of news outlets, as well as government agencies and nonprofit groups and organizations across the state and nation.

The eLEADER was first published in May of 2011. This email version of the traditional paper Leader newsletter hits the email boxes of the organization's core volunteer leaders each Friday afternoon. It synthesizes relevant policy information from both the state and national levels in an effort to keep members updated.

SART changing name to reflect broader role

Helping farmers prepare for disasters remains core mission

Following Hurricane Floyd in 1999, North Carolina's leaders realized a need to establish a support system capable of quickly helping livestock and pet owners in the event of an emergency.

In response, the State Animal Response Team (SART) was formed, but now, the organization is changing its name to the State Agricultural Response Team in order to better reflect its broader mission.

North Carolina Farm Bureau's Chester Lowder, director of livestock policy, is also SART's executive director, and he says the organization's new name will be gradually rolled out over the months ahead.

A formal announcement will come later in 2012 and plans are also in the works for a hurricane awareness workshop and other events.

"We're not taking anything away from the animal response benefits," Lowder said. "It has always been broader than just animal operations."

Although the word "response" is in the name, Lowder said SART focuses on giving farmers the resources to prepare their operations in the event of a weather emergency, fire, a disease outbreak or other disaster. SART's website, www.ncsart.org, offers all sorts of materials and guides to farmers who want to build a preparedness plan to suit their particular operation.

"Preparation goes a long way toward being able to recover if there is an event," Lowder said.

Drafting an emergency plan is not a one-time process—as an agricultural operation grows

or changes, as new resources are made available and as plans are enacted and materials used, emergency plans should be updated. By the same token, an update of SART was due.

Many of the original founders of SART have retired or moved on. In addition, the state has added and lost farms, and the agencies playing a role in SART have changed. In addition to the state's department of agriculture and emergency leaders, SART works with North Carolina State University and the American Humane Association.

During 2011, the state's emergency resources were put to the test, with tornadoes sweeping across Eastern North Carolina in the spring and Hurricane Irene hitting Coastal counties and damaging crops in the summer. The evolution of SART is part of a larger effort by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and oth-

er state agencies to revisit and improve emergency response.

"This year's events showed opportunities for coordination," Lowder said. "It's a good time for local communities to look at their plans or reorganize a plan."

The state team serves to reinforce the work of CARTs—County Agricultural Response Teams. There are currently 94 active or in development CARTs in more than half of North Carolina's counties. Each team includes members of the county Extension Service, emergency management, agricultural leaders and volunteers. SART leaders hope to encourage more CARTs to form.

In addition to offering farmers tools to prepare their farms for disaster, SART or CART affiliates create a support network after a disaster event and help connect farmers to the resources they might need, such as rebuilding materials or damage assessments to apply for aid.

N.C. Pesticide Board update on NPDES permits

The North Carolina Pesticide Board met Jan. 10 in Raleigh to hear reports concerning the private pesticide recertification program, the pesticide environmental trust fund, a micro sampling program and an update on the state's national pollutant discharge elimination system (NPDES) pesticide general permit.

In particular, the NPDES permit has been the subject of intense debate and court action. Jeff Poupart, with the N.C. Division of Water Quality, updated the board on the status of the permit, including minor technical updates made to the permit, as well as

what activities must be covered and the inspection process.

The permit is the result of a rule passed by the U.S. EPA in 2006 that requires a permit for pesticide applications made directly to or near bodies of water.

After several appeals and legal action, including the National Cotton Council vs. EPA case, the 6th Circuit Court granted EPA a two-year stay in 2009 to implement the permitting program.

The permitting program went into effect in 2011. The big difference between the N.C. permit and the federal permit is the definition of "waters of the state."

FIELDNOTES

by Larry Wooten, NCFB President

What's in a Name?

The name Farm Bureau means something across North Carolina. Farm Bureau is synonymous with integrity, family values, honest work and a tradition of service.

Farm Bureau has emerged as a powerful force for agriculture and our rural residents. As a leader in our state, Farm Bureau bears responsibilities to the people of North Carolina—and we take those responsibilities seriously. Our primary responsibility—our core mission—was clearly defined in 1936. Farm Bureau is to provide legislative representation for North Carolina's farmers and rural families.

Every legislative session finds Farm Bureau staff actively advocating for member policy positions, which were formalized by the voting delegates from county Farm Bureaus.

We had a good legislative session during 2011. We worked well with the new leadership in the North Carolina General Assembly and counted several significant accomplishments.

Among the most important of those accomplish-

ments was regulatory reform. The process was to primarily ensure that state regulations are fair and no more punitive than federal regulations.

We also worked with other organizations to protect agricultural programs during tough budget negotiations within state government. We worked on a host of water issues, protecting the farmer's right to use the water under his land. We were instrumental in establishing the North Carolina Animal Ag Coalition. We protected present use value based taxation. We worked hard to protect private property rights. And we opposed the introduction of E-Verify at the state level.

As a nonpartisan organization, Farm Bureau stands for agriculture. We have the responsibility to speak for farmers and serve as an advocate for agriculture in North Carolina. Farm Bureau will NOT shirk that responsibility no matter how tough the issue, no matter how controversial the issue, no matter how sensitive the issue—just as long as our policy supports our actions.

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The County Presidents Leadership Conference is Feb. 29-March 1 in Raleigh.

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