



NEWS FROM NEW YORK FARM BUREAU

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NY FARM BUREAU UNVEILS 2017 NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

Immigration, regulatory reform and Farm Bill are included in the agenda

New York Farm Bureau leaders plan to meet with members of New York's congressional delegation this week in Washington, D.C. to outline their federal priorities. They are in the nation's capital to take in American Farm Bureau Federation's Advocacy Conference. It is kicking off a year full of activities where NYFB members will be engaged on the organization's member approved public policy priorities. In addition, NYFB President David Fisher and Elizabeth Wolters, NYFB's Associate Director of National Affairs, held a press conference call with reporters this morning to publicly unveil the priorities. The priorities are listed below.

Immigration

Immigration reform remains a top priority for New York's farmers. While this is something New York Farm Bureau has been discussing for a long time, the issue is especially in the forefront right now with enforcement actions taken by the new Trump Administration.

Farm Bureau believes in having stronger border security, but enforcement cannot be the only approach to fixing a broken immigration system. It also involves having a workable guest worker program that allows farmers to fill positions on their farms when they cannot find anyone locally to do the work. This involves having an improved guest worker visa program that addresses both seasonal and year-round needs of our farmers.

Reforms should allow current, trained workers to stay on farms and maintain a consistent workforce to plant and harvest crops, and care for livestock. There are proposals on the table to reform the federal H2A guest worker program that would open up the legal process to allow workers to be here longer than a growing season while reducing the regulatory burden that often leads to delays and headaches for farms and employees alike. Last year, some New York farms experienced delays of a month or more in having their workers arrive in this country to work on the farm. That is unacceptable when you need to plant and harvest crops on time.

"This is an issue that has major implications for farmers and their employees. We have to have a system in place that will allow farms in this country to grow the food we need to feed ourselves. The only alternative is to import food grown outside of our borders and that becomes a national security issue," said David Fisher, New York Farm Bureau President.

A lack of serious reform is not just a problem for farms, but for their seasonal and year round foreign employees as well. They are hardworking people who sought new opportunities in this country to support themselves and their families. They are giving back in many ways.

“Let’s be clear, when they seek employment on our farms, we are obliged under the law to accept their paperwork. As far as we know, they are here legally,” said Fisher. “However, when they are targeted by ICE and law enforcement, some workers may not have legal documentation after all. Enforcement actions can break up families and send others into hiding. This is in addition to leaving farms without enough employees needed to care for animals or harvest the crops.”

New York Farm Bureau will work with the Trump Administration and our representatives in Congress to find a workable solution that strikes an important balance between strong enforcement and a strong guest visa program.

Regulatory Reform

Regulatory Reform is another national priority for New York Farm Bureau. Its members have long been in opposition to proposed changes to the Clean Water Act that they believe broadens the jurisdiction of “Waters of the U.S.” rule. It would expand regulations from traditional navigable waters to also including dry land. The Environmental Protection Agency has placed an undue burden and increased regulatory control on farmers with no added benefit to the environment.

The issue is currently tied up in the courts after a federal appeals court issued an injunction on its enforcement. However, Farm Bureau will continue to support efforts to prevent the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers from implementing the rule. This does not mean farmers are looking to dismantle regulations that have proven value in keeping our water clean in this country. However, the EPA failed to establish scientific justification for its rule change, did not address the tens of thousands of public comments that explained how it is unworkable on farms in this country, and it created a public campaign meant to discredit those people who disagreed with the rule change. NYFB is confident the courts will find that this is a violation, and NYFB members will look to their congressional representatives to hold the EPA accountable to follow the intent of the law that Congress established under the Clean Water Act. It is a priority to pursue rational and effective regulatory policies that are transparent, fact-based and the will of Congress.

“Necessary regulations are one thing. A federal government that oversteps its bounds and circumvents Congress is quite another,” said Elizabeth Wolters, NYFB’s Associate Director of National Affairs.

Farm Bill

Finally, discussions are beginning on the Farm Bill, which comes up for renewal every five years. This is the biggest piece of legislation that impacts every farmer in the state as it sets policy and funding for things like crop insurance, specialty crop research, rural development, farm to consumer programs, disaster assistance and so much more. A large component of the bill is also nutrition assistance, which NYFB believes is an important part of the Farm Bill and is a necessary component to get the legislation through Congress.

As discussions continue leading up to a vote next year, it is a priority of NYFB to keep baseline funding for the myriad of programs. In the previous 2014 Farm Bill, agriculture took a major funding hit of around \$23 billion. That cannot happen again. There are many needs for agriculture. A proper safety

net and a reformed Margin Protection Program for dairy farmers are two examples. Farm income dropped a billion dollars in New York in 2015 to \$5.3 billion. Farm income is expected to be down again for 2016. These tough economic times demonstrate why a strong, supportive Farm Bill is critical to the success of this state's diverse agriculture community.

“We have to have a strong Farm Bill that invests in this country's family farms and its rural communities to ensure we have a sustainable farm economy in this country,” said Wolters.

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New York Farm Bureau is the State's largest agricultural lobbying/trade organization. Its members and the public know the organization as "The Voice of New York Agriculture." New York Farm Bureau is dedicated to solving the economic and public policy issues challenging the agricultural community. www.nyfb.org