

2011 Wisconsin FCS Policy Statements

(Approved March 21, 2011 at Wisconsin Farm Credit Legislative Conference)

Maintain the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP)

Whereas The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP) has added strength gained with its mission of advocating and overseeing consumer protection, particularly as it connects the agency with urban residents of the state, and;

Whereas DATCP's Bureau of Consumer Protection is a national leader in consumer protection and returns more than \$4 to the state treasury and the states' consumers for every \$1 the state spends on the program, and;

Whereas relocating DATCP's Consumer Protection functions to the Attorney General's office is not certain to provide budget savings, and would actually reduce restitution to consumers and revenue to the state treasury, and;

Whereas a transfer of the Consumer Protection from DATCP would decrease its position among state agencies such as the DNR and, by doing so, reduce the influence the state's rural and agricultural communities have within state government and;

Whereas the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee is concerned about the overall impact substantial and disproportionate budget cuts at DATCP that have occurred over the past three biennium are making it difficult for DATCP to meet its core mission of serving Wisconsin agriculture and consumers;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee supports maintaining the Consumer Protection Bureau at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and urges the governor and 2011 legislature to not disproportionately cut DATCP programs and staffing.

Value-Added Renewable Energy Facilities

Whereas Wisconsin is witnessing the construction across the state of a number of new renewable energy facilities, including ethanol and bio-diesel plants, manure digesters, wind and solar energy systems; and systems utilizing biomass, and;

Whereas, farmers across the state are benefiting from these new facilities through new domestic markets for their grain, increased corn prices, and increasing farmer ownership value of these new facilities, and could supply crop and woodlot by products to emerging industries utilizing biomass; and;

Whereas, the state and local economies are benefiting from these new facilities through new construction jobs, new facility managerial, technical and other employment, increased local property values, increased local employment, increased local and state property, sales and income tax payments, and through other financial benefits; and;

Whereas, the Wisconsin Farm Credit System is one of the primary financiers of these new renewable energy facilities; and;

Whereas, these new renewable energy facilities help to replace imports of energy from other nations and provide security to Wisconsin and the United States from foreign energy supply cutoffs; and;

Whereas, especially for producer owned facilities, the profits remain in the state and the local community and become available for further reinvestment;

Now, therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee commends the Wisconsin biofuel industry and University of Wisconsin for their key roles in biofuel production and research,-and we endorse state financial incentives and other initiatives to encourage producer ownership of new and existing renewable energy facilities in Wisconsin.

Right to Farm Law

Whereas Wisconsin's "Right to Farm" law offers certain protections to those engaged in agricultural pursuits against nuisance lawsuits, and;

Whereas the "Right to Farm" statute (823.08) offers protection from legal remedy against those agricultural practices that do not present a substantial threat to public health or safety, and;

Whereas such protection is more important than ever as conflicts between neighbors increase in both sprawling suburban areas and in traditional agricultural settings experiencing growing residential construction, and;

Whereas success in production agriculture today and in the future may demand a scale of operation and practices that may result in disputes;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee supports the "Right to Farm" law at a time when legal challenges to farming operations could put the law to a real test.

State Standards for Agricultural Operation Siting

Whereas siting of new and expanded agricultural facilities became more difficult in recent years due to the lack of consistency among local governments, the opposition of various parties and the challenges by opponents of modern and larger agricultural production operations; and;

Whereas the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee supports the right of farmers to modernize and structure their farm businesses to respond to changes in the marketplace and, consistent with sound, science-based systems, to protect the environment, and;

Whereas Wisconsin statute 93.90, the Livestock Facility Siting and Expansion Law, was enacted, aimed at consistent statewide regulation of new and expanding livestock operations and;

Whereas the law establishes predictability and streamlines the permitting process for both producers and local governments, thereby helping producers plan their expansions, and resulting in siting permits being issued within 4 months, and;

Whereas a state Livestock Siting Review Board (LFSRB) was created to serve as a review panel for livestock operators or neighbors who are displeased with a local government decision, thereby avoiding further litigation in some cases, and;

Whereas the positive results of the law are being noted by the livestock industry and governments, both in Wisconsin and elsewhere and;

Whereas the law requires a review of the facility siting standards created in administrative rule ATCP 51 at least every four years, and that review began in 2010, focused on whether any new science discovery might warrant updating any of the rule's standards;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee supports this law and administrative rule, opposing any review of policy beyond the rule's scope at this time, and reminds all that the primary desired outcome of the entire process is a strengthening of the livestock industry in Wisconsin, which benefits the Wisconsin economy greatly.

Preservation of Working Lands

Whereas the Working Lands Initiative Steering Committee concluded that the preservation of Wisconsin working lands is critical to the health and success of Wisconsin by preserving our agricultural economic base; and

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Legislative Committee agrees that preservation of our working lands is essential and we applaud the Legislature for enacting these preservation initiatives for the benefit of Wisconsin farmers and the general public and will support efforts to educate landowners and local officials about these land preservation tools.

Dairy Manufacturing Facility Modernization

Whereas most of Wisconsin's dairy processing facilities are old and less efficient than new plants elsewhere in the United States, and;

Whereas modernizing these plants is essential to keeping the dairy infrastructure strong in Wisconsin, thereby continuing to offer many potential purchasers of producers' milk, and;

Whereas dairy cooperatives struggle with the difficulty of obtaining the costly financing necessary to replace plants due in part to equity retirement pressure from retired and retiring members, and;

Whereas the legislature enacted a provision to provide a 10% income tax credit for expenses related to modernization or expansion of dairy manufacturing operations, with a maximum aggregate of tax credits for any claimant limited to \$200,000, and the proposal was enacted; and;

Whereas the legislature enacted a provision that will allow dairy cooperative members to claim the credit in proportion to the amount of milk that each member delivers to the cooperative, and this provision was enacted;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee thanks policy makers for these positive actions and acknowledges the need for an even greater public-private partnership to help with dairy plant modernization and encourages policy makers to help identify and create the most viable components of such a partnership for cooperative dairy processors.

Integrity of Segregated Funds

Whereas it has become increasingly more common for state elected officials to divert money from state segregated funds or program revenue accounts to cover expenditures previously paid for through general fund revenue, and;

Whereas this is a result of both reoccurring general fund deficits and the aversion of elected officials to balance the state budget through tax and expenditure modifications, and;

Whereas funds that have fallen victim to this practice include, but are not limited to, the transportation fund, injured patients and families compensation fund, public benefits fund, universal service fund and Agricultural Chemical Cleanup Program (ACCP) fund, and;

Whereas since 2003 and continuing through fiscal year 2011, over \$2 billion has been, and will be used for purposes never intended when segregated funds and program revenue accounts were set up, and;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee calls on the governor and legislature to stop diverting segregated and program revenue account money for uses never intended, and to address general fund shortfalls through other budget actions and requests that the 2011-2012 legislature pass a constitutional amendment that would prevent the diversion of segregated account funds to uses for which they were not intended.

Global Climate Change

Whereas public concern about the possible impact of greenhouse gas on our climate has reached the point where elected officials feel compelled to take action in the U.S. and abroad, and;

Whereas Wisconsin Governor Doyle appointed a Governor's Task Force on Global Warming charged with developing policies that would reduce our greenhouse gas

emissions and address climate change while growing the states economy and the final report was released in July of 2008, and;

Whereas under the key national issue of a carbon cap-and-trade program the federal government sets a limit on the amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted by industry but industries would have an opportunity to purchase “credits” and;

Whereas the possibility of “offsets” in Wisconsin that are credits stored or eliminated rather than emitted could provide financial opportunities for farmers to sell the offsets as credits that are generated on their lands, and;

Whereas the Governor’s Task Force on Global Warming made recommendations to promote biomass and biofuel utilization in Wisconsin and that can create new opportunities for Wisconsin’s farmers and rural communities, and;

Whereas the Wisconsin Legislature considered a bill that included new costs and regulations on agricultural industries and rural residents, but that was ultimately not brought to a final legislative vote but could be re-introduced in the 2011 Legislative Session;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee requests legislators to defer to the federal government on climate change legislation so Wisconsin does not become an island of increased costs and regulations.

Immigration

Whereas labor availability in rural areas is a significant concern and American agriculture has a need for a stable, legal supply of workers to sustain and grow agricultural production; and;

Whereas certain sectors are heavily dependent on immigrant labor and the federal government has yet to adequately address the need for immigration reform;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Services Legislative Committee supports comprehensive federal reform of our nation’s immigration policies that will allow current immigrants to become documented legal participants in our society, provide for simple and accurate status verification and include a timely approach to the future flow of immigrants needed to support our business and economic growth.

Communication Technology Development

Whereas residents and businesses have become increasingly dependent on the rapid advances being made in technology that can create new opportunities for rural Wisconsinites to span distance and gain access to the world; and;

Whereas cost-effective access to fast Internet service is essential to staying competitive and informed in the nation and the world;

Now therefore the Wisconsin Farm Credit Legislative Committee supports funding for increased high-speed Internet access and other technology improvements to guard against a “digital divide” in rural Wisconsin.

Animal Wellbeing

Whereas the Wisconsin Farm Credit Legislative Committee supports a vibrant and viable livestock sector and believes in maintaining consumer confidence in the food supply, and;

Whereas opponents of animal agriculture and their supporters are working on a state-by-state basis to eliminate such production, as well as to mandate husbandry practices within the livestock and poultry industries;

Now therefore, the Wisconsin Farm Credit Legislative Committee supports initiatives for livestock and poultry care that are based on sound veterinary science, sound information, economic feasibility, and sustainability, and strongly opposes laws and regulations that would undermine the livestock industry.