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Corner

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NFU DELEGATES ADOPT EIGHT SPECIAL ORDERS OF BUSINESS

NFU's held its 112th anniversary convention March 8-11 in Santa Fe, N.M. During the convention, delegates from across the country debated a number of amendments to NFU's policy and passed eight special orders of business (SOBs) – resolutions that highlight a particularly timely or high priority issue on which to focus advocacy efforts for the coming year. This year's SOBs focused on the following topics:

- **International Year of Family Farming:** The United Nations (U.N.) has officially designated the year 2014 as the "International Year of Family Farming," and NFU delegates felt it important to reinforce that recognition with a SOB. The resolution states, "NFU recognizes the vital role family farms play in the economic and social well-being of the United States and the world, and the importance of raising the profile of family farming by focusing the world's attention on its significant role in alleviating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development in rural areas."
- **Family Farming and the Implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill:** After many years of advocacy, NFU is proud to have finally achieved passage of a new five-year farm bill. However, as the delegates recognized in this SOB, "equally important as the legislative process is the implementation of the farm bill, and NFU urges officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture to act in a way that benefits family farming throughout the nation." The resolution goes on to list a number of specific implementation priorities.
- **Family Farming and Immigration Reform:** "The current immigration system is broken, especially for agricultural laborers and employers," stated NFU delegates. Congress and the administration have highlighted immigration reform as a policy priority in 2014, making this SOB particularly timely; however, a number of obstacles stand in the way of completion. As the resolution continues, "NFU is supportive of the legislation passed by the U.S. Senate in June 2013, which included agriculture provisions based upon an agreement between a coalition of farm organizations and the United Farm Workers. The U.S. House of Representatives should follow this example and take action to pass a reasonable comprehensive reform bill."
- **Family Farming and Trade Policy:** Pending free trade agreements and the president's request for trade promotion authority, which would prevent Congress from amending or filibustering trade agreements negotiated by the president but instead subject them to only an up or down congressional vote, prompted delegates to adopt an SOB that "opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership as it currently stands because it uses the same failed blueprint as past trade agreements" and "opposes legislation that would enact trade promotion authority, or 'Fast Track,' for negotiating trade rules."
- **Family Farming and Animal Disease Protection and Research:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are in the midst of a process to move research on highly contagious animal diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), from its current location on Plum Island, N.Y. to a mainland location in Manhattan, Kan. This proposal "poses significant risks – a concern echoed by a 2009 Government Accountability Office report. The inadvertent release of any of the diseases researched at the facility, which will be located in close proximity to domestic livestock production, would be devastating to the U.S. livestock industry." For that reason, the resolution opposes moving this research to Kansas but, if inevitable, "urges Congress to provide robust funding of the Kansas facility to ensure it is in top condition to contain these highly contagious diseases and prevent them from contaminating the U.S. herd." It also opposes "attempts to loosen restrictions on imports from countries that are affected by FMD."

- **Family Farming and the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS):** The RFS is the main policy driver of biofuels, and it is “under attack on a variety of fronts. In Congress, the deep-pocketed oil industry and other interest groups have put the RFS in their crosshairs.” The administration has also proposed to reduce the 2014 biofuels targets under the RFS and is in the process of soliciting input on its proposal to do so. The resolution states that “NFU remains adamantly opposed to changing the statute legislatively or administratively.” To combat the claim that the oil industry has met a ‘blend wall’ and is unable to use more biofuels, “NFU calls for the retention of the RFS, increased availability of blender pumps nationwide, and the expansion of flexible-fuel vehicles.”
- **Family Farming and the Reform of the Beef Checkoff:** NFU is a member of the Beef Industry Checkoff Group, in which livestock stakeholders have come together to seek changes to the checkoff which will ensure the funds are not used to support priorities that are contrary to ranchers’ interests. To support this work and stress the need for a swift resolution of this nearly three-year process, delegates passed an SOB that outlines the organization’s priorities for reform: “Checkoff programs are intended to promote the consumption and further research and development of commodities, funded by assessing a fee from a farmer, rancher, grower or processor, based on the production of the commodity. These are worthwhile objectives if the checkoff programs and funds are properly administered. Policy organizations should be divorced from the beef checkoff program.” The resolution concludes by stating “if adequate changes to the cur-

rent structure of the beef checkoff are not made within the confines of the Beef Industry Checkoff Group, NFU will seek its own resolutions to these problems.”

- **Sequestration:** Automatic, arbitrary and across-the-board budget cuts, known as the sequester, went into effect after Congress was unable to reach a compromise on spending cuts and tax rates to reduce the deficit. These cuts have already “weakened the ability of some agencies to perform their duties”; therefore, the resolution urges “the immediate repeal of sequestration.”

Read the full text of the special orders of business at www.nfu.org.

SECRETARY VILSACK KEYNOTES NFU CONVENTION, UNVEILS NEW SMALL AND MID-SIZED FARMER INITIATIVE

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack spoke for more than an hour on Monday, March 10 at NFU’s recent convention in Santa Fe, N.M. His remarks focused heavily on USDA’s efforts to implement new 2014 Farm Bill programs as quickly as possible, since farmers are already in the midst of the 2014 crop year.

During his remarks, the secretary took the opportunity to announce new and expanded efforts to connect small and mid-sized farmers with USDA resources that can help them build stronger businesses, expand to reach new and larger markets, and grow their operations.

“USDA is taking a hard look at our existing resources to ensure that they work for producers of all sizes,” said Vilsack.

“We’ve adjusted policies, strengthened programs and intensified outreach to meet the needs of small and mid-sized producers. These producers are critical to our country’s agricultural and economic future.”

Visit youtube.com/FarmersUnions to watch Secretary Vilsack’s NFU convention address.

