



Grassroots

Spring 2026

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 and John Hogeland - Whippoorwill Creek Farm, Lovilia, IA.



Legislature Adjourns With Work Left Undone

Iowa House Passes Right to Repair and Farm Data Bill. Senate Doesn't Answer the Call for Farmer Fairness.

By: Aeon Lehman, IFU President

The Iowa House passage of H.F. 2763, boldly reasserted farmers' right to repair their farm equipment. The bipartisan bill passed by a large margin. Unfortunately the Iowa Senate did not advance the legislation.

Farmers Union has been a longtime advocate of Right to Repair issues. Farmers are facing rising costs across the board, including repair costs. Allowing farmers to fix their own equipment is common sense.

For decades, farmers have traditionally often repaired their own farm equipment. Now, farmers are finding they need costly and time-consuming permissions to fix their machines.

When a farmer attempts to install a replacement part on a modern tractor, the manufacturer's software can refuse to recognize it. The equipment shuts down and/or indicates error codes in the diagnostic system until a dealer sends a costly repair technician with proprietary pairing software.

If the farmer has the skill and purchases a perfectly good replacement part, nothing should stand in their way of making their own repair and getting back to work. Software gatekeepers should stay off the farm unless invited.

The bill would have required agricultural equipment manufacturers to make documentation, software, firmware, and diagnostic tools available to farmers and independent repair shops at fair and reasonable cost.

In addition, the bill included important data protections for farmers. Current farm equipment collects a massive amount of information from the field. This bill would have helped farmers retain control of that valuable asset instead of handing it away to the farm equipment manufacturers and corporate data giants.

Despite the support of the Iowa Farmers Union, the Iowa Cattlemen's Association, the Iowa Pork Producers Association, the Iowa Corn Growers Association, and the Iowa Soybean Association the bill did not even receive a hearing in the Iowa Senate. This lost opportunity costs farmers thousands of dollars and contributes to the profitability crisis across rural America.

Eminent Domain Reform Left Undone. Legislative promises to limit eminent domain for private gain were left unfulfilled by the Iowa Legislature. Early session progress by the Iowa House of Representatives was met by a lack of action from the Iowa Senate. Despite the massive unpopularity of the current efforts of pipeline corporations that ignore the property rights of farmers and rural residents, no legislation advanced to the Governor's office.

Water Quality Monitoring Needs Only Partially Met. Iowa farmers are central to Iowa clean water solutions. But we need real-time information to understand how farmers can be the best partners in that effort.

The Iowa Water Quality Information System, or IWQIS, provides real-time data on Iowa's waterways every 15 minutes, including their nitrate levels, discharge rates, dissolved oxygen concentrations and temperature.

Traditionally supported with state appropriations that began in 2013, the Iowa Legislature in 2023 passed legislation diverting funding away from the monitoring system. While private funds temporarily kept the system alive, that money will run out this summer, and the Iowa Farmers Union has been working to find solutions to keep it running.

Farmers making an investment in a conservation practice need real information about the impact. These monitors are an essential part of that process.

The legislature appropriated only \$300,000 toward the effort which was conservatively estimated to cost \$600,000. The partial funding means many rural communities will not have the financial capacity to access the critical information needed to provide clean water and farmers will have far less than a committed partner in clean water efforts.

Local Food Gains. The Iowa Farmers Union and the Iowa Food System Coalition successfully advocated for important investments to connect farmers with consumers and our community institutions.

The Iowa legislature approved a \$1 million dollar investment in the Double Up Food Bucks program. Double Up Food Bucks works by matching what SNAP customers spend on fresh fruits and vegetables. The program is a proven tool to address food insecurity while providing farmers larger markets for growing local food.

In addition, farmers and local food system advocates praised the inclusion of \$200,000 appropriated to the Choose Iowa program for the purchase of local food by school districts in Iowa. The reinstatement of funds was an essential step in the right direction after a massive \$3 million cut in USDA funds for the Local Food Procurement Agreement in Iowa and the elimination of funding for the Choose Iowa local school program by the 2025 legislature

Iowa's legislative session may have ended, but the work continues. IFU members can make a difference by staying informed, sharing these issues with neighbors and legislators, and showing up when it counts. Stay connected through our weekly Lunch & Learns, follow us on social media, and join us at the Barn Party on July 25. Together, we're building a stronger future for family farmers and rural Iowa.

NFU President Rob Larew released a statement on the U.S. House of Representatives Farm Bill passed in April 2026...

"The bill largely continues existing farm safety net programs that do not match the scale of the current economic crisis family farmers are facing. It also maintains cuts to the nutrition safety net at a time when too many American families are struggling to make ends meet. Other missed opportunities include authorizing year-round E15, restoring mandatory country-of-origin labeling, addressing rising input costs, protecting farmers and ranchers from the threat of market concentration and expanding domestic market opportunities for U.S. producers.

"Farm bill policy must evolve to meet the realities of today's economy, and while this bill provides some needed certainty, it does not fully address what is at stake. We look forward to working with the Senate to strengthen this bill and deliver more effective safety nets for farmers and families."

FROM THE POLICY DESK: FARMERS SHOWING UP AT THE CAPITOL

BY: TOMMY HEXTER, POLICY LEAD

This year, Iowa Farmers Union helped lead two strong advocacy days at the Iowa Capitol: Iowa Farmers Union Day on the Hill (February 3) and Iowa Farm & Food Day on the Hill (March 18). Both days reinforced a simple truth – when farmers show up, we move legislators and get bills passed.

At IFU Day on the Hill, we started with a policy briefing alongside partners working on local government, environmental issues, and legal advocacy, and we were joined by several legislators for lunch – Rep. Chad Ingels, Rep. J.D. Scholten, and Rep. Elinor Levin. From there, we went directly to the Capitol and met with 25 legislators; 15 Republicans and 10 Democrats, across both chambers.

Our conversations focused on three priorities: farmers as leaders on water quality, protecting Iowans' rights in pesticide cases, and advancing Ag Right to Repair. Right to Repair passed the Iowa House with a 70-18 vote on April 27, but sadly did not advance through Senate.

In March, we returned for Iowa Farm & Food Day on the Hill, bringing together partners across agriculture, hunger, conservation, and rural development. After a joint briefing, we set up 6 tables in the Capitol Rotunda (including local food samples from the Iowa Food Cooperative) and we met with 20 legislators.

These conversations focused on expanding markets

for local farmers, strengthening school nutrition, and supporting the next generation of producers. We're seeing progress here too. The state agriculture budget now includes \$400,000 for the Choose Iowa Purchasing Program, split between schools and food banks – an important step because farm-to-school funding wasn't included at all in 2025.

One of the clearest takeaways from the day came through a simple "Iowa Local Food Poll" we hosted in the rotunda that sparked conversations with legislators: there is broad, bipartisan agreement that producing more food in Iowa can strengthen rural economies and improve health outcomes. There is also real interest in moving that work forward.

These days matter because they build relationships. Policy moves when farmers are in the room, sharing their experiences directly with decision-makers.

I want to close with a quick personal note. I will continue serving as IFU Policy Lead, and I will always be part of the Farmers Union family. At the same time, I am transitioning my day-to-day work into my role as Director of the Iowa Food System Coalition. IFU will be hiring a new full-time Policy Coordinator later this spring and into the summer to carry this work forward. I'm proud of what we've built together – and I'm excited to work to see it continue to grow!

IFU 2026 ANNUAL CONVENTION

Save the Date

Friday, December 4th & Saturday, December 5th

Location:
Meskwaki Casino, Hotel
and Convention Center
near Tama, IA



www.iowafarmersunion.org

IFU IN 2026: MAKING FAMILY FARMERS' VOICES HEARD WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

BY: MATT RUSSELL, IFU EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Iowa is back in the national spotlight as one of the most important states in this year's elections. We have a competitive Senate seat. This is the first time since Senator Tom Harkin retired in 2015 that Iowa has a Senate race without an incumbent. We also have an open governor's race. You need to go back to 1968 to find a year with both a US Senate and Governor's race without an incumbent on the ballot.

Iowans will also be voting in three competitive House races. The fourth congressional district, while not considered competitive at this time, is an open race without an incumbent running, which raises the chance of an unpredicted outcome.

It's becoming widely held that control of both the US House and Senate could depend on how Iowans vote in November. This is a big reason why Iowa is showing up in nearly every conversation and analysis of this year's elections.

All of this means there will be hundreds of millions of dollars spent by campaigns and outside groups in Iowa. It's fair to feel like gritting your teeth and preparing for the negative ads and endless fundraising appeals through texts, emails, social media, and old-school mail. But your Iowa Farmers Union offers you an antidote to the frustration.

As part of the National Farmers Union family, IFU constantly prepares for times like these. We've been partnering with NFU, growing our membership, and putting our members in front of groups and media on an almost daily basis.

As a bipartisan farm group, IFU has a tremendous opportunity to help shape this year's elections at all levels of government. With so much attention on our state, IFU members have an incredible opportunity to speak out and stand up for our shared values.

For the next six months, members of IFU will have an unbelievable opportunity to make our voices heard. As the media, interest groups, campaigns, and our friends and neighbors reach out to hear from us, we'll have a huge platform to advocate for strengthening the independent family farm by advocating for sustainable production, safe food, a clean environment, and healthy communities.

We are also partnering with Iowa's Labor Unions and organizations like Mainstreet Alliance who like us can take some partisan, political action.

The board is beginning the process of endorsing candidates. We'll be hosting candidates at our events, sharing information about other organizations' events, and continuing to answer every media request.

Interest in Iowa has also increased investments in the Iowa Farmers Union Education Foundation. Work we do through the IFU Education Foundation is strictly non-partisan. That means much of the work we're doing in 2026 is restricted from partisan elections and lobbying.

The work we are doing is educating the general public about important issues that do relate to public policy. This includes cleaning up our water, defending access to health care, and welcoming new Iowans to rural communities.

In 2026, we're focused on challenges to water quality and the negative health outcomes like rising cancer rates associated with water pollution. We know that farmer-led solutions are some of the fastest and most cost-effective actions we can take to clean up our water.

We're also continuing to elevate the challenges all Iowans face with rising costs for health care and reduced access. We've been a powerful voice regarding cuts like the loss of the enhanced premium tax credits for Affordable Care Act insurance coverage. We've been raising the alarm that cuts to Medicaid will gut health care access in rural Iowa.

We believe that Iowa needs more farmers and ranchers, not less. We believe our rural communities need more people, not less. Immigrants who want to be part of Iowa's rich history and tradition of agriculture have been moving to all 99 counties for decades. The broad and general attack on all immigrants is a direct threat to advancing the goals of more farmers and more people in rural Iowa.

Stay up to date on our efforts across the state. You can jump on our weekly Lunch and Learn discussions on Thursday at 12:30. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Look for our email updates hitting your inbox several times a week. Make plans to join fellow IFU members at the annual Barn Party on July 25th.

While political winds change, IFU has been consistent in our advocacy to hold those accountable who advance policies that consolidate wealth and power on the backs of ordinary Iowans.

Let us know how you want to be part of this historic opportunity to invest in and shape our democracy.

IFU Education Foundation: Working In Our Communities

By: Jonathan Lawrence

As the Education Director, it's been a privilege to work with the Iowa Farmers Union and the Iowa Farmers Union Education Foundation in a troubling time where our presence and our voice are needed. This goes for everyone who feels their values are being threatened. IFU has shown up for our fellow farmers and neighbors in a way that makes me very proud.

Part of my job is to listen and pay attention to what's going on so that we can adapt to the needs of our communities. This has resulted in us working with our members through a Mental Health Grant provided by the great folks at the Great Plains Agriculture Center for Health.

This grant could not have come at a better time, as every week, sometimes every day, it feels like something is being inflicted upon us and our communities. We brought two cohorts of about 15 people together to learn from Iowa State University Extension professionals about mental health. Our volunteers were trained in Mental Health First Aid about reducing the stigma behind this topic, understanding the language and signs that people exhibit when they are going through tough situations, and ultimately what resources are out there to share.



IFU Members at mental health training.

Trainings like this demonstrate the importance of being there for our neighbors. In times of high stress like now, this work is needed most. In a world where we have so much at our fingertips, it seems like simple gestures of checking in on our neighbors and being present with them are often overlooked. Sometimes that's all that's needed to improve someone's day.

So many farmers and rural Iowans across the state are so busy working on the land and in their communities that it becomes easy to feel disconnected. Who's going to be



Matt Russell, executive director, and Jonathan Lawrence, education director, join Iowa's Outdoors celebration.

that neighbor who's willing to call them up or meet up at the local coffee shop to check in? IFU is proud to be doing the work to empower our members to be those neighbors, colleagues, family members, and friends.

IFU continues to work in the Food Safety space as well this year through sponsoring Produce Safety Alliance Trainings. We're conducting Listening Sessions so that our partners can better understand how to make food safety knowledge more accessible. Thank you to the National Farmers Union and the Food and Drug Administration for supporting our work. We're eyeing a few other projects and collaborations to finish out this 3rd year of the grant. Stay tuned. If you've ever wanted to learn how to make your farm more food safety-prepared, reach out to me. We're always looking to collaborate on projects!

Another project that really aligns with me is our commitment to fight for immigrant rights. As a 2nd generation Dominican-American, I've seen firsthand what it's like to be given a chance in this country. So, with the threat to our new Iowans, it's been great to see IFU show up for immigrants' rights. We recently had an event with our partners at Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice (Iowa MMJ), South Central Iowa Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), & League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) for May Day to establish solidarity with our fellow immigrants and labor groups. The theme of this event was immigrants' rights are workers' rights.

We are showing up in communities all around the state to hear from farmers, local leaders, and food and agriculture stakeholders. We are always looking for ways to build partnerships. This is what it's all about and why I love being IFU's education director. We will continue to listen and collaborate with those who align with our values. Thanks to all involved in these projects, and looking forward to a great second half of the year for IFU and the IFU Education Foundation.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

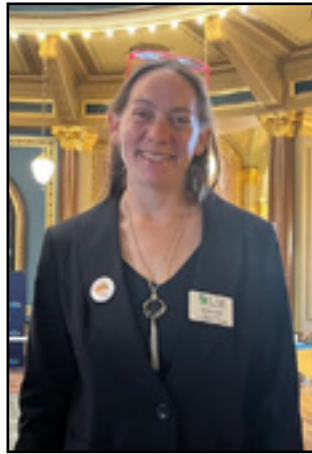
Don't Underestimate the Power of Community

Community is often described as a support system, but within a progressive farming advocacy organization it becomes something more dynamic; a catalyst for resilience and change. Farmers who might otherwise feel isolated geographically and politically, find themselves part of a collective voice that carries weight beyond any single operation. Shared challenges, from unpredictable weather patterns to shifting market demands, are no longer borne alone. Instead, they are processed, discussed, and addressed through a network of peers who understand both the risks and the stakes. This sense of belonging transforms individual uncertainty into collective confidence.

Membership in such an organization also fosters the exchange of practical knowledge in a way that feels immediate and grounded. Progressive farming often involves experimentation; new soil practices, sustainable inputs, alternative crops. Not every attempt succeeds. Within a strong community, failures are not hidden; they are shared openly, becoming valuable lessons for others.

Successes, too, ripple outward, accelerating adoption of better methods across regions. Over time, this continuous exchange builds not just better farms, but more adaptive farmers equipped to evolve alongside their environment rather than react to it.

Equally important is the emotional and psychological impact of community. Farming can be an intensely solitary profession, and the pressures—financial, environmental, and personal—can accumulate quietly. Being part of an advocacy group provides a space where those pressures can be acknowledged without judgment. Conversations extend beyond yields and techniques into mental well-being, family life, and long-term sustainability. That human dimension strengthens the fabric of the organization, ensuring that its members are not just productive, but supported and seen.



Member Jennie Erwin stops by to renew her membership at the IFU table at the Iowa Food System Coalition's Local Foods Day at the State Capitol.



Member Michael Henning welcomes new member Nashiru Miniru at the Iowa Faith and Climate Network Conference in Cedar Rapids.

Finally, community amplifies influence. Individually, farmers may struggle to affect policy or industry standards, but together they form a constituency that cannot be easily ignored. Advocacy becomes more than a mission statement; it becomes a coordinated effort grounded in real-world experience. Whether pushing for regenerative practices, fair pricing, or environmental protections, the collective voice gains legitimacy and traction. In this way, community is not just a benefit of membership—it is the mechanism through which meaningful progress becomes possible.

If you aren't a part of the IFU community yet, please join us today!
www.iowafarmersunion.org

Deborah Bunka.
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LUNCH & LEARN WEBINAR SERIES

Thursdays from 12:30 to 1 pm CT on Zoom

To register, visit the events calendar at

www.iowafarmersunion.org.





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You're Invited

IOWA FARMERS UNION ANNUAL MEMBER POTLUCK BARN PARTY

Saturday, July 25

4 to 7 pm at the Big Oak Barn
12806 NE 64th St. Elkhart, IA

Join us for food, music, and community as we
celebrate the Iowa Farmers Union membership.

RSVP by visiting www.iowafarmersunion.org.