In 2021, nearly 90 percent of Minnesota faced severe drought conditions, which stunted the growth of crops and pasture and dried up water sources for livestock. The drought came on the heels of Minnesota’s wettest year on record in 2019.

As a result, members of Minnesota Farmers Union passed resolutions to help farmers become more resilient in the face of a changing climate. These resolutions were passed at county conventions in 2020 and 2021 and adopted as a special order of business at the state conventions in 2020 and 2021. Special orders of business are priorities of members.

What’s the issue?

Minnesota’s climate is changing, with historic drought and wetness occurring in the past three years. Family farmers are on the front line of dealing with these changes as they impact crop and livestock production, which impacts food production.

Farmers are ever-resourceful and are devising ways to remain resilient and help combat the changing climate, but it’s imperative that family farmers have a seat at the table in government climate discussions occurring at the state and federal level.

What is MFU doing to facilitate drought relief and help farmers be more climate resilient?

Minnesota Farmers Union has advocated for drought relief on the state level, urging legislators and the governor to:

- Fund near-term drought relief at the state level, including to provide ‘Rapid Response Grants’ to producers and expanding access to the Rural Finance Authority (RFA);
- Provide targeted tax relief and incentives to help farmers affected by the drought including by removing the sales tax on fencing equipment, expanding the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit (BFTC), and limiting the tax liability for family farmers who sold livestock;
- Allow haying and grazing of acres held in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in all drought conditions.

In addition, Minnesota Farmers Union supports state and federal action to give farmers the information, tools and resources they need to continue pursuing on-farm climate action, including by:

- Helping family farmers earn a fair return on voluntary investments in practices that can sequester carbon and deliver other ecosystem benefits;
- Fully funding research at land-grant universities to research and scale alternative crops and practices that can improve farm finances and make farms more resilient;
- Making conservation equipment available to farmers to implement new practices;
- Funding and expanding the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) and other voluntary state and federal programs that incentivize on-the-ground practices that promote soil health and improve the climate;
- Expanding the use of biofuels and on-farm renewable energy.
What has MFU accomplished?

- Supported the establishment of the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP);
- Developed a Farmers Guide to Wind and Solar and convened a group of farmer leaders to inform a Farmers Guide to Carbon Markets;
- Worked with Gov. Walz and his administration to advance a proposal to put $27 million into soil health grants that will help farmers implement voluntary conservation practices on their land;
- Supported new investments in crop breeding and development through the University of Minnesota Forever Green Program;
- Helped secure $583,000 for the University of Minnesota to generate small-scale weather models that farmers can use to better plan crop rotations, tiling, livestock genetics and other investments that will make them more resilient to the effects of climate change.

What are next steps?

Join us at the state legislature and in Washington, D.C. to make sure farmers have a seat at the table when it comes to decisions that affect their farms, livelihoods, and future generations.

“Part of the conversation is about how to reward farmers who have already adopted climate-smart practices. A lot of the focus is on encouraging farmers to make changes to their farming operations, but we don’t want to forget those who are already leaders, and we don’t want to focus on one environmental benefit at the expense of others. All environmental services that benefit our soil, air, water and wildlife habitat have a public benefit and deserve a public investment.”

“And, as in other sectors of agriculture, we worry about concentration in potential new markets taking away from farmers’ profits. Farmers are the ones doing the practices on their land; they deserve to be ones who are compensated.”

- Hannah Bernhardt, Finlayson

Are you interested in joining Minnesota Farmers Union members as they work alongside family farmers to improve the climate?
Go to www.MFU.org to click and join.

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