

# Farm Bureau Approves Strategic Action Plan for 2016

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Jan. 29 released highlights of its 2016 strategic action plan, which addresses public policy issues in the coming year. The plan is a result of deliberations of delegates to the AFBF's 97th Annual Convention in Orlando.

The board-approved plan focuses the organization's attention on a number of key issues including:

- Creating a more positive dialogue with consumers about modern agricultural practices;
- Protecting farmers' ability to use biotech plant varieties and other innovative technologies;
- Opposing unlawful expansion of federal jurisdiction under the *Clean Water Act*; and
- Moving forward with congressional approval of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement.

"This plan is an important roadmap to key issue areas that AFBF and our grassroots members will address in 2016," AFBF President Vincent "Zippy" Duvall said.

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) new *Waters of the United States* (WOTUS) rule remains among the most pressing issues in agriculture. Although presented as a water issue, the measure in fact would unlawfully regulate land in violation of the *Clean Water Act* itself, according to an AFBF news release. The rule takes over local and state authority while threatening private-property rights and normal farming activity nationwide.

"EPA's blatant overreach is nothing short of a federal land grab," Duvall said. "The administration has refused to listen to business owners, local governments and lawmakers. The courts have ordered this rule temporarily stopped. The Government Accountability Office found EPA's actions illegal, and Congress — which originally gave EPA its authority under the *Clean Water Act* — called for an end to this rule. We won't give up until it's gone and farmers are free to care for their own land."

AFBF's action plan also supports agricultural biotechnology that promises great benefits for agriculture, consumers and the environment.

"Farmers and ranchers need better tools to be more productive and efficient.

We will continue to defend farmers' and ranchers' access to biotechnology and protect their right to use other promising new technologies, from data services to drones," Duvall said.

The AFBF board reaffirmed its commitment to the TPP Agreement.

"TPP promises to open up markets around the Pacific Rim. These are some of the fastest-growing markets in the world, and America's farmers and ranchers are ready to expand business there," Duvall said. "We're ready to work with Congress to move this agreement forward for the

overall good of U.S. agriculture."

The action plan places a special focus on food safety and security issues.

"Consumers should have the confidence that

their food is safe and wholesome.

As farmers, we want the best for our families and yours. We've made great strides in opening up the dialogue to help consumers understand more about modern agriculture, but there's a long way to go," Duvall said. "All consumers deserve access to safe, affordable food, and we will continue to protect agriculture's ability to meet that need."

The AFBF board approved an additional list of issues that will require close monitoring as they develop over the course of 2016. Those issue areas include advancing legislation that addresses agriculture's long- and short-term labor needs, implementing business tax reform, monitoring the overall farm economy, and energy availability and affordability.

## Delegates set the stage

Jan. 12 at the organization's 97th Annual Convention, delegates from all 50 states and Puerto Rico elected new leaders and approved policies laying the groundwork for the strategic plan. Renewable fuels, governmental reform, farm policy, risk management and international trade were among the most important matters slated for action during the next 12 months.

Delegates elected Duvall to serve as the new president of AFBF and Scott VanderWal as vice president.

Duvall is a poultry, cattle and hay producer from Greene County, Ga., and served as president of the Georgia Farm Bureau for nine years. Duvall has held numerous leadership positions in Farm Bureau and his local community. He is the AFBF's 12th president.



Scott VanderWal is a third-generation family farmer from Volga, S.D., and has been president of the South Dakota Farm Bureau since 2004.

Delegates approved new policies that covered a wide range of agricultural topics. Among other things, they took the following actions.

### **Risk management**

- Supported the addition of cottonseed to the list of oilseed crops eligible for farm programs;
- Supported voluntary risk-management products for poultry growers that would provide assistance during disease outbreaks; and
- Reaffirmed support for programs that provide emergency assistance for livestock and tree producers not covered by federal crop-insurance programs.

### **Regulatory review and reform**

Delegates addressed recent malfeasance by establishing a new policy that opposes governmental attempts to sway public opinion regarding rules that are open for public comment, whether by social media or other means.

### **International trade**

Delegates reaffirmed support for fair and open world trade that benefits agriculture. In particular, AFBF voted to support the TPP, which promises to expand opportunities for U.S. farm goods to some of the fastest-growing markets around the world.

### **Biotechnology**

Delegates reaffirmed their support for the use of genetically modified plant varieties and other innovative technologies. Delegates also called for a voluntary and uniform labeling system for products designated as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). They denounced mandatory labeling of food products containing GMOs at the local, state and federal levels.

### **Law Enforcement**

Delegates approved new policy related to forfeiture reform that requires that individuals be convicted of a federal crime before their property is seized.

### **Immigration**

Delegates reaffirmed support for flexibility in the H-2A program that would allow workers to seek employment from more than one farmer. They also called on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform to assist in solving the continuing shortage of agricultural workers.

### **Big data**

Delegates reaffirmed support for the protection of proprietary data collected from farmers, as well as fair compensation for farmers who choose to sell their data to third parties, including other farmers.

### **Energy**

The delegates maintained their strong support for biofuels and the Renewable Fuel Standard. They also called for continued tax incentives to benefit biodiesel and other advanced biofuels.



**Editor's Note:** This article is compiled from news releases provided by AFBF.

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— Zippy Duvall

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