

## **Young Farmers and Ranchers Turn to Optimism Reservoir**

*By John Hart*

Of all the traits it takes to be a successful farmer or rancher, optimism may be the most important. Technological advances have made the task of producing crops and livestock easier, but there are still many obstacles that make farming and ranching a difficult job.

Farmers a century ago could not have fathomed the challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century agriculture. Back then no one worried about climate change: drought, floods and threatening hail storms were among the many “climate change” worries of farmers. However, they would have thought you were joking if you told them the federal government considers carbon dioxide a pollutant that needs to be regulated to protect the planet from warming temperatures.

Farmers and ranchers in 1910 relied on optimism to deal with challenges that came from the weather. Farmers in 2010 rely on that same optimism to not only deal with weather challenges, but to handle rules and guidelines that attempt to regulate the weather. Farm and ranch families are turning to their optimism reservoir now more than ever these days because of such regulatory challenges.

This was confirmed by Farm Bureau’s annual survey of members involved in the Young Farmer and Rancher (YF&R) program. Despite ongoing worries about profitability, increasing government regulations and the impact of activist groups, 80 percent of young farmers and ranchers reported being more optimistic than they were a year ago.

The optimism of these men and women, who range in age from 18 to 35, was further confirmed when the survey showed 96 percent consider themselves life-long farmers or ranchers and 98 percent would like to see their children follow in their footsteps. In these difficult times, we can all be buoyed by their hope and optimism.

According to Will Gilmer, a Lamar County, Ala., dairy producer and chair of AFBF’s YF&R Committee, the survey results makes it clear the group still sees a bright future, despite challenges on many different fronts.

“We have confidence in ourselves that we’re going to be able to rise up and meet those challenges and that the opportunities in agriculture will be there for years to come,” Gilmer said.

The YF&R survey showed a high level of apprehension about government climate change regulation; 79 percent of those surveyed expressed high or very high concern about such regulations and the impact on their operations. Activist groups are also of concern; 85 percent expressed serious concern that such groups will interfere with their farms or ranches. The survey was conducted during the annual YF&R Leadership Conference in Tulsa last month.

The United Nations tells us that farmers and ranchers will need to produce 70 percent more food for an additional 2.3 billion people worldwide by 2050. Meeting this huge need will fall largely to today’s young farmers and ranchers and their children.

They will rely on their optimism to meet the job at hand. But government officials and elected leaders must do their part by not adding rules and regulations that hamper the ability of American agriculture to feed the world.

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