

SPEAK OUT

March 2008

Policy Development

Objectives

- To identify important issues relating to agriculture on a county, state and national level
- To encourage council members to discuss and submit policy proposals
- To encourage council members to become involved with and remain a part of the policy process.

Farm Bureau & Policy Development

The discussion on which you are about to embark will play a major role in what Farm Bureau will do beyond 2008. Policy suggestions from councils surface important issues and recommend possible solutions. Policy development is one of the best means to assure that grassroots input from our members is addressed.

Policy for the county Farm Bureau is the foundation for programs and activities of the county Farm Bureau. The policy development program should give opportunity for Farm Bureau members to shape policies that give direction for the following year of effort. Your county Farm Bureau policy development committee should study in-depth the problems of the county and of agriculture. David White, senior director of policy development and Research reminds us not to “underestimate the importance and potential of Ohio Farm Bureau’s grassroots policy development process.”

Advisory Councils are a grassroots forum in which you can be heard and make your voices count. Your suggestions into this process will occur at this meeting. Farm

Bureau depends on you as Advisory Council members to surface important issues and suggest solutions to help direct the future of agriculture.

Other sources of Farm Bureau policy suggestions include individual members, county Farm Bureau policy development committees, the county Farm Bureau board and meetings with outside resource persons or organizations. Advisory Councils represent perhaps the single largest source of policy suggestions in the process. Council suggestions received from this guide will be forwarded to your county Farm Bureau for consideration in its policy development process.

A Proud Policy Legacy

The policy process has been in place since Farm Bureau’s early days, and it has become so ingrained that it is easy to take for granted what an effective – and unique – process it is. Back in 1950, *Farm Journal* took note of Ohio’s Advisory Council system in an article by Vernon Vine. He noted, “The remarkable thing that’s happening is that neighbors are getting together in small groups to talk things over.... remarkable that one day they might

tell the president of the United States, right in the White House, what they think of some of his schemes... and maybe the next day they are getting the township committee to fix the bridge a cow fell through. Councils are helping to keep alive the neighborhood spirit.”

But simply stating an opinion does not necessarily make good policy, or more specifically, well-written policy with a stated goal. When your council secretary records your suggestions, make sure he or she is writing it in a way that clearly states the problem and a possible solution. For example, simply stating that roads and bridges need to be fixed is poorly written policy. A better way would be to say, for example, “We encourage the county to dedicate a larger portion of the county revenue to the maintenance of roads and bridges.” Well written policy strikes a balance between stating a specific goal but not dictating a narrow solution that may tie the hands of those who will work to make the policy a reality.

Another important thing for your council to consider is if your suggestion is really something Farm Bureau can – or should be expected to – accomplish. First, ask if this problem directly affects agriculture and is something Farm Bureau should pursue. Second, is the proposal forward-looking? In other words, will it affect something in the future that can result in some form of action? Also ask yourself if the problem is something Farm Bureau can actively address. You should be able to answer ‘yes’ to all of these questions. The proposals that you are submitting are destined for your county policy development committee for review and discussion. If the committee prioritizes your policy, then it will be forwarded to your county annual meeting to be voted on by local Farm Bureau

members. Ultimately your policy could eventually make its way to the Ohio Farm Bureau annual meeting later this year and the American Farm Bureau annual meeting next January.

Finally, consider how your policy suggestion relates to Farm Bureau’s vision statement: Forging a partnership between farmers and consumers that meets consumer needs and ensures agricultural prosperity in a global marketplace. Ask if your policy suggestions move us closer to our shared vision for the future.

Creating Policy

For most of you, the policy development process is not new. For some, this may be the first time you have submitted policy. Let’s take a look at the policy process. First, your council submits your proposals along with your council minutes to the Ohio Farm Bureau office in Columbus. The proposals are previewed, sorted by counties and mailed to the county Farm Bureau office. The proposals are presented to the county policy development committee for further review. The county committee then determines what will be presented to the voting members at your county Farm Bureau annual meeting. The process is then repeated at the state and national levels.

Listed below are some things to keep in mind as you draft policy suggestions. Also included are a few policy comparisons.

Criteria for good policy

- Does it directly affect agriculture?
- Does it ask for or will it result in action?
- Is it forward-looking?
- Is it of high interest to members?
- Should it be done by Farm Bureau?
- Does the Advisory Council believe the policy is needed?

What should be written?

- State the problem.
- What is the result expected?
- Is it general enough to give latitude for execution?
- Is it specific enough to establish a clear goal?

Here are a few policies that have been submitted in the past. Can you see the difference in the quality of the statements?

Local

- We encourage more being done to support Farmland Preservation.
- We support the creation, development and implementation of a comprehensive, countywide land use plan.

State

- We support the reduction of all wildlife species in Ohio.
- We support a lengthening of the hunting season for deer in order to reduce the size of the herds in Ohio. We also support an increase in the number of

deer that would be permitted by each hunter.

National

- We support the preservation of farmland.
- We encourage the reauthorization of the USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program in the Rural Development title of the next farm bill.

As you can see, the first policy at each level tends to be vague. The second policy listed at each level provides a specific action to be taken, yet leaves the process for accomplishment open. This provides Ohio Farm Bureau with the flexibility that is sometimes needed to help craft legislation or write the rules to accomplish the policies' intent.

Now is your opportunity to tell us the direction Ohio Farm Bureau should be moving. Use this opportunity wisely, discuss among yourselves and be sure to write your policies in the proper format. We look forward to hearing from you!

Questions:

In the spaces provided, please list any county, Ohio and/or American Farm Bureau policy that your council wishes to have submitted to your county policy development committee. If more room is needed, use standard notebook or printer paper to attach it to your minutes.

1. County Farm Bureau policy:
 2. Ohio Farm Bureau policy:
 3. American Farm Bureau policy:
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April Topic: Energy

Officer Selections: April is the month you are asked to select a chair, discussion leader, secretary, promotion & education representative and government affairs representative. Think about the council role that you want to take in the upcoming program year. 2008 – 2009 rosters will be sent in your next packet.

Information Sources:

David White, senior director of policy development & research

Ohio Farm Bureau Policy Development Manual

Ohio Farm Bureau Web site – <http://www.ofbf.org>

OFBF Policy Development Council Guides (1999 – 2006)

CONNECTIONS



COMPARE YOUR RESPONSES

The following is a tabulation of the responses to the November Speakout Guide on the issue of *A Conversation with Robert Boggs, Director-Ohio Department of Agriculture*. Samplings of some of the comments received are also included.

1. Did your council find this month's interview with Ohio Director of Agriculture Robert Boggs interesting and informative?

- Yes 77 %
- No 23%

Comments

- We would like to learn more details about several of the themes mentioned in the interview.
- There were issues we didn't understand.
- Informative but not interesting. It was a little weak for discussion.
- The questions and answers gave us some information on his background and what his interests are as the Ohio Director of Agriculture.
- "Bogged Down" – it was not appropriate for the discussion desired.
- It raised more questions than it answered

2. What was most interesting or educational about this month's guide?

Comments

- We are glad to know he is working for us.
- He is first and foremost a politician!
- One of the biggest challenges the department faces is that a majority of our state's population has little understanding of agriculture.
- He is interested in small livestock operations as well as the large ones.
- We found his answer regarding the need to educate the public about agriculture being a high priority for his office to be very encouraging.
- We were disappointed with the shallowness of this guide.
- We hadn't heard anything about Director Boggs until this month's guide.
- We were surprised to learn that Ohio consumes more livestock products than we produce.

3. Would you like to see other leaders highlighted in future guides? If yes, then who?

- Yes 72 %
- No 28 %

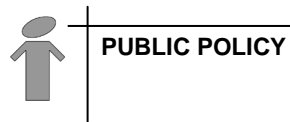
Comments

- Maybe occasionally, but we prefer topics.
- Yes, but perhaps on video.

- Possibly an occasional interview, but discussion of topics provides more information for members.
- Yes, we would like to see more leaders highlighted in the guide.
- Leaders could be highlighted briefly, but not the main topic for discussion.
- No, it is ok for one time, but let's get back to the discussions.
- We would rather discuss issues.

There were many suggestions to highlight all kinds of state leaders in future council guides. The most mentioned included Gov. Ted Strickland, ODNR Director Sean Logan and EPA Director Chris Korleski.

Editor's Note: At this time we are not planning to use an interview type format again due to the fact that it did not encourage group discussion. We always welcome and encourage Advisory Councils to submit topics to be considered for future guides. You can submit your topic ideas in your regular monthly minutes or e-mail them to speakout@ofbf.org.



Earth Day

Coming up in April are two opportunities for Farm Bureau members to put agriculture in a positive light. Earth Day, Tuesday, April 22, 2008 and Arbor Day, Friday, April 25, 2008 provide opportunities for all of us to confirm our commitment to protecting our environment. Our individual actions, from recycling a soda can to planting a tree to cleaning up a

local stream, do make a difference. These two days provide Ohio agriculture the opportunity to highlight the positive impact agriculture has on the environment and highlight those individuals (Environmental Stewardship and Conservation Farm Family Award winners) in your community who embody the characteristics of environmental stewards.

Trends & Issues Conference

Consider attending this year's conference highlighting energy trends, fundamental forces affecting agriculture and a farm bill update. For more details see the enclosed flyer.



Ohio Farm and Country

March's edition of *Ohio Farm and Country* covers two important water stories: drainage issues in Ohio and protection of the Great Lakes water supply for Ohioans. Ag Day at the Capital will be reviewed and viewers will learn about "farmaceuticals" – medicines made from farm crops. *Ohio Farm and Country* airs on the Ohio News Network, an Ohio-focused cable network, Sundays at 9:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. and Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. New shows air each month.



Organization Action Team

The mission of the county Farm Bureau Organization Action Team is to ensure the county organization becomes more effective in involving, funding and conducting grassroots activity with the goal of service to its members. For more than 80 years, county Farm Bureaus have been an integral part of their communities. It is the role of the Organization Action Team to ensure the organization continues to be active in the local community through member involvement. The responsibility of this team to county members can be summed up in one word – stewardship. Stewardship is our willingness to be accountable for the well-being of our organization by operating in services of the members around us and holding the organization in trust for future generations. This team is charged with building a better county organization year after year.



Twin J's Advisory Council
Montgomery County



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