



## 82ND ANNUAL CONVENTION

### **Special Orders of Business for 2024**

Special Orders approved by the 2023 Minnesota Farmers Union Convention for 2024 are:

1. Ensuring Affordable and Accessible Care in Rural Minnesota
2. Curbing Monopoly Power and Protecting Competition
3. Investing in Climate Resilience
4. Addressing the Shortage of Veterinarians
5. Passing a comprehensive Farm Bill

## **Ensuring Affordable and Accessible Care in Rural Minnesota**

**Whereas** access to affordable care—from the beginning of life until the end of life—is fundamental to economic opportunity, vibrant communities, and the persistence of the family farm.

**Whereas** healthcare is too expensive, and this hits family farmers hard, pushing spouses to seek off-farm employment, leading families to shoulder risk by forgoing care, and narrowing opportunities for the next generation.

**Whereas** the voices of Minnesota Farmers Union members helped authorize a MinnesotaCare Public Option, pass a Prescription Drug Affordability Board, and enact meaningful checks on large hospital mergers during the 2023 legislative session.

**Now therefore be it resolved** that MFU calls on policymakers to build on their work to control healthcare costs for farmers, businesses, rural residents, and others across the state, including through:

- 1) Implementing a strong, affordable Public Option that will allow farmers and other self-employed people to 'buy in' to the state's MinnesotaCare program at affordable rates.
- 2) Structuring current and future programs in a way that creates a path toward universal, single-payer healthcare.
- 3) Using public programs to negotiate the price of prescription drugs, prevent price gouging, and prescription affordability and availability regardless of insurance coverage.
- 4) Opposing cuts to or privatization of Medicare.

**And whereas** care is not only expensive but access to care in rural communities is being narrowed as healthcare facilities close or consolidate or services are eliminated.

**Be it further resolved** that MFU calls for action to improve access to care in rural areas, including through:

- 1) Supporting rural care providers—including those in home healthcare—through funding, training, increasing reimbursement rates, and otherwise improving their wages.
- 2) Increasing Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates for rural care providers.
- 3) Strengthening existing or creating new tools to prevent further consolidation of healthcare entities and services.

**And whereas** the cost of childcare has skyrocketed just as severe shortages of providers span 80 counties across the state.

**And whereas** lack of affordable childcare makes it harder for young families to farm, remain in the workforce, and build a life in rural Minnesota.

**Be it further resolved** that MFU calls on policymakers to ensure that every community can access quality affordable childcare, including through cost sharing for families, state bonding for facilities, and financial assistance for new daycares.

## **Curbing Monopoly Power and Protecting Competition**

**Whereas** unchecked corporate monopolies limit farmers' ability to earn a fair price, drive down worker wages, increase costs, stifle innovation and competition and otherwise limit people's voices in our economy and democracy.

**Whereas** economic consolidation is pervasive and growing, with the economy becoming 50 percent more consolidated since 2005, a pace that would leave the United States with just one company by 2070.

**Whereas** a few giant firms control the inputs and markets farmers rely on, resulting in the farmers' share of every dollar spent on food declining from nearly 50 cents in 1952 to less than 15 cents today, the lowest on record.

**Whereas** the consolidated manufacturers of farm equipment use digital technology to lock owners out of the things they own, which prevents a competitive market for repair and creates delays and high costs for farmers while limiting opportunities for independent repair shops.

**Whereas** prices have increased in recent years for everything from healthcare to groceries to gasoline while corporations in consolidated industries enjoy record profits.

**Whereas** America's national security is threatened by unchecked corporate consolidation, particularly by foreign-owned companies.

**Now therefore be it resolved** that MFU calls on the state and federal governments to take swift, meaningful steps to curb monopoly power and protect competition in the market by:

- 1) Strengthening enforcement of the federal and state antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act, and prohibiting anticompetitive mergers and price discrimination.
- 2) Strengthening federal and state antitrust laws including by increasing fines and providing clear, strong, and enforceable standards of uncompetitive behavior.
- 3) Passing a Right to Repair law that creates a more competitive market for the repair of farm equipment including tractors and combines.
- 4) Funding capacity at the Department of Justice, Federal Trade Commission and State Attorney General's Office to bring cases against companies who abuse their market power.
- 5) Defending Minnesota's Corporate Farm Law and passing similar prohibitions on corporate ownership of farm assets nationally.

**Be it further resolved** that while we challenge consolidation, we also invest in diverse, distributed market opportunities, including through cooperatives, incentives for small businesses, public research, and supply chain development.

## Investing in Climate Resilience

**Whereas** climate change has consequences for the livelihoods of family farmers, the health and safety of our communities, and economy of our state and nation.

**Whereas** each season, farmers of all sizes and production types are confronted with the effects of climate change, including drought, excess rainfall during harvest, collapsed grain bins, hoop houses, and other structures, excessive heat, and increased pressure from plant and animal disease.

**Whereas**, in the face of these challenges, family farmers are coming up with ways to remain resilient, adapt to new challenges, and take on-farm action to lower emissions.

**Whereas** the adoption of new policies and technologies has quickened, making it essential that family farmers be at the table for conversations about resource allocation, land use, power generation, grid reliability, and programs aimed at harnessing the potential of working lands.

**Therefore, be it resolved** that MFU supports state and federal action to help farmers make their farms and communities more resilient, including by:

- 1) Expanding voluntary publicly funded conservation programs that incentivize on-the-ground practices, promote soil health, and improve the climate. These programs should:
  - a) Be easily accessible,
  - b) Allow participation by early adopters,
  - c) Prioritize beginning farmers,
  - d) Help farmers earn equitable payments above implementation costs, and
  - e) Address economic losses during transition to practices.
- 2) Fully funding research at land-grant universities to research and scale new crops and practices that can improve farm finances and make them more resilient.
- 3) Removing the sales tax on fencing equipment, promoting flexibility in conservation programs, and establishing other incentives for grazing.
- 4) Supporting farmers markets, food hubs, and other direct-market entities in protecting from heat stress and making their operations more sustainable.
- 5) Creating opportunities for farmers to financially benefit from an energy transition, including cooperative ownership of green fertilizer production.
- 6) Expanding the use of biofuels, including by moving to higher blends, implementing farmer-friendly incentives, and promoting advanced biofuels across the transportation sector.
- 7) Expanding farm-scale renewable energy through tax credits, cost share incentives, and technical assistance.

**And be it further resolved** that as new projects and technologies are deployed to address climate change, policymakers are careful to protect the rights of family farmers including by:

- 1) Ensuring transparent contracts, fair compensation, and guarantees to promptly resolve any ill effects.
- 2) Promoting farmer and worker ownership of renewable energy projects, including through the cooperative model.

## Addressing the Shortage of Veterinarians

**Whereas** livestock are central to rural Minnesota's economy and culture, with tens of thousands of family farms caring for cattle, hogs, turkey, sheep, and other livestock across the state.

**Whereas** regular care from licensed professionals is required to secure the health of not only individual animals, but also that of animals on neighboring farms, wild animals, and people.

**Whereas** the expertise of a veterinarian is required in other roles across the agricultural sector including for youth livestock shows, research, public health, and nutrition science.

**Whereas** there is a severe shortage of large animal veterinarians in Minnesota and across the nation. The United States Department of Agriculture lists shortage areas in 46 states, including 15 in Minnesota encompassing much of the state.

**Therefore, be it resolved** that MFU supports state and federal action to meaningfully address the veterinarian shortage including by:

- 1) Establishing a new Certified Veterinary Technician license to perform basic veterinary services in clinics and on farms.
- 2) Expand and create new training programs for students seeking to go into veterinary practice.
- 3) Funding scholarships and other incentives for veterinarians to practice on large animals in rural Minnesota.

**And be it further resolved** that onerous regulations requiring veterinary oversight be revisited with the aim of empowering farmers to care for their livestock, allowing veterinarians to focus on their practice, and protecting public health.

## Passing a Comprehensive Farm Bill

**Whereas** farmers, workers, and consumers alike benefit from a food system that is distributed, resilient and fair.

**Whereas** the Farm Bill provides the foundation for United States food and agriculture policy, and the current Farm Bill expired in September of 2023.

**Whereas** a lapse in funding could jeopardize service delivery, needed support for dairy farmers, nutrition assistance, new operating loans, and a host of other issues leading into spring planting.

**Now therefore be it resolved** that MFU supports passing a comprehensive Farm Bill that includes:

- 1) A competition title, outlining USDA's role in ensuring transparency, enforcing antitrust law, and diversifying markets for processing, inputs, and farm equipment.
- 2) A strengthened farm safety net that reflects higher input costs and puts limits on farm payments to corporate and investor owners.
- 3) Enacting a dairy revitalization plan and other initiatives that ensure a level playing field for family farms.
- 4) New investments to help farmers implement voluntary practices that mitigate and adapt to climate change, including on-farm renewable energy and soil health investments.
- 5) Expansion of working lands conservation programs, especially the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). We support timely haying and grazing of acres held in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) during droughts.
- 6) Expansion of support for small and mid-sized regional processing facilities, including meat processors.
- 7) Strong support for farmers markets, farm to school and early care, institutional purchasing, and other initiatives that strengthen diverse local and regional markets.
- 8) Improved access to programs, credit, and technical assistance for beginning and emerging farmers.
- 9) Support for publicly funded research on new crop varieties, disease resistance, animal health, and other initiatives that help family farms diversify and remain resilient.
- 10) Strong funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), school meals, and other programs that address hunger.
- 11) Expansion of support for the Empowering Rural America (New ERA) program and Powering Affordable Clean Energy Program (PACE) so all electric co-ops can benefit.