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LEADING THE WAY INTO NEW FRONTIERS

A few weeks ago, North Carolina Farm Bureau voting delegates, members, and staff traveled west to Salt Lake City to participate in American Farm Bureau Federation's 105th Annual Convention. It's a time we always look forward to as we engage in the development of new Farm Bureau policies and initiatives, take part in important discussions about the future of agriculture, and form valuable relationships with friends and colleagues from other states.

"We are exploring New Frontiers this convention, and you can truly feel the frontier spirit out here in the West. I can just imagine the pioneers watching the sunset over the mountains, and wondering what was waiting on the other side," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall.



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Pioneering Spirit

Duvall continued his opening remarks saying, “As farmers, I believe we all have a little pioneering spirit in us. We’re eager to see what’s next, and how we can get there together. New frontiers are not just new lands to explore. They are the places where our communities come together in new and creative ways; where innovation drives us toward a brighter future; and where we find solutions to the challenges we face. We reach New Frontiers together, one step at a time.”

At the heart of that pioneering spirit? Leadership, perseverance, and teamwork.

President Duvall noted how those three elements combined to secure victories for agriculture in the past year, including how Farm Bureau leaders continually rallied against the WOTUS rule, leading to the Supreme Court striking down the rule earlier this year. And how farmers came together with diverse interests to advocate for the farm bill, securing an extension for one more year. He shared how Farm Bureau is engaging future chefs in culinary school to help them better understand where their ingredients come from, and highlighted agriculture’s progress on sustainability, technology, and mental health.

In closing, Duvall said, “I want to leave you with a challenge. As you enjoy reconnecting with old friends and making new ones, I’d like you to discuss the next frontier for Farm Bureau. Whether it’s at the county, state or national level – or all three – what does that frontier look like? Then, I ask you to consider what role you can play to help us get there.”

We need everyone at the table, working together to reach new frontiers.



Mental Health and Wellbeing at the Forefront

Announced at AFBF Convention, the Farm Family Wellness Alliance is launching free, anonymous, online mental health and wellbeing services to provide a nationwide safety net of confidential and on-demand support to farmers and farm families. Access to services starts at Togetherall, a safe, clinically moderated peer-to-peer community, where members around the world are there to listen, support and give members’ mental wellbeing a boost. Through an anonymous profile, users can access a global network of peers, backed by the safeguarding of licensed clinicians overseeing the community around-the-clock. Access to the platform is available to members of a farm family aged 16 and older. In addition to Togetherall’s global community, farmers and their families will have access to an agricultural sector sub-group to share or read others’ experiences in a safe, judgement-free zone.

“Farming is tough even on the best days. That’s why Farm Bureau has been committed to helping farmers and ranchers across the country get connected with the tools and resources they need to promote mental health and wellbeing—and to check in on their friends, neighbors and loved ones,” said Duvall.

Togetherall also offers a range of wellbeing tools, such as self-assessments and access to additional support services through a partnership with Personal Assistance Services. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, financial health, improving sleep and more. The landmark alliance bringing Togetherall and Personal Assistance Services to farm families represents a broad swath of agricultural organizations, illustrating the far-reaching impacts of mental health and well-being in rural America.

NCFB a Leader Once Again

North Carolina Farm Bureau continued to show its strength both as an organization and through our outstanding individual leaders. For the second year in a row, NCFB won the Pinnacle Award for Group 6, the highest honor a state Farm Bureau can be awarded for program and member achievement. This marks NCFB’s fourth win in the past nine years. “It’s nice to win trophies, but I’m just so humbled to receive this award on behalf of our people because they deserve to be recognized,” said NCFB President Shawn Harding. “Maybe it’s just a few hours of volunteering but when we all work together we accomplish amazing things, and I’m grateful for the opportunity to honor them for

their effort.” NCFB also won a Navigator Award for membership growth, reporting an increase of 15,416 members, falling just shy of Texas for the honor of largest gainer.

Secret Garden Bees, represented by NCFB member Jim Hartman, was one of the semi-finalists for the Ag Innovation Challenge and claimed the competition’s People’s Choice Award as decided by public vote. The competition provides opportunities for Farm Bureau members to showcase business innovations being developed for agriculture. Located in Cumberland County, Secret Garden Bees is a veteran-owned and operated honey farm that helps train veterans seeking to enter agriculture.

We’re also proud of our Young Farmers & Ranchers competitors Malorie Thompson (Excellence in Ag), Adam and Carrie Barnhardt (Achievement Award), and Victoria Lee (Discussion Meet)!

Politics in Focus

The AFBF government affairs team updated attendees on the most pressing issues in Washington during a “Public Policy Hot Topics” workshop that covered government spending, taxes, livestock issues, and other topics. But the farm bill was the key topic this year.

Representatives for the Agriculture committees had a panel discussion covering the challenges and opportunities in drafting and passing a new farm bill. One of the toughest issues facing lawmakers is how to fund the farm bill. “There is no new money,” said Parish Braden, staff director for the House Committee on Agriculture. “We’re at a time of fiscal restraint.”

Joe Gilson, AFBF Director of Government Affairs, stressed the importance of getting a farm bill passed before lawmakers’ focus turns to elections. “With this year being an election year, I think we have a window in late March. If it gets much beyond that, we have members who will go home to campaign,” he said.

“I’m asking you to send a resounding message to Congress to deliver a new farm bill for our farms and our country,” Duvall said. “The road to a new farm bill has become longer than any of us would have liked, but together we can see it through.”

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack also addressed the closing general session, where he announced more

than \$200 million in loans and grants for fertilizer production and renewable energy.

Delegates Address Challenges, Move Farm Bureau Forward

On the final day of AFBF Convention, delegates gathered to adopted policies to guide the organization’s work in 2024. Key topics ranged from artificial intelligence, to labor, to crop insurance.

Addressing the growth of artificial intelligence in agriculture, delegates noted that AI has the potential to enhance farming practices and conserve resources, but privacy rights must be respected.

Recognizing the challenges of maintaining a strong agriculture workforce, delegates voted to stabilize wage rates for guest workers and revise H-2A and H-2B programs to better meet the needs of America’s farms.

They reaffirmed their support for increasing reference prices in the farm bill and maintaining a strong crop insurance program, including an expansion of eligibility to ensure more commodities are covered.

On foreign investment, delegates added policy in support of additional funding to improve data collection on the foreign ownership of agricultural land. Delegates also voted to support the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S. reviewing foreign investments in U.S. agribusinesses, natural resources and real estate.

Delegates called for changes to the contract poultry pay system to ensure long-term economic sustainability for farmers, and to require more transparency from chicken companies.

On trade, delegates added policy to recommend Congress investigate fertilizer supply chain outages and tariffs placed on imports.

“Today, delegates demonstrated their readiness to seize the opportunities and take on the challenges facing agriculture,” said Duvall. “It’s crucial that Congress pass a new farm bill and address the labor shortage in 2024. The policy set forth by Farm Bureaus in all 50 states and Puerto Rico will guide AFBF in its efforts through the process. We look forward to making our members’ unified voice heard as they work to ensure a strong food supply for America’s families.”

The 106th Annual AFBF Convention will take place January 24 – 29, 2025 in San Antonio, Texas.