

# Grassroots

A Bi-Monthly Newsletter  
from the Iowa Farmers Union

February-March 2011



photo by Matthew Hoffman

## Transmission Lines on Farmland

*Iowa Farmers Union understands how much members have already been affected by renewable energy development. Further continuation will create room for farmers to make decisions. IFU intends to work to insure that our members can maximize profit opportunities in renewable energy while also protecting their rights.*  
- Gregg Heide, Vice President

As Iowa's wind energy industry flourishes, new transmission lines across farmland are likely. These lines may offer financial opportunities through right-of-way easements, but they also raise concerns about eminent domain, unwanted lines, and unfavorable easements.

Before negotiating with landowners, the developer must hold informational meetings in each county where construction is proposed. Meetings are held for an explanation of each project

by the developer and the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB). The IUB is the government entity that determines whether a transmission project should be built. These meetings are entirely informational – no project can be approved or denied at that time.

Easement negotiations with landowners begin after the informational meeting. It is important for landowners to consider a range of factors including effect on crop and livestock production, land value, landowner liability, and hunting and other land-uses. Also, consideration must be given to the likelihood that the property will be condemned through eminent domain if the landowner does not voluntarily agree to an easement.

After the informational meeting, the company can petition the IUB for the right to build a transmission project also called a transmission franchise. If any interested party objects, or if the project would require condemnation through eminent domain, the IUB will conduct a hearing to determine

whether to grant the franchise. At the hearing, the IUB decides whether the proposed line meets certain legal requirements, including whether the line furthers a plan to improve electricity generation and transmission.

The IUB also decides whether to grant a company's eminent domain request. In order to grant condemnation by eminent domain, the IUB must find that the condemnation would serve a public use. If eminent domain is approved, the county board of supervisors appoints county residents to a Compensation Commission that determines the fair market value of the landowner's loss, which the company pays.

For more information or for legal representation contact John Cutler, Hackstaff Law Group LLC, at [jc@hackstafflaw.com](mailto:jc@hackstafflaw.com), or visit [www.hackstafflaw.com](http://www.hackstafflaw.com)

*The mission of the Iowa Farmers Union is to strengthen the independent family farm through education, legislation, and cooperation.*

*Our goal is to achieve sustainable production, safe foods, a clean environment, and healthy communities.*



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## Letter from the President Chris Petersen

Hello all,

Winter has settled in with repetitious snow, ice, and vehicle accidents. We now all dream of working in the fresh spring dirt, and seeing the vibrant life and intense color of standing in a waist high cornfield or a growing garden in June. In the meantime, let's not forget to be thankful for the innocent wintertime peacefulness.

I came in from outside on one of those quiet rural winter days where you can hear a pin drop and it seems nothing bad ever could happen in this world again. I immediately flipped the TV on, and the Arizona shooting was just being reported. My first thought was "this is just what the country needs now" as I sat down in disbelief. It unfortunately reminded me of the political assassinations and of growing up in the 1960's and those violent times; is humanity on a repetitious cycling of events.

Today's world is full of incivility in society with people hiding behind screen names. Blogs that have the blessing of print and verbal media fuel anger and many false truths – cyberspace is like the 1800's wild west without the guns. People are skittish about writing legitimate signed letters to the editor because they are too controversial and mean-spirited reprisal may occur. Anything I write is transparent - it comes from me and I put my name on it.

Things we should hold dear, such as civility and facts, are not priorities. In today's political realm there is plenty of hard-to-trace, massive amounts of campaign funding. We see rhetoric and distasteful tactics, gun sights on "targeted" political race maps and politicians publicly saying "it's time to reload," maybe it's time for them to reclaim their soul.

The time has come for "we the people" to assume leadership. Do we need to have a very civil, factual, community and soul driven discussion about society today? Do we need to talk about individualism and everybody acting for themselves? Can we address violence and the causes of it? And as for guns, can't they be used for sportsmanship and the police, hopefully not for killing people? This country, starting with leadership, needs to pause and think. We again need to remember the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Bobby Kennedy, and everything they stood for- peace and the common good of everyone.

Sincerely,



*Membership (circle one)*

- \$50 for one year
- \$80 for two years
- \$150 for four years
- \$25 for one year "Friend of the Family Farmer"\*
- \$15 for one year Student\* (ages 16 years and up)

\*non-voting, limited benefit membership

Mail form and check or cash payment to:  
Iowa Farmers Union, PO Box 8988, Ames, IA 50014

Pay by credit card or PayPal at our website:  
www.iowafarmersunion.org

**Thank you for your support!**

## Support the Farmers Union in working to protect the family farm, integrity of our food supply, and landscape by becoming a member!

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive Grassroots by e-mail? \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome  
to Our  
New  
Members!

Rachael Ohde, Ames

Tim Mlsna & Joan Fumetti, Dubuque

Tim Swinton, Marshalltown

Kent Hartwig, Des Moines

Glen Evans, Alden

## Legislative Update

### Kent Hartwig

The start of the 2011 Iowa General Assembly in January brings new political realities to the Iowa Farmers Union agenda. Democrats maintain a slim one seat majority in the Iowa Senate, and Republicans claimed the Iowa House with a large 60-40 majority. Furthermore, after a twelve year absence, Terry Branstad returns to Terrace Hill for his record breaking 5<sup>th</sup> term as Governor.

These changes in leadership reflect the voter's perception that Iowa's budget has grown too large and unsustainable. House Republicans have already released legislation that will trim state government spending by almost \$115 million in this budget year and \$500 million over three years. Among these

reductions is a freeze on state acquisition of land by the DNR and the elimination of the Iowa Power Fund and Office of Energy Independence. We expect to see further reductions once the Governor releases his Fiscal Year 2012 and 2013 budgets, as the administration's intention is to move to a two year budget cycle.

The changes in the legislature and Governor's Office offers the Iowa Farmers Union an opportunity to demonstrate to Republicans that rural economies can be strengthened through our agenda. A main focus of the new Branstad Administration is job creation, and the IFU message of locally produced and processed foods can be seen as a strong component of expanding our local economies. Farmer-owned distributive energy is also a concept that could potentially be embraced by Republicans.



Kent Hartwig

Advocacy Strategies has always maintained relationships with both sides of the aisle so that we can continue working on your agenda regardless of who is in power.

Additionally, our team is already working to build relationships with the 29 freshman Representatives, 11 freshman Senators and the new committee chairs. As always, we will continue to work with the executive board to advance IFU's policy initiatives and we look forward to seeing all of you at the Capitol to build relationships and move the IFU agenda forward!

## Upcoming Events

*From the Women, Food and Agriculture Network:*  
**WFAN Conference,**  
 January 29, 2011  
 Clive, Iowa

*From the National Farmers Union:*  
**College Conference on Cooperatives,**  
 February 17-20, 2011,  
 Minneapolis, Minnesota

*From the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service:*  
**MOSES Conference,**  
 February 24-26, 2011,  
 La Crosse, Wisconsin

*From the Beginning Farmer Center:*  
**AgLink Event**  
 February 25-26,  
 Ames, Iowa  
 Come to this business planning workshop to plan entry into existing farm operations

*From the EUCI:*  
**Biomass for Power, Fuels, and Chemicals**  
 March 21-22, 2011,  
 Minneapolis, Minnesota

## Fly in Report Back: GIPSA

Alan Hoefling

I had the pleasure of traveling out to Washington D.C. in November 2010. I was on a panel with two other farmers- a chicken contract grower and a cow-calf producer; I was the hog producer. This panel was organized by the National Farmers Union and we had the pleasure to give our stories and explain how the new Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration rules would help the small independent producer and contract grower. The panel got to sit in front of the House Agriculture Committee and the Senate Agriculture Committee. It was disappointing that none of the Congressmen made the hearings but their staff were there, which is how most Congressmen get updated on an issue.

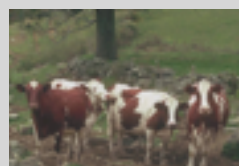
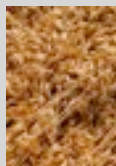
During the hearing, each of the panelists gave their story on how corporate agriculture has ruined the openness and fairness of the open markets. We also presented how it gets favored when it comes to marketing and contract grower contract terms.

After each of us spoke the floor was opened for questions. I was somewhat apprehensive about what might be asked. The questions were statements that came from what they had heard by the opposition - the National Cattlemen, the National Pork Producers, and the American Meat Institute. They framed questions about the end of contracts, the price of meat going up, and impacts on the operations.

The opposition is using scare tactics like they used when COOL, Country of Origin Labeling, was being implemented. If you remember, it was going to cost the producers millions of dollars and the

packing industry many more millions. Did this all come to pass? It never did and that is what the opposition is doing with the new GIPSA rules.

One question seemed to stay with me. I had explained during the hearing that if you wanted to negotiate a contract with a packer, you as a producer could not share this contract with your wife, banker, or lawyer. One of the new GIPSA rules would allow you to share this contract. When I was asked why anybody "in their right mind would sign such a deal" I thought for a while. When the hog industry was losing \$40 to \$50 a head back in 1998, producers were desperate to save their operation and livelihood by doing anything at the moment which was better then the current situation. The packer was taking advantage of the situation to get what they wanted.



**GIPSA: Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration**

I was glad that I had the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. As small time businessmen we need to be more active when it comes to our livelihood. Most staffers and Congressmen only believe what they hear from the organizations that you hope are representing us well. The National Cattlemen and the National Pork Producer Council do not represent our point of views on many issues. You will be more proactive in getting your message across by going to the people that set the rules and laws of this great country of ours.

The National Farmers Union helps us to get the truth out and I am proud of that.

## Staff Transitions

*This winter, the outreach director of two years, Amber Anderson-Mba, left the Iowa Farmers Union to move to Boston, Massachusetts. Two people have stepped up to fill her shoes; please welcome to the staff Lynn Heuss and Sue DeBlieck.*

### Hello from Sue DeBlieck!

I am glad to be joining the Iowa Farmers Union as outreach director this January. I will be working alongside Lynn to help bring you up to speed with sustainable agriculture policies and maintain the office.

Before coming to IFU, I was working as the Farm to School Coordinator in coastal Maine. I led a county-wide program, coordinated a regional initiative, and contributed to state-wide policy work. As a result of my efforts, the amount of school cooks buying food from farmers grew.

I am glad to be back in Ames, Iowa. It was here that I completed the Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture and coordinated the local food purchasing program at Iowa State University, Farm to ISU. Today the university purchases over fifteen percent of its food from local producers. It will be great to expand my experience in

working with farmers in rural areas. I am looking forward to learning more from you all about the work you want to see done to strengthen independent farms.



### Hello from Lynn Heuss!

I am happy to be working as a new staff for the Iowa Farmers Union. I began my local food work as a grassroots organizer for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. My task was to encourage our national Congressmen and Senators to support Child Nutrition Reauthorization. When the legislation finally passed, all but Congressman Steve King supported it.

Last year I worked on a project with the Drake Agricultural Law Center and Heartland R.C. & D. to increase farmer participation in the Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign. In 2010 I also worked for the Iowa Food Cooperative to increase membership.

In addition to my work at IFU, I am very active in the local food system community. I am a part of the Midwest Region Farm to School Lead Agency, working to encourage schools to buy fresh food from local farms. I am also part of the Regional Food Systems Working Group and the Iowa Food Systems Council.

Let's work together to create policy changes to support family farms!

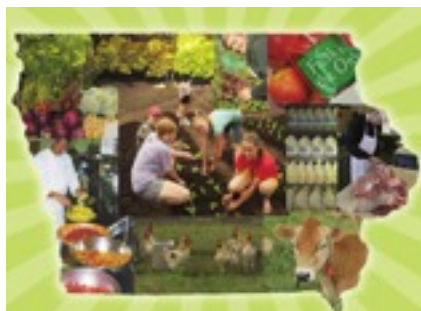


**The National Farmers Union newsletter is going electronic by 2012.**

Be sure to send in your e-mail address to continue to receive updates and great articles!

E-mail Cheryl Bolton,  
cbolton@nfudc.org

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture just completed the Iowa Local Food and Farm Plan, a report to the Iowa Legislature.



find it at [www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu)

**Speaking up across Iowa**

*You can now find the Iowa Farmers Union on Facebook, at our website, and on the radio.*

*Listen for Iowa Farmers Union updates Wednesdays at 3:20PM on 840 AM; Rural Radio KTIC West Point, Nebraska*



PO Box 8988  
Ames, IA 50014-8988

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COMING SOON FROM THE IOWA FARMERS UNION:  
Look for a postcard about the upcoming Booster Club  
**Legislative Supper**

Join us on February 27th for supper and to hear legislative opportunities and priorities.



Onion Creek Farm mentors newly-created Table Top Farm in Nevada.



Come to the  
**Environmental  
Lobby Day!**

February 3rd,  
from 8:30AM to  
3:00PM at the  
**Iowa State House**



Dan Whitaker & Sue DeBlieck, PFI 2011 conference