



Grassroots

Winter 2024

A Quarterly Newsletter from the
Iowa Farmers Union

Since 1915, Iowa Farmers Union members have worked together to strengthen the independent family farm through legislation, education and cooperation and to provide Iowans with safe food, a clean environment and healthy communities.



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Cover photo contributed by Beth Hoffman,
 Whippoorwill Creek Farm, Lovilla, IA.



Josh Manske stands in front of U.S. Capitol building during NFU Fly-In to Washington D.C.

Be a Part of Iowa's Farming Power

By: Joshua Manske, Iowa Farmers Union
 Policy Committee Chair

There's a saying about the Farmers Union amongst Congressional Offices and Federal agencies in Washington, D.C., and it's this: "The Farmers Union Punches Above its Weight." I'm not sure when I first heard this saying, but it has stuck with me ever since, especially when I saw a full room at our 108th Annual Convention in Storm Lake this year.

Whether I am lobbying in D.C. with the National Farmers Union or at the statehouse in Des Moines, I can't unsee how powerful we are for a group that has relatively small amounts of money compared to other groups we are in the same space with. It is our collective voice, not our bankrolls, which changes the minds of politicians and shines like a beacon of hope for Iowa's agricultural future.

Everyone receiving this newsletter and whom I am so glad to be a fellow member of the Iowa Farmers Union, is what allows us to make grassroots change. There is a power to networking and unifying that is the essence of the Farmers Union's spirit of cooperation. By banding together and speaking truth about common issues, we have positively impacted Iowa's agricultural future since 1915.

With our voice, we have stood in the way of destructive bills that threaten Iowa farmland with foreign ownership and we have helped author legislation that purchases...

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Iowa Farmers Union Blasts Proposed Fertilizer Plant Purchase by Koch

The Iowa Farmers Union (IFU) is leading the call for federal and state officials to block the pending sale of OCI Global's nitrogen fertilizer plant in Wever, Iowa to fertilizer goliath Koch Industries.

The plant was built with more than a half billion dollars of taxpayer support. The state's largest-ever subsidy was justified as a way to increase competition in the nitrogen fertilizer market. At that time, Iowa Farmers Union joined community leaders and citizen groups opposing the subsidy.

"The proposed sale to Koch would reduce competition, artificially increase prices paid by farmers, and ultimately increase food prices for all Iowans," said IFU President Aaron Lehman. "It is another painful example of public investments being misused to increase monopolies. We desperately need more competition. This sale must be halted."

Presently four corporations, (Koch, Nutrien, CF Industries and Yara-USA) control more than 75 percent of the nitrogen supply. At this level of concentration, economists agree that market forces no longer work effectively to keep prices competitive. Fertilizer is one of the ag sectors where anti-competitive concentration is being challenged by the Farmers Union's ongoing Fairness to Farmers campaign.

The statement from the Iowa Farmers Union Board of Directors follows...

The Iowa Farmers Union -- along with 18 national ag and policy organizations -- is calling on Iowa and federal officials to block the pending sale of OCI

Global's nitrogen fertilizer plant at Wever to industry giant Koch Industries.

The deal will be bad for Iowa farmers, bad for Iowa's economy, and ultimately bad for consumers paying high food prices. It is a slap in the face for taxpayers who invested about \$550 million (as well as \$1.2 billion of Iowa Finance Authority bonds) to build the plant, now known as the Iowa Fertilizer Company (IFCo).

The stated justification for the tax subsidies was to increase competition in the nitrogen fertilizer supply- a critical input for corn, the midwest's major crop. In fact, the Brandstad/Reynolds administration cited Koch Industries' market dominance as the reason why the investment was necessary. Now we are on the cusp of those tax dollars being used to increase Koch's anti-competitive stranglehold.

To safeguard our economy -- and indeed our democracy -- our enforcers must prevent dominant firms from capitalizing on investments made with public resources. This deal is yet another example of the consequences of short-sighted public policy focusing only on imagined benefits and ignoring the pitfalls.

Federal regulators at the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice must step in immediately to stop this sale. Iowa's Attorney General should join with state Attorneys General from around the country to take action.



Entering New Phase of Growth, Iowa Farmers Union Adds Executive Director. David Andrews Welcomed into the Organization.

With Iowa's family-scale farms at their greatest risk ever from the consolidation of corporate power in agriculture, residents from all backgrounds are flocking to the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU), the state's oldest farm organization, to demand more accountability in agriculture by supporting family-scale, independent farming.

The grassroots organization's rapid growth has allowed it to hire its first full-time executive director, the union announced today. Dave Andrews, a retired diversified commodity farmer and former executive director of Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in Wisconsin, said he is looking forward to significant growth in the next 5 years.



Pictured: David Andrews

"I am excited to be part of the Iowa Farmers Union staff," said Andrews. "In my opinion the solution to input intensive agriculture is to diversify both crop and livestock practices along with tying those practices to ecological sustainable food systems."

David Andrews grew up on a diversified grain and livestock family farm operation near Melbourne, Iowa and was engaged in farming for twenty-five

years following graduation from Iowa State University. He has done agricultural consulting work in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Tanzania and has managed large agricultural projects in Romania and the Philippines. Most recently, he retired as Executive Director of Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in East Troy, Wisconsin, a nonprofit institute, whose focus is education, research and policy initiatives to promote organic agriculture. He holds BS and MS degrees from Iowa State University.

Iowa Farmers Union President Aaron Lehman said the new position indicates the growing popularity of the organization's message - that independent family farms build strong, healthy, and dynamic rural communities and economies.

"Iowa Farmers Union has grown in membership for 11 consecutive years," said Lehman. "Our individual donor program has expanded by 500% in that same period. We are reaching more and more rural residents with quality membership benefits and we are working with a wide variety of partners around the state."

"The influence of our organization is growing every day and we turn that into real accomplishments for our members. David Andrews brings the passion and expertise that reflects that progress. We are excited to enter this new phase of positive change for family farm agriculture in Iowa. I am looking forward to serving with David and the rest of our excellent staff and leadership team."

To welcome David to the Iowa Farmers Union team, email him at dandrews@iowafarmersunion.org.

Be a Part of Iowa's Farming Power

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food grown by Iowa farmers and provides it to pre-schools. Because of your voice, we are an organization that goes beyond simple lip service, but truly stands for doing everything necessary to commit to clean water, vibrant and diverse rural communities, and a healthy bottom line for independent family farms.

Farm Policy has been made very complex by those in power. Most Americans would fall asleep or have their eyes glaze over listening to it. That is not the case with Farmers Union policy. Our organization stands for the stories of family farmers and issues at the heart of living sustainably in rural America.

The Iowa Farmers Union is not just an organization but an engine to change the course of history. And we change history by speaking together. I invite you to attend Iowa Farmers Union lobby day this year at the State Capitol on February 21, 2024, and be a part of Iowa's proud agricultural history.



Food systems advocates join for a group photo during Food and Farm Day on the Hill on Jan. 25.

Iowa Food System Coalition Prepares for Release of Food Systems Plan

The Iowa Food System Coalition is set for a 2024 release of "Setting the Table for All Iowans," an Iowa Food System plan. Iowa Farmers Union is leading legislative education efforts and engaging farmers and food system advocates with the goal of further development of Iowa's local and regional food system.

We have seen growing levels of state and federal investment through initiatives such as the Butchery Innovation and Revitalization Program, Choose Iowa, Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program, and the Local Food for Schools Program.

With investments in local food farms and infrastructure, we are seeing more food grown in Iowa for ever before, and that food is finding its way into our communities through food pantries, schools, and other wholesale and retail markets. The Iowa Farmers Union hosted a Local Food Policy Summit with members, IDALS and state legislators on December 1, 2023, virtual advocacy food system advocacy training sessions through the month of January, and a Food and Farm Day on the Hill on January 25, 2024 to celebrate the success of local food programs and encourage continued investment.



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

**ON-FARM
FOOD
SAFETY**

PRODUCE SAFETY ALLIANCE



**GROWER
TRAININGS**

There are two upcoming Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Courses hosted by the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Safe Produce Program. **Iowa Farmers Union is offering stipends up to \$200 to cover costs - including registration, mileage, childcare, and time for participating in the training.**

Dates are:

Feb. 28, 2024 – In-person, Webster County, Fort Dodge

April 3, 2024 – Remote, virtual

This partnership is funded through Iowa Farmers Union participation in the National Local Food Safety Collaborative by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

More information
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FARM & FOOD FILE - A SYNDICATED COLUMN BY ALAN GUEBERT

At what level of ‘do something’ should agriculture begin to clean up nitrates?

Alan Guebert

For at least the past decade, reported The New Lede (TNL) last September, “a growing number of peer-reviewed medical studies have linked exposure to nitrates in drinking water to elevated incidences of cancer.”

As the environmental news service clearly states, this news isn’t exactly news.

For years researchers, public health officials, and environmental watchdog groups have been warning local leaders and state lawmakers that Big Ag’s growing dependency on chemical “crop science” and CAFO-based livestock and poultry production was increasing nitrate levels in both rural and urban wells to health-impacting levels.

Warning after warning, however, went unheeded despite huge increases in nitrogen-and, in turn, nitrate pollution-across corn and livestock country. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), “...nitrogen applied to corn has increased 120 million pounds annually since 2000,” TNL notes, while “the amount of nitrogen-rich and untreated liquid and solid manure... most of it in the Midwest... grew to 1.4 billion tons by 2018...”

Worse than even those truly staggering amounts, we know that “as much as 70% of the nitrogen applied to farmland... leaked off fields and drained toxic nitrates into the region’s waters.”

Again, we’ve known this since at least 2015 when, in a high profile lawsuit, the Des Moines Water Works sued several drainage districts upstream of its key water source, the Raccoon River, for contaminating its water with dangerous levels of nitrates for its 500,000 customers.

The fight turned ugly when Iowa’s then-Gov. Terry Branstad, a committed warrior for Big Ag, called the lawsuit an act of “war on rural Iowa.” The sound bite was Grade A baloney but it hit its mark; since the suit was dismissed in 2017, no public agency has attempted to bring Big Ag to heel over its growing role in nitrate pollution.

And that can’t be dismissed as just some legal weakness or lack of evidence.

But a Feb. 1 followup story on nitrate contamination by TNL, the reporting arm of the non-profit, non-partisan group that most farmers love to hate, the Environmental Working Group,



noted that “lawmakers and public health officials in Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska are pursuing... new strategies at reducing the risks” nitrate pollution poses to “human health presented by ongoing farm-related contamination.”

The reason is simple, says University of Nebraska (UNL) researcher Eleanor Rogan, chair of the Department of Environmental, Agricultural, and Occupational Health at its Medical Center: “It’s pretty obvious that in the areas where levels of nitrates and other agrichemicals in water are higher, you get more pediatric cancers and birth defects.”

And, she adds, “So that sort of tells you maybe you should do something...”

In Nebraska that something largely turns out to be \$2.5 million to fund researchers “in part with identifying and controlling the sources of cancer in the state’s children.”

The reason for the new state funds is equally obvious: Nebraska has a “high rate of birth defects and pediatric cancers in areas where groundwater is contaminated with nitrates and atrazine, a weed killer.”

An Iowa state legislator, Democrat Austin Baeth, “an internal medicine specialist from Des Moines,” explains TNL, is leading a statehouse effort “to figure out the key drivers of our cancer rate,” the second highest in the nation.

One Minnesota state rep, Democrat Rick Hansen, has a different approach than his nitrate-rich neighbors. Hansen wants a “polluters-pay,” \$1-per-ton surcharge on in-state sales of commercial fertilizers to fund cleanup of rural and community water sources impacted by nitrogen overuse.

It’s just one good idea that serves notice that nitrate contamination of rural-and, increasingly, downstream urban and suburban-water sources is a deadly, here-and-now problem and yesterday’s denials and today’s delays won’t be suffered silently by a now better informed, increasingly endangered public.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

2023: A Year of Exceeding Expectations Thanks to Members Like You

2023 was a year of exceeding expectations for Iowa Farmers Union thanks to our members.

Growth was seen in the following areas:

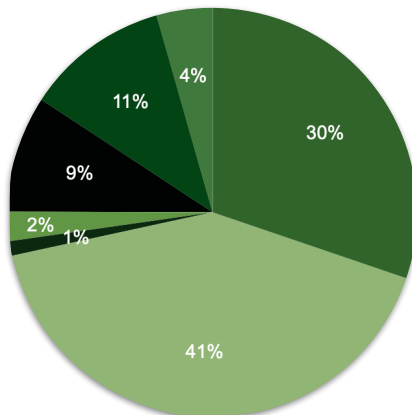
- Membership increase
- Fundraising
- Peer-to-peer member recruitment
- Member sponsorship of new members
- First district meetings
- Member recruitment at the Iowa State Fair

In 2023, IFU hosted or attended over 70 events including continuing to offer our weekly Lunch & Learn webinars; hosting a booth in the Ag building at the Iowa State Fair; presenting a series of workshops on finding your voice and telling your stories; hosting our annual Farm and Food Lobby Day; presenting a webinar on the ABCs of CAFOs with Diane Rosenberg; hosting our annual Potluck Barn Party; holding district meetings on Zoom and in-person and more.

Through these efforts and your support and participation in them, IFU saw a membership increase of 11.7% over its 2022 numbers.

Peer-to-Peer member recruitment and current member sponsorship of new members also played a significant role in our growth. Thank you to everyone who stepped-up in a big way to make this happen.

Earlier in the year, Tommy Hexter, IFU's Educator & Rural Organizer organized district meetings online in order to help members meet others in their near vicinity.



IFU Membership Make-up

In two of the districts, Southeast and Southwest, these Zoom meetings were followed by potluck picnics where attendees were able to meet in-person and have some fun.

Members can look forward to more of these get-togethers this year.

A word about our booth at the Iowa State Fair. In case you missed it, 2023 saw IFU moving from our usual location in the Varied Industries Building to a new spot in the Agriculture Building. The booth is just a few feet away from the famous State Fair Butter Cow.



- Regular/Regular, 2yrs 30%
- Beginning Farmer 41%
- Sustaining 1%
- Organizational 2%
- Associate 9%
- Lifetime 11%
- Student 4%

It seemed fitting that we should be there because the long-time sculptor of the Butter Cow was Norma 'Duffy' Lyon whose family were staunch Farmers Union members. In fact, Joe and Duffy's son and family became members at the Barn Party last year. We welcome them to the fold!

IFU's Stronger Together: \$30,000 in 30 Days fundraising campaign has concluded and I am overjoyed to report that we have once again exceeded our fundraising goal thanks to your incredible generosity. However, we still have 6 pledges that have not been fulfilled. So, if you pledged to donate but haven't had time to pop your cheque in the mail or go online to make that donation, please do it. If you need help don't hesitate to give me a call at (515) 451-8492. Every dollar makes a difference and will be put to good use.

So, it's on with the New Year! Look for changes to our website - repairs and remodelling. Keep your ears open for events like the NFU Advocacy Training in April. Let us know if you're interested in attending. Or, perhaps we'll see you at Lobby Day on Feb. 21. Register on our website.

Remember, we're stronger when we all work together!

Deborah Bunka
Membership & Fundraising Director



The calendar has flipped over following a productive year for competition in agriculture in 2023. The previous year featured major Fairness for Farmers priorities sharing time in the spotlight, including efforts to strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act, Right to Repair, and legislation resembling a farm bill competition title.

NFU intends to carry that momentum forward, as Congress finds itself in a familiar place: racing to meet several major deadlines. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees have signaled their desire to proceed on a new farm bill in the first quarter of the year. Congress has once again extended government funding into March, as appropriators race to develop annual appropriations bills for the rest of the fiscal year.

1. FARM SAFETY NET TALKS HEAT UP



Photo by National Farmers Union.

Farm bill negotiations remain ongoing and complicated, as each side of the committees have disagreements concerning the farm safety net and climate-smart agriculture investments from the Inflation Reduction Act. In mid-January, Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) offered a variety of potential changes to commodity programs and crop insurance.

In a letter to Senate colleagues, Chair Stabenow outlined five key principles for the farm safety net in the (now) 2024 Farm Bill:

- Programs must be targeted to active farmers.
- Provide farmers choices and flexibility.
- Assistance should be timely.

Expand the reach of programs to help more farmers.
Address the emerging risks farmers face.

Sen. Stabenow expressed support for offering farmers the option of forgoing title I programs (such as Agriculture Risk Coverage or Price Loss Coverage) in exchange for purchasing risk management products with higher subsidy levels. The Chair noted that previous farm bills offered cotton growers a choice and the next bill ought to extend this option to all commodities.

The Chair's comments echo several of NFU's policy priorities, such as broadening the reach and availability of Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), increasing marketing loan rates, and protecting funding for nutrition and conservation programs from cuts or repurposing. NFU looks forward to learning more about the proposals, as well as the mentioned possibility of increasing farm bill spending levels using outside funds.

2. NFU CONVENES 2024 POLICY COMMITTEE



Photo by National Farmers Union.

From January 8-11, NFU convened a meeting of the 2024 Policy Committee, kicking off NFU's annual 2024 policy process. An integral component of Farmers Union's success and reputation is its grassroots policy process, which is driven by the organization's 220,000 farmer- and rancher-members.

Farmers Union's policy process begins each year at the local or county level, where members develop policy proposals based on their experiences, concerns, aspirations, and understanding of farm policy. Individuals are then elected to serve as delegates for their state or regional Farmers Union conventions, during which

WASHINGTON CORNER CONTINUED...

they have the opportunity to debate and vote on policy proposals along with other delegates from across the region. From there, a small subset of delegates is elected to represent that state or region's interests during the policy debate at National Farmers Union's annual convention.

But the locally-led policy making process begins at the national level long before the annual convention.

Every January, NFU gathers the national policy committee, consisting of 7-8 members who are nominated by their state or regional Farmers Union organization.

Earlier this month, eight Farmers Union members from across the country traveled to Washington, DC to begin crafting NFU's official 2024 policy book, going line-by-line through NFU's existing policy proposing, debating, and adopting changes. They also had the opportunity to hear from the House and Senate Agriculture Committees' majority and minority staffs for discussions on the state of farm bill deliberations.

The committee is tasked with drafting a report to present to all delegates for consideration during the policy debate and adoption at NFU's annual convention. All changes the committee approves must be voted on and adopted by the delegate body. Delegates have the opportunity to debate and vote on any change the committee presents and may also propose amendments on the floor during the policy session. NFU's policy book is finalized only upon adoption by the delegate body at the convention, ensuring NFU's official policy best represents our members.

This democratic, grassroots, member-driven process is the lifeblood of Farmers Union. It is essential for ensuring all voices in the organization are heard equally and the voices of farmers and ranchers across the country can speak loudly and clearly in Washington in support of family agriculture.

The 2024 Policy Committee will reconvene in March at NFU's 122nd Anniversary Convention, in Scottsdale, AZ to propose their recommendations to the full slate of delegates during the grassroots policy process. This current committee is chaired by Hank Wonnenberg, representing South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU). Hank returned to the policy committee after serving as a member in 2023.

The other members of this year's Policy Committee are:
Missy Bakker Roach, Minnesota Farmers Union.
Tim Fischer, North Dakota Farmers Union.
Barry Squires, Oklahoma Farmers Union.
Lindsey Shapiro, Pennsylvania Farmers Union.
Zach Withers, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union.
Thomas (Josh) Munns, Utah Farmers Union.
Patty Edelburg, Wisconsin Farmers Union.

3. NEW DOJ/FTC MERGER GUIDELINES FINALIZED - AND CONFRONT AN IMMEDIATE CASE

On December 18, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) jointly released the final version of their 2023 Merger Guidelines after more than two years of consultation. In January 2022, the agencies announced an initiative to reevaluate and consider revisions to the previous guidelines on horizontal and vertical mergers.

The new guidelines aim to address concerns of excessive corporate consolidation by enhancing merger enforcement. Key changes feature the inclusion and emphasis of horizontal and vertical mergers in a single guidelines' document, a lower concentration level recommendation to presume mergers are unlawful, and a generally more aggressive stance on merger enforcement.

The FTC claims the new guidelines emphasize the dynamic and complex nature of competition ranging from price competition, employment terms and conditions, and platform competition, enabling the agency to better assess and protect competition throughout the economy. Though the guidelines are not legally binding, they provide transparency into the agencies' decision-making process regarding merger enforcement and identify major factors and frameworks that are considered during merger investigations.

The updated merger guidelines were released just before reports of a proposed acquisition, between Koch Industries and OCI Global's Iowa Fertilizer Company (IFCO), a major nitrogen-enrichment facility in Wever, IA. Koch Industries is seeking a \$3.6 billion acquisition of IFCO, established in 2017 with substantial local, state, and federal investment in a project proponents cited as an opportunity to challenge Koch's dominance in the fertilizer industry.

NFU has joined several agriculture and environmental groups urging DOJ and FTC investigate the proposed merger, citing the updated merger guidelines' concerning increased concentration in highly concentrated markets and entrenching a firm's market dominance. Koch Industries is one of four firms that control approximately 75 percent of the fertilizer market, while being one of the largest privately held companies in the United States.

NFU and partners urge DOJ and FTC to thoroughly investigate the proposed acquisition and block the merger if the agencies conclude, under the new guidelines, the deal will further entrench Koch Industries' control in the fertilizer sector.



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IOWA FARMERS UNION FARM & FOOD LOBBY DAY

Wednesday Feb. 21 at the Iowa State Capitol and Iowa Genealogical Society Building. To register, visit www.iowafarmersunion.org.

