

September 2013

## AFU to Hold Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Alaska Farmers Union will be held on Nov. 2, 2013, in Palmer. Please mark your calendar for this important event. We will have interesting speakers and the opportunity to discuss policy and other organizational matters for the upcoming year.

Please look for more details in future newsletters, or contact President Bob Shumaker.

## Become a FFAN of National Farmers Union

National Farmers Union is excited to announce the creation of the Family Farmer Advocacy Network. We couldn't do our work in Washington, D.C., without the help of leaders like you across the country. Your grassroots contact with your members of Congress is critical to spreading Farmers Union's message quickly throughout the country.

To join our network and become a FFAN, please fill out the form at [www.NFU.org/FFAN](http://www.NFU.org/FFAN) to update your contact information. NFU staff will contact you occasionally with requests to contact lawmakers about specific legislative proposals to educate them about how the legislation will affect family farmers and ranchers.

Thank you for your help! We'll be in touch soon with further details.

## FSA OFFICES CLOSING

Early in 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that it would be closing more than 250 facilities.

While it has been slow going, Alaska has already been impacted by these closures. The Glennallen Farm Service Agency (FSA) office has already closed and next will be Nome and then Dillingham.

"It should come as no surprise that FSA and other USDA service and research facilities are closing because of the continued emphasis on spending reduction," said NFU Vice President of Government Relations Chandler Goule. "A 'cut first, ask questions later' attitude in Congress toward investing in agriculture and rural America is now showing its true cost to farmers, ranchers and rural citizens with these closures. Agriculture cannot be continually asked to do more than its fair share to resolve our nation's deficit problems – our leaders must look elsewhere to find solutions."

According to USDA, a total of 259 facilities across the country will be shut down. FSA offices will account for 131 of the closures, and agricultural research stations, Natural Resource Conservation offices, Rural Development offices and Food, Nutrition and Consumer Service offices, among other agencies, will account for the rest.

"The efforts Secretary Vilsack and USDA have undertaken to conserve resources are commendable," said Goule. "They have made great strides toward streamlining and economizing the department's operations. Since 2010, Congress has cut USDA's discretionary spending levels by about 12 percent, and USDA has done its best to prevent those reductions from affecting the quality of service that farmers and ranchers have come to expect. With the latest spending reductions, it was not possible to avoid painful cuts that will harm farmers and ranchers across the country."



*Pictured: AFU President Bob Shumaker (left), Sen. Lisa Murkowski, and other Farmers Union members during NFU's Fall Legislative Fly-In held Sept. 9 to 11, 2013, in Washington, D.C.*

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Howdy folks, I have been away for a little while but back at it. I just got back from Africa and then Washington, D.C., and of the many things I have to share, there is always good news. The cooperative that we started in Chipata, Zambia is moving along. They elected their first permanent board. There was an interim board in place and it was time that they moved forward. The first summer of using the maize sheller was a success, although they had trouble transporting it from village to village. They need a truck to accomplish that, so that will be a project in the future. I was asked to speak at their meeting; it was an honor. If you want to see a copy of their minutes let me know.

While in D.C., National Farmers Union was well represented at the Fall Legislative Fly-In, but times have changed on the political scene for agriculture and for those who represent the industry. We got to visit with Secretary Vilsack and listen to many speeches but times are changing. He commented that many FSA offices will be understaffed and some offices will have no employees. We are very thankful here in Alaska for all the support and help Danny and his crew provides us.

I write this as we are coming to the end of an era for farm bills, but let me say that all of us can appreciate the support of the senators in getting it out. Our Alaska senators have expressed their support. Our house representative has expressed his support as well. The stumbling block has been in the House side. House members have never settled on a bill to come out of committee nor have conferees even been selected, and we are almost out of time. What killed it before was the amendment that would require recipients of the SNAP program to work. Come on people, SNAP is for the elderly, sick, and most often, women with young children. There are always people who will abuse systems but for the most part our programs are secure. I see famers at the market who accept coupons. We all have skin in this game and for those of you on the sidelines it may be time for you to take the court. Making your voice heard will be helping those that need help. Which I might add may be you local FSA or ag people because there is going to be some changes. The decision to not make a decision by our representatives in Washington is going to have some fallout. Your voice needs to be heard so please contact our delegation.

I do have some good news for those of you who follow the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) issue on the national

scene. The national office sent the following to me:

*Good news on the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) front came this morning (Sept. 11) from U.S. district court Judge Ketanji Brown. She ruled in NFU's favor and rejected the preliminary injunction request. The court's decision and opinion are extremely thorough and we appreciate the effort that the court made to address each argument that was made. The strongest point made by the court is that the plaintiffs were unlikely to prevail in any of their three arguments: COOL is not a violation of the first amendment, the new production steps label is not unreasonable and is within USDA's authority.*

*Among its findings, the court found that the plaintiffs had not carried out their burden to demonstrate irreparable injury. This is a point that NFU has made continually throughout conversations about COOL. We are pleased to have the judge rule in our favor.*

*Perhaps more importantly, the court found that public interest, based on likelihood of success, favored the defendants in the case. NFU has said that consumers want to know where their food comes from; this decision suggests that the judge thinks so as well.*

*NFU will continue to work with the other interveners in order to see that the COOL regulations are upheld and implemented. But this comes at a cost, of course. NFU is thankful for those who have helped financially in this endeavor, helping to ensure that we have the best representation possible. If you are interested in how you may assist, please visit [www.USCOOLDefenseFund.org](http://www.USCOOLDefenseFund.org).*

In short, this is good news. There is always a financial bill when legal help is involved and if you see a way please forward your contributions to the national office in D.C., or through the above website (please indicate you are a Farmers Union member/supporter).

I didn't realize it rained 18 straight days while I was gone, but the weeds are showing no mercy. The pumpkins are looking good and the zucchini as always is top. It is time to start cutting hay, and that will begin soon. The last note is that I got married while in Africa to a woman I met during my first trip and my hopes are that she will be here for the annual meeting on Nov. 2. All for now, but please keep me posted and tuned to things going on. -Bob

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