

**Bob Stallman, President,
American Farm Bureau Federation President
Annual Address to Members
92nd AFBF Annual Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

Producing Results

Farm Bureau members, friends, supporters, welcome to Atlanta and the 92nd annual meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation. Over the next several days, we will mark our progress, and chart our course with a focus on producing results...

...The American Farm Bureau Federation is committed to producing results. One clear indication of our success is the fact we are celebrating a membership milestone this year.

Fifty years ago, Farm Bureau membership at the national level stood at 1,600,792 member families.

At that time, December 1960 President Charles Shuman noted in his speech at AFBF's 42nd annual meeting that...“Farm Bureau's strength is at the local level – in the hearts and minds of millions of farm family members who believe in themselves, in their country and in their God.”

Today, the collective strength and spirit of Farm Bureau remains true to President Shuman's words. The main difference? Today there are several million more hearts and minds gathered under the Farm Bureau banner.

American Farm Bureau membership stands at 6,279,813 member families. Today, thanks to you, we celebrate 50 consecutive years of growth.

Producing results for members is the best way for any organization to ensure its long-term success.

Michigan farm boy, Henry Ford, father of the American auto industry, knew a thing or two about producing results. He said, “You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do.”

The American Farm Bureau's reputation as the Voice of Agriculture is based on our actions and accomplishments.

Our standing as the most influential grassroots farm organization in the world is based on the fact that by working together, we produce results – each and every year.

Sadly, our nation's reputation as a producer has recently been called into question.

In this day and age, when the classic Radio Flyer wagon is made in China, when Converse basketball shoes are manufactured in Indonesia and when the red seams of official Major League baseballs are stitched in Costa Rica, some people say that America just doesn't produce much of anything, anymore.

Well, from where I stand today, my polite answer is one word, and it starts with a “B” -- Bull-loney.

We are still the world’s biggest manufacturer.

America’s farm and ranch families are all about producing. And, you are good at it! You evaluate what the market wants. You produce. And you deliver.

You show up long before most workdays start and you stay long after others have gone home. You make the gears of American production agriculture run -- efficiently, sustainably, even miraculously.

Like Farm Bureau, American agriculture is also on a 50-year hot streak. Since 1960, U.S. agricultural exports have been larger than U.S. agricultural imports.

This surplus in ag trade will be in the \$40 billion-dollar range this year. And, this year, we are expecting a record \$126 billion dollars in U.S. agricultural exports. Simply amazing.

Our strong agricultural sector is setting the pace for a broad national economic recovery. And that is only part of the story.

The 2010 National Resources Inventory confirms we are producing more with fewer resources. Those of us running equipment, buying supplies and feeding livestock, have known that all along. Total U.S. crop yield has increased more than 360 percent since 1950. Farmers are producing 262 percent food with 2 percent fewer inputs. It takes 40 percent less feed for a cow to produce 100 pounds of milk than it did just 30 years ago.

Any way you slice it, more with less makes sense for people and our planet.

But, even with greater efficiency we still must answer a global challenge of producing 70 percent more food over the next 40 years to feed an additional 2.3 billion people who will share our planet. That is a huge task, not only for us, but for our children and grandchildren. And it will not be easy.

We face challenges from regulators who are ready to downsize American agriculture, mothball our productivity, and out-source our farms.

Whether the topic is greenhouse gas regulations, absurd new rules on dust, futile endangered species mandates, permits for spray nozzles expansive new rules for water, over-regulation endangers our industry.

This pressure is a clear and present danger to American agriculture, and it’s coming from one major source.

With a \$10 billion budget and more than 17,000 employees, the Environmental Protection Agency has ramped up its regulatory force at the very time agriculture's environmental footprint is shrinking.

That makes about as much sense as a back pocket on a work shirt.

We will not stand idly by while opponents of today's American agriculture...try to drag us down...try to bury us in bureaucratic red tape and costly regulation – and try to destroy the most productive and efficient agricultural system in the world.

Our message to the new Congress is clear: It is time to stop the EPA.

But we don't intend to leave this to Congress alone. We are prepared to carry this battle to the courts.

It is clear to us that over the last two years, EPA has established some of the most burdensome, and we believe illegal, environmental regulations ever.

AFBF is now actively engaged in the legal battle over EPA's "greenhouse gas" regulations.

These regulations seek to unilaterally impose costly restrictions on common emissions that Congress has refused to regulate.

This issue broadly affects every source of carbon dioxide or any other "greenhouse gas" in the nation, eventually including many of America's most productive farms and ranches.

I also want to pass on a little news to you today.

As we meet, AFBF's legal counsel is preparing to file a new legal action against EPA. This suit will seek to rein in EPA's latest and most aggressive effort to use the Clean Water Act to impose burdensome new regulations on agricultural production.

I am talking about new regulation of the Chesapeake Bay total maximum daily load, or TMDL.

EPA likes to call the TMDL a "pollution diet," but this diet threatens to starve agriculture out of the entire 64,000 square-mile Chesapeake Bay watershed.

This new approach will not end with the Bay. EPA has already revealed its plan to take similar action in other watersheds across the nation, including the Mississippi River watershed.

That is why this legal effort, led by AFBF, is essential to preserving the power of the states – not EPA – to decide whether and how to regulate farming practices. Our lawsuit is not about whether farmers will work to achieve clean water.

Farmers throughout the Chesapeake Bay region and across the nation are working diligently – as they have for years – to implement real, on-the-ground conservation measures to improve water quality.

Our lawsuit is about whether EPA can dictate how we get there – and at what cost.

I know who I trust in that scenario – America’s farmers and ranchers, who, day after day, are our nation’s true environmentalists.

When it comes to the courts, sometimes, just one judge can hold an entire group of farmers hostage. Recently, a judge in San Francisco, at the urging of extreme environmental groups, ordered the entire seed crop of biotech sugar beets to be plowed under. The U.S. Court of Appeals has put a temporary hold on that judge’s order.

But, if allowed to go forward, this would be just one more assault on the kind of agricultural technology we need to feed the world. It would create a seed shortage, put sugar beet farmers at risk, and decrease U.S. sugar production by 20 percent.

We will challenge the actions of judges, activists and regulators who use the courts and bureaucracy to hinder the progress and productivity of our farms and ranches!

Today, whether we farm sugar beets or not, whether we farm utilizing biotechnology or not, it’s time to stand up and say: Let’s move forward, not backward.

And we must make that move together. Farm Bureau firmly believes in a “big tent” view of American agriculture.

Our membership is comprised of farmers and ranchers who grow conventional crops, biotech crops, organic crops, traditional and specialized livestock...big and small. But the common thread is always -- family.

Family-based agriculture – done by those who have the most pride, investment and personal connection to the hard work of farming and ranching – remains the best way to meet the quality and quantity demands we face.

Our diversity makes America’s foodie culture possible. Our productivity allows our society the luxury of debating how to produce food versus where to get food.

Against that backdrop, however, it remains true that a handful of self-appointed food elitists are still trying to divide us. They cherry-pick facts and embrace spin to weave compelling, emotional fables.

They define good farmers and bad farmers, solely on some arbitrary divide based on size or methods of production.

Defining farmers is really not something anyone should try to do. In fact, I have heard that some of the elitists now consider three farmers meeting in a local coffee shop a “big ag conspiracy.”

Makes you wonder how the conspiracy theorists might choose to define a Farm Bureau meeting, doesn't it?

Well, they ain't seen nuthin' yet.

Last year in Seattle, I told you that “we must aggressively respond to extremists who want to drag agriculture back to the day of 40 acres and a mule.” Today, we are ready to face our opponents with a new attitude. We are fighting back.

As you may have heard, 23 farm and ranch groups, including the American Farm Bureau Federation, joined together to form the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance.

And, yes, critics of today's agriculture have already tried to brand the alliance as a “big ag conspiracy.”

Well, there's really no conspiracy or secret about it. The formation of the alliance is one of the greatest unity-building actions in the history of American agriculture.

You heard that right...I just used the words “unity” and “American agriculture” in the same sentence.

Our goal is to work together to increase consumer knowledge and restore trust in our nation's food production system.

While, we know that we are committed to producing safe and nutritious food, and we know we work to protect and enhance the environment and we know we humanely care for our animals, the public, our neighbors, still want to be convinced. Improving consumer trust is job one.

In the process, the alliance is committed to continuing the benefits provided by today's American agriculture.

Another important mission involves collaborating with the entire food chain to craft a better response to all the challenges I've talked about.

It's no secret that the companies that buy our products, process them, distribute and sell them, are not always in sync when it comes to dealing with attacks and challenges from activist groups. The top priority of companies that sell branded products is to protect those brands.

But we believe it's also possible for companies to communicate that our food system, from field to fork, is responsible and is committed to doing the right thing. In doing so, their brands will also prosper.

Let me make one point about the alliance crystal clear for those who might try to misinterpret our words or intentions.

This effort is not about any form of antagonism or hostility toward consumers. It is clearly aimed as a counterbalance to those who are hell-bent on misleading consumers.

Folks, that's no big ag conspiracy. That's just telling the truth.

The Alliance also needs your help, as individuals. You will always be the best ambassadors for American agriculture.

At Farm Bureau, we believe in the power of positive engagement with consumers. Today, consumer engagement has gone beyond the point of just being a nice sounding goal. It has become a point of action.

Traditionally, consumer education has tended to be one-way. But, nobody wants to be lectured to or talked at. Today, one-way communication is shunned like a piece of chalk screeching on a blackboard.

Farmers and consumers must be part of a conversation based on shared values.

Fortunately, there is a new activist spirit in farm country. Our adversaries are smart and resourceful. But we're now matching them in using new communications tools, new strategies and new tactics. It all adds up to increased engagement and greater understanding.

One example of agriculture's activist spirit is a group of dedicated farmers and ranchers called the AgChat Foundation. This effort was launched as new social media communications tools like Facebook and Twitter hit mainstream popularity.

Many active participants are Farm Bureau members, but their most common characteristic is they are new-breed communicators. Many are young. Some not-so-young. None of them miss an opportunity to engage.

In that same spirit, more farmers and ranchers are engaging in two-way conversation with consumers – one-on-one, at their farms, in grocery stores, before civic groups and in public forums.

It is true that we still love to talk to ourselves – probably a little too much. But we now know that the messages we love to hear from each other are not always the ones consumers want to hear.

We have also found that the common link to these engagement efforts is the ability to listen.

Listening is a lost art. All you have to do is look at our national political system, where both political parties have frequently been too busy yelling at each other to make bipartisan progress.

It is up to us to break down these partisan walls on the issues that mean the most to us. Speaking

as individuals and through Farm Bureau, we have scored a couple of great victories this past year.

Armed with our resolve we have worked with Republicans and Democrats alike to defeat potentially devastating cap-and-trade proposals. Lawmakers credited Farm Bureau for defeating what was simply bad legislation. We made sure your voices were heard -- loud and clear.

More recently, during the final days of the 111th Congress, bipartisan sanity prevailed on the issue of estate tax reform.

But it would not have happened without your e-mails, your phone calls and your personal stories about how this tax would have slammed farming and ranching families. This is major victory. You made it happen.

Many challenges and opportunities await us in this new year...and in this new Congress. Our nation, once and for all, must get its financial house in order.

This, of course, is easier said than done. It will require budget cuts and those cuts will be painful. Every aspect of our government and every program and service we enjoy as Americans will be on the table.

This problem will not be solved with slogans, sound bites and symbolism. It will not be solved with partisanship that is focused on the acquisition of power, rather than solutions for our nation.

In 2009, the AFBF Deficit Reduction Task Force highlighted the serious fiscal problems facing America. They identified \$107 Trillion dollars in "unfunded liabilities" for Social Security and Medicare alone.

That's just a fancy way of saying promises we have made but cannot keep because we won't have the money to pay the bill!

Last year's budget shortfall was \$1.3 trillion dollars.

Since 2000, our total national debt has more than doubled. Unless action is taken, it will double again in less than 10 years. Just last week it surpassed \$14 trillion dollars.

Farm Bureau has long been known for its strong position on fiscal responsibility. We have a responsibility, even an obligation, as an organization with great political and policy influence, to weigh in and help find solutions to these problems facing our nation.

Hard choices will have to be made. Demanding a balanced budget, with no new taxes, and cutting government programs for everyone else while asking that more be spent on our concerns will not be well accepted as a solution!

The business session on Tuesday will provide our delegates the opportunity to give us clear direction as an organization.

Which brings me to another matter to consider in our delegate session that is very important to us -- the farm program and what we expect will be in the 2012 Farm Bill.

Budget and deficit concerns will drive the debate as never before. Quite frankly, they should. But we also know the historic and stabilizing role the farm program has played in American agriculture.

Strong, assertive policy on Farm Programs must emerge from this meeting. We need a big-picture strategy. We need to make choices and establish priorities. Right now, there are more questions than answers.

Before we leave Atlanta, we need clear answers to some of these questions -- What role should direct payments, revenue insurance and disaster provisions play in providing a basic economic safety net for America's farm and ranch families? What is the most effective and equitable way to use scarce government dollars? And perhaps, most fundamental of all, what should be the role of government farm policy in the 21st Century?

As an organization that represents all regions and all production, we will face tough sledding. But to ensure our position of leadership in the Farm Bill debate, we must have direction that is clear, a strategy that is inclusive and an outlook that is visionary. Let's roll up our sleeves and get it done.

We must continue to work together to produce results through Farm Bureau.

It's what our mothers and fathers did. It's what their mothers and fathers did. American agriculture is a legacy of prolonged sustainability and Farm Bureau has been leading the way now for 92 years.

Over that time, the tools and methods of farming and ranching have changed. But our values hold true. Care for the land. Care for our animals. Help our neighbors, particularly in times of need. Produce results for America and the world.

As farmers, who we are as individuals is always wrapped around what we produce in our feedlots, our fields and pastures, our forests and orchards, and our barns and greenhouses.

Whether it's a bale of cotton, a bushel of corn, a basket of peaches or that steak on the grill, in agriculture, our identities are determined -- more so than any other profession -- by the fruits of our labor.

Me? I am a Texas rice grower and beef producer. And once again, I thank you for the trust you have placed in me to serve as AFBF president. I am honored to lead this great organization.

Through Farm Bureau, we will uphold the honor and dignity of our profession, the character of our industry and the success of our nation.

Together, we will produce results.

God bless you.

God bless Farm Bureau.

God bless America.

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