

**Farmers Unite to Further Policies that Benefit Agriculture**

*By Lynne Finnerty*

Delegates to the American Farm Bureau Federation annual meeting have agreed on the policies they believe will help farmers and ranchers remain productive and profitable.

Plowing their way through hundreds of pages of policies on everything from animal care and the environment, to taxes and immigration, they once again crafted national policy that surpasses regional and commodity differences — policy aimed at benefitting all farmers and ranchers and the food security they provide.

The delegates were united in their support for continuing our nation's drive toward energy independence by putting more renewable fuels in Americans' gas tanks. They affirmed policy in favor of the renewable fuels standard and went even further by adopting new policy that supports increasing the ethanol-to-gasoline blend rate to more than the current 10 percent.

As the new Congress and the incoming Obama administration tackle the recession and consider proposals to get the economy growing again, Farm Bureau offered suggestions aimed especially at bolstering the rural economy. Rural areas currently lag behind cities in availability of high-speed, broadband Internet access, and in this day and age when so much economic activity and information-sharing takes place on the Web, rural areas must catch up to ensure farm families and other rural residents have access to good jobs, health care, educational opportunities and overall quality of life. The delegates called for any economic stimulus proposal to expand broadband access in rural America.

In addition, the ability to transport products to market is vital to farmers' and ranchers' profitability, and the Farm Bureau delegates said the economy could be stimulated by funding construction projects to rebuild locks and dams on our inland waterways, which are used for transporting farm goods.

Lawmakers most likely will debate climate change proposals this year aimed at reducing emissions of carbon, methane and other greenhouse gases. The delegates were adamantly opposed to an emissions cap that would drive up the cost of farm inputs, such as fuel and fertilizer. People need clean air to live, but they also need food.

The delegates also weighed in on the meaning of the concept "sustainable agriculture." There's been growing interest in nailing down just what that concept means. The delegates indicated that such a term must be flexible enough to fit the diversity of American agriculture and agricultural practices, and it must allow farmers and ranchers to produce food and feed in a way that is economically viable.

"It is important to remember that agriculture needs the flexibility to alter cropping patterns and practices to meet the demands of operating in an open marketplace where our competition comes from farmers worldwide," the delegates said in their resolution on the issue. "When considering sustainable agriculture, there is only one constant and that is agriculture is only sustainable when it is profitable."

It is an impressive sight—hundreds of farmers and ranchers from all across the country taking time away from the farm once a year to come together, set their parochial interests aside and develop policy that benefits their industry as a whole. Someone once said that Farm Bureau is like a large ship. It takes a lot of time to turn it, but once its course is charted Farm Bureau's grassroots voices power the ship on a sure and steady journey toward its destination.