



ALASKA FARMERS UNION

NEWS

May 2011

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 ...

Here we go. Creeping into May feels like a snail's race with the hare looming in the horizon. We are getting closer to the longest day and if it isn't planted it ought to be. [Every day I spend a few hours putting more seeds in pots or trays. Like a race, what is winning in agriculture? Is it going to market and putting money back in our pockets? Are we in it for ourselves? Or is it something bigger? Our/my system is a small piece of the overall pie. We are only one booth space, we each have our share. But there are big changes going on all over the horizon, like us darkness is coming. The race to Dec. 21 will be on! It doesn't have to mean the end of our growing season, just that our methods must change. Making do with less, consolidating, streamlining are all terms we have heard year after year. We may be "losing" our local seed bank, why Alaska? Why do we have a seed bank/repository? The answers are sometimes not readily seen but Food Security is a big and important issue. I believe America is in for some difficult times in the financial picture but the last place we want to cut is in agriculture. We have some extremely talented people tied to these cuts; by losing them we lose a piece of intellectual Alaska. Times are changing and now more than ever it is important to plant, protect, and grow Alaska. On the same note please be aware of the last minute changes to the railroad spur out at Pt. Mac. They have move out of the wet areas and on to our dwindling agriculture lands. Since when did we run out of wetlands? Now more than ever we need to fight for our agriculture lands.

Look for Alaska grown when you are out to eat. There are some business that want to support us and those are the places we should be. Thank you all for your time and efforts in getting the crops in, we are in for a great summer. Be active and proactive the time is right! --*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.

Oil Subsidies Must End

National Farmers Union (NFU) President Roger Johnson sent a letter to U.S. Senate and House of Representatives leadership earlier this month urging elimination of tax subsidies for the oil industry.

"At a time when most Americans are pinching pennies, oil companies are posting record profits," said Johnson. "For example, Exxon Mobil recently reported first quarter earnings of \$10.6 billion, a 69 percent increase over profits for the same quarter last year. Other oil companies have posted staggering first quarter profits as well."

Eliminating subsidies for the oil industry would save nearly \$40 billion over 10 years.

"Money saved from eliminating tax loopholes for oil companies should be used to take action to provide consumers relief at the pump by investing in biofuels," said Johnson. "According to a Michigan State study, increased ethanol utilization can produce a positive net impact, ranging from \$55.60 to \$193 for individuals and \$68.50 to \$404.50 for a family of four. Investment in biofuels production and infrastructure makes sense for a stronger economy, greater national security, and a cleaner environment."

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