



# ALASKA FARMERS UNION

# NEWS

April 2011

## *Hot Topics at the 2011 NFU Convention*

Climate change, food safety, and biotechnology were just a few of the hot issues. I mean what do farmers talk about? Freedom to farm, animal husbandry, financial reform, farm bill, how much can you fit in three days of discussion and debate. Yes, I said debate, and sometimes hotly. NFU encourages all members to participate in the discussions that shape its official policy positions. "It is the process known as grassroots, where members shape the agenda," said Alaska Farmers Union President Bob Shumaker. "AFU played a role in formulating national policy and we encourage our members to provide input making Alaska's voice stronger at the national level.

Take free trade for example. Should we just accept status quo and say we are in favor of the pending free trade agreement with South Korea? It is predicted that America will lose 159,000 jobs within the first 7 years if the agreement is accepted. How does that help family farms and our economy! Just ask yourself who really benefits from these so called free trade agreements. NFU has always championed for fair trade agreements passing a resolution opposing the proposed trade agreement with South Korea.

NFU takes a stand in support of clean energy for all Americans. NFU knows that farmers and ranchers can provide a variety of clean, renewable solutions including biofuels, wind, solar, biomass, and methane biogas to meet our nations energy goals. Heck, when are we going to stop sending our energy money around the world so others can continue to buy and build bombs to be used against us? The President of the United States has called on us to be producing 80 percent of our energy needs here at home by 2035.

How about the so-called Farmers and Ranchers Bill of Rights or the GIPSA rule? What's wrong with getting on the right side of the fence in support of family farm agriculture? The bottom line is that implementation of the GIPSA rule would return protections to producers from the misuse of market power and consolidation of the beef, pork, and poultry industries. Just think about what has been going on. In 1980 there were 660,000 hog farms and only 67,000 today. In my lifetime I have seen pork (live animals) sell for as low as 6 cents a pound. Have you ever see that value in the retail stores? Who's been making all the money? The stories behind the beef and poultry industries are the same. We passed a "Farmer and Rancher Bill of Rights" that would protect livestock farmers from the misuse of power and consolidation in the beef, pork and poultry industries.

A new NFU policy supports having states establish testing standards and management practices that allow farmers to sell raw milk to consumers. Alaska as well as others including the New England Farmers Union got in this discussion. Hans Geier stated, "it is time the small guys got a chance." NFU is the first national agriculture organization to support raw milk dairies.

And that is not all but many other issues, policy, and resolution came to the table like: state inspected meat sales, maple syrup designation, and fiscally responsible farm policy. Check out the National Farmers Union website and learn more or call on our local team.

## *From the President ...*

San Antonio, Texas, was the location of the National Farmers Union convention. Three members attended this year. Hans Geier attended as a delegate. A delegate is selected by and through our local board. Alaska is allotted one delegate in addition to the president. Hans is our northern representative out of the Fairbanks/Delta area. Hans and his wife were vacationing across the southern states prior to the convention. For those of you who remember Michael Brooks he is now living in New Mexico working in the real estate market. The Geier family got to stay with him a couple of days. Also in attendance was Karen Olson of Wasilla. Karen was on the policy committee so besides the national convention she spent a week in D.C., in January working on policy. What that meant was that Alaska was represented on stage at the convention, a job well done. I don't know of more difficult job during a convention. A personal thank you to Karen for all her hard work and dedication. And, of course I attended. I have attended a few conventions and this one was awesome. The delegates accomplished numerous changes some of which will be reflected in the up coming farm bill (I hope). Farmers nationwide are facing some of the similar problems and opportunities that we have here in Alaska. It is easy enough to lump all lower 48 farmers as big, nothing could be farther from the truth. The consensus is against corporate farming and for strong family farms. The last sentence of our Alaskan mission statement says it all. "We believe the strength of our communities, our state, and our nation is dependent on stable and economically viable farm family enterprises." That was as true the day Stoney Wright suggested it is today. I feel privileged to represent Alaska agriculture at the national table. I thank each and every one of you for allowing me to serve. Because we know that the "Alaska Farmers Union is dedicated to the growth and expansion of agriculture and the family farm in our state." What more can you ask for? --**Bob**

## *From the History Books: Farmers Union's Rich History*



*The second half of a two part series by Tom Giessel, NFU honorary historian.*

After four years of independent research, I finally found the time to travel to Norlin

Library in Boulder, Colo., to visit the NFU archives. It was a pilgrimage of sorts, a journey I have long awaited. I was not disappointed.

I was humbled to be holding in my hands and reading letters by early Farmers Union leaders. Some were handwritten. I was witness to the history recorded in photographs and scrapbooks. You could sense the strength, desire, hope will and commitment of so many.

I saw the birth, the pains and joys of the journey of the organization from its earliest days. There were the failures and triumphs and generosity. There were the high points and low points, the builders and the “kickers,” the movers and the shakers, the leaders and the statesmen. I saw NFU's priorities of education, cooperation and legislation take shape. There were men, women and children, and families. There were tears and laughter and many great speeches.

With over 400 linear feet of files, one could spend a lifetime on research and

study. I have only scratched the surface of our wonderful story. What I have gained is a strong sense of why our Farmers Union continues to live a strong and purposeful life. Our history provides insights into how we continue to shape our future, what divides us, and what places us on a path to success.

Here are a few fascinating facts about our organization, in no particular order:

-Charles Barrett, who served as NFU President from 1906-1928, deserves much credit for bringing together “Education, Cooperation and Legislation,” as the fundamentals of NFU purpose and goals. In effect, he wrote our mission statement long before the term was recognized.

-Many of our early state and national presidents were editors of newspapers.

-A colorful member of National Farmers Union was a man named O. F. Dornblaser or “Uncle Dorn” as he was affectionately called. He never missed a national convention, and in 1933 – then past ninety years of age – he danced a jig to show folks how young the national convention made him feel. He retired at the age of 93 from active membership work for Farmers Union. Newt Gresham, Dornblaser and William T. Garner wrote the first constitution and bylaws of the National Farmers Union. Garner's son, John Nance Garner, served as vice president of the

United States from March 4, 1933, through January 20, 1941. Prior to that he served as the 44th Speaker of the House of Representatives.

-As president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson addressed the 1917 Kansas Farmers Union State Convention. In 1906, Miss Amanda Bates of Osborne County Kansas, was the first woman elected president of a Farmers Union local.

-John F. Kennedy addressed the National Farmers Union convention during his presidency. Theodore Roosevelt was a member of National Farmers Union.

-In 1917, National Farmers Union did away with many of the “rituals” such as passwords and secret handshakes to get into meetings. Rituals were common for many organizations as those opposing the goals of the organization might slip in to spy or attempt to create unrest or opposition.

-Of eight speakers at the 1908 national convention, five were women.

-A yellow fever scare postponed the 1905 national convention until after the first frost.

-Oklahoma Farmers Union has the first cooperative hospital in the nation, which operated in the mid-1930s.

If you have interesting Farmers Union history to share, e-mail Tom at [tom.giessel@gmail.com](mailto:tom.giessel@gmail.com).

*Tom Giessel farms with his brother on a fourth generation farm in west central Kansas. They grow wheat, corn, grain sorghum and alfalfa. He and his wife Sheryl have three grown children, Andrew, Kate and Ann. Other than Farmers Union history, he enjoys building furniture in his wood shop.*

### **Alaska Farmers Union**

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## *New FSIS Rule Benefits Family Farmers and Ranchers*

National Farmers Union (NFU) President Roger Johnson spoke in favor of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) final rule announced earlier this month that will broaden the market for smaller state-inspected plants.

"This new rule will benefit small packing plants across the country by allowing certain state-inspected meat and poultry to cross state lines," said Johnson. "This should increase market access for these smaller plants. By allowing smaller plants to sell into other states, the rule will help increase competition and grow jobs in rural America. The new rule will benefit family farmers and ranchers who utilize smaller plants, because it will increase the market for their products and ensure they receive a fair price. NFU was very active in ensuring that interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry was placed in the 2008 Farm Bill, so we are pleased to see the final rule take effect."

For qualifying plants, the FSIS final rule allows meat and poultry that is inspected at the state level to be shipped across state lines, as long as it meets federal standards set under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and Poultry Products Inspection Act. Prior to this rule, plants that were only state-inspected could only sell their meat and poultry within their own state.

## *Learning the Skills of Civic Citizenship*

Growing up on a family farm teaches many important life lessons. Perhaps no lesson is more important than learning the skills of civic citizenship. Through participation in local cooperatives, schools, and local governments, farmers and rural Americans have many opportunities to help make the rules that affect them and those around them. The skills that one learns from civics participation start on the family farms and ranches of rural Americans across the country.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reflected on this notion in his remarks at the iCivics' "Educating for Democracy in a Digital Age" conference this March when he said, "In an era of texts, tweets, and chat rooms and the instant democracy of the web, civics education may seem antiquated. However, recent events have debunked the idea that civics education doesn't matter. From the peaceful uprising in Egypt to the tragic shootings in Tucson, Americans have been reminded again that freedom matters -- and that democracy is its embodiment. I would suggest to you that while civics education and engagement is vital in its own right, the skills acquired by civic participation are in fact critical to succeeding in the knowledge economy of the 21st century."

*From the President ...*

*--Bob*

## *NFU Convention: AFU Member Perspectives*

*Submitted by Hans and Marilyn Geier*

We arrived in San Antonio the day before the NFU annual meeting started. AFU President Bob Schumaker was already there, so we moved into his room at the Riverwalk Marriot, just a few blocks from the Alamo. For the next three days we enjoyed meeting and greeting new and old friends from all over the U.S., discussing markets, membership, policy, and the upcoming Farm Bill. President Bob and Policy Committee member Karen Olson represented Alaska agriculture interests in stellar fashion. There is no doubt that Alaska Farmers interests are being considered by the NFU. I (Hans) was the voting delegate for Alaska, and the last two days of the conference was devoted to approval of the policy. More than 200 pages of the policy book were examined and discussed in detail by the delegates and state presidents. President Bob was one of the more active advocates, speaking many times either in favor of or against certain policy changes.

Of particular interest was the dairy policy. The dairy policy committee ran concurrently with the policy committee meeting. In the end, the new policy supported by the policy committee was replaced by the policy by special order, "Dairy Policy, An Opportunity for Improvement," that instead of treating dairy as an industry under a crop insurance model, it addresses many of the problems caused by imports of MPC and casein which have caused U.S. and world dairy prices to put American dairy farmers at a disadvantage. This is an example where NFU, as a member-driven organization, was able to stand up for the rights of small, medium, and family farmers against corporate agribusiness concerns.

Other subjects of interest were many and varied. Of interest to Alaskans may be the policy proposed by a delegate from Pennsylvania who proposed an amendment decrying "puppy mills." While his reasoning was sound, we spoke against it due to the hardship it may signify for Alaskans who engage in dog mushing and other commercial enterprises using dogs. This amendment was voted down, and if it does resurface it will be more appropriate due to our input. As I write this I have five little Labradoodle puppies behind me who were born only five days ago.

Much of the concern of delegates was directed towards the many "free trade" issues that arose. The fact that many of the past free trade agreements such as CAFTA and NAFTA have not performed as promised for U.S. agriculture, and did not hold all participant countries to comparable standards for labor, environmental, and health and food safety. Therefore, NFU resolved to not support free trade agreements that simply replicate the CAFTA and NAFTA. Conditions for support of future free trade agreements were elucidated. Alaskans may remember problems with feed imports and labeling which may have contributed to poultry poisoning in the Mat-Su, as well as deficiencies in musk ox feed sold to the University of Alaska Fairbanks, contributing to a significant die-off of the herd there. Alaska has been on the receiving end of many "free trade" deficiencies.

Many other concerns were hashed out in the policy committee and policy adoption by the delegates. In the end we have a policy that we can all be proud of, and that reflects national and Alaska interests.

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