



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Wisconsin Farmers Union members travel to D.C. for fly-in** *Hundreds of family farmers gather to advocate for rural America*

**WASHINGTON** – The dairy crisis, trade war impacts and consolidation in agriculture are among the issues that 24 Wisconsin Farmers Union members are putting a voice to while in Washington, D.C. this week. Nearly 400 farmers and ranchers from across the nation have gathered for the National Farmers Union (NFU) Fall Legislative Fly-In Sept. 9-11.

“As a farmer-led organization, grassroots advocacy is a big part of Farmers Union,” said WFU President and Westby dairy farmer Darin Von Ruden. “The fly-in is an opportunity for members to meet with their representatives in Congress and put a face to the issues impacting rural America. Given the state of the farm economy, we need policies that support family farmers and foster a sustainable future for rural America.”

Advocates from across the country will campaign for policies that strengthen the farm safety net, reduce chronic overproduction, help farmers and ranchers implement climate smart practices, restore competition to the agricultural economy, resolve ongoing trade disputes, and expand the market for homegrown biofuels. The NFU Fly-In Talking Points package can be found [here](#).

“In early September, most farmers are busy harvesting, planting winter crops, and tending to livestock,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “The fact that nearly 400 are here this week to advocate better food and agricultural policy speaks volumes to how exceptionally challenging things are right now in farm country.”

“For several years, farm commodity prices have been below the cost of production, which means that most farmers are selling at a loss and are rapidly losing equity. At the same time, a recent wave of agribusiness megamergers has pushed up input costs. Many producers have been forced to take out more loans just to keep their doors open, causing farm debt to balloon to record levels,” Johnson continued. “All of this has been compounded by a never-ending global trade war and the ongoing subversion of the Renewable Fuel Standard, both of which have wiped out critical markets for farmers and ranchers. If that weren’t enough, climate change has thrown weather patterns out of whack, making it that much more difficult to grow crops and raise livestock.”

“NFU members want Congress to understand the financial and environmental realities of modern agriculture, and they want to provide recommendations for what meaningful solutions look like,” Johnson said. “We hope that long after Fly-In attendees return to their farms, their elected representatives will use these conversations to write policies that bolster rural America and family farm agriculture.”

The three-day event began today with a briefing at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).



The event will continue this afternoon when a number of industry experts and agricultural policy specialists will speak to attendees about the farm economy, corporate consolidation, international trade, and biofuels. NFU members will take to Capitol Hill later this week to meet with all 535 congressional offices and to present congressional champions of family agriculture with the Golden Triangle Award, the group's highest legislative honor.

Wisconsin Farmers Union, along with a number of other organizational sponsors, will host two Dairy Economics and Policy briefings for members of Congress on Thursday, Sept. 12. The events will feature research by Dr. Mark Stephenson, dairy economist and director of the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Profitability, who will share encouraging results from recent analyses of federal dairy policies designed to reduce market volatility and improve dairy farm profitability. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Rep. Mark Pocan, Rep. Glenn Grothman, and Rep. Gwen Moore have all signed on as Congressional sponsors of the hearings.

At this year's fly-in, WFU is represented by President Darin Von Ruden, Westby; NFU Vice President Patty Edelburg, Amherst Junction; Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership program participants John Adams, Washburn; Sarah Baghat-Eggert, Clayton; and Evan Flom, Ashland; and other members, including Paul Adams, Eleva; Andrew Cotter, Eau Claire; Victoria and Brittany Dunnum, Westby; Erin Elsner, Medford; Lisa Geary, Viola; Bryce and Max Luchterhand, Unity; Kriss Marion, Blanchardville; Sue Marx, Helenville; Joseph Ploeckelman, Athens; and Dennis Rosen, Emerald. WFU staff in attendance will be Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar, Government Relations Director Kara O'Connor, Government Relations Associate Bobbi Wilson, Special Projects Director Sarah Lloyd, and Communications Associate Tommy Enright. WFU board members Rick Adamski, Seymour, and Linda Ceylor, Catawba, will also be attending.

For Ploeckelman, the trip kicks off what will be a year-long experience in the NFU Beginning Farmers Institute, an educational program that promotes the success of the next generation of agricultural professionals by providing mentorship, technical training, and leadership development. For Baghat-Eggert, it's the next step in a year-long journey in the 2019-2020 Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Program; the trip concludes the leadership program for John Adams and Flom, who are graduating from the 2018-2019 cohort.

Elsner is representing youth from across the nation as a member of the NFU National Youth Advisory Council, a position she was elected to by her peers during NFU's All-States Camp this summer in Bailey, Colo. Cotter, a UW-Eau Claire student and past council member, will help oversee the council.

**Photo cutline:**

*The Wisconsin Farmers Union Fly-In delegation includes, from left, (front row) Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Dells; Sarah Baghat-Eggert, Clayton; Linda Ceylor, Catawba; Lisa Geary, Viola; Erin Elsner, Medford; Julie Keown-Bomar, Menomonie; Kriss Marion, Blanchardville; (second row) Bobbi Wilson, Madison; Kara O'Connor, Madison; Sue Marx, Helenville; Paul Adams, Eleva; (third row) Rick Adamski, Seymour; Maxine and Bryce Luchterhand, Unity; Dennis Rosen, Emerald; (back row) Andrew Cotter, Eau Claire; Darin Von Ruden, Westby; Tommy Enright, Amherst; and Joseph Ploeckelman, Athens. Not pictured: John Adams, Washburn; Victoria and Brittany Dunnum, Westby; and Evan Flom, Ashland.*

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