



## *Alaska FFA in State of Peril*

The Future Farmers of America in Alaska has taken a black eye by the last state rep who has gotten into trouble with the law. I don't know the specifics but needless to say it has left this student/young adult organization in a lurch since there is no state leadership now in place. These kids are hard working and have an excellent program. At Palmer High School the FFA school activity is the single largest activity out of all the activities offered. This is a program that teaches leadership, environmental, and communication skills. There are FFA groups in Fairbanks, Kodiak, Homer, and delta. Don Berberich teacher/advisor is a good contact at 355-4419 for information. The advisors have talked about a person to take over the state position that was previously funded in part by the University of Alaska/Fairbanks and the fund raising activities of the kids themselves. These kids need a state advisor to do multiple functions including coordinating within the state, as well as nationwide. The real heroes

at the moment are two people that have stepped forward and volunteered their time and efforts to continue this organization for the kids. Rain Reynolds (an Anchorage police officer) and Amy Kenley (housewife, mother, and past state president of FFA). The state advisors have asked Rain to become the acting state president and he has accepted. Here comes the need. FFA Alaska needs a jump start. FFA Alaska is asking for a grant, they feel \$100,000 would get them an office and help Rain make the transition smooth and keep the organization going. He has already pledged to provide open and transparent activities, book keeping and such. The money would become part of a fund that would become revolving with the students continuing to build upon. Sounds like a lot of money but this is what the advisors feel they would need, a one time shot. Please contact Don Berberich and even if you can not fund that amount maybe offer some resources that will help them continue this important student activity. Thank you for your time.

### *From the President ...*

And the drum goes on. Well you can travel just about anywhere in the lower 48 and every once in a while you will run into "No Trespassing" signs. Here at home a lot of the land is controlled by our big brother; state or federal. A recent editorial in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner regarding BLM's new "Wild Lands" policy leads one to believe the invisible no trespassing signs will continue to go up (2/26/11). Let the people know we think the land ought to be turned over to private ownership. So people can go to work with their own hands and toil on their own land. Let the Governor know that we want to open up those lands in Nenana, Fish Creek, Kobe, Tonsina North, and throughout our boroughs. Don't forget to support our soil and water districts; they can become part of the key that opens the door for access and development. Most of all support our State Department of Agriculture; they truly are working with our best interest in mind. Summer is just around the corner or maybe I should say winter will be coming soon. The daylight is on the increase so don't delay, get out there and plant.

*--Bob*

## From the History Books: Farmers Union's Rich History



Part one of a two part series by Tom Giessel, NFU honorary historian.

Farmers Union's history is rich with colorful characters, amazing achievements, and both humorous and serious stories of endurance and survival.

My passion for Farmers Union history was set in motion in 2006, as we prepared for the Kansas Farmers Union centennial. Donn Teske, Kansas Farmers Union (KFU) president, asked if I would be interested in putting together a short program on our history for the state convention. I had no idea his request would start me on a journey which has no finish line.

Since then, I have spent countless hours poring over rolls of microfilm, old newspapers, reports, letters and anything else that reveals our organization's history. Libraries are my second home. Virtually all Farmers Union organizational, business, legislative and social activities were associated with education. It is no accident that "education" takes a prominent place not only in our official name, the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union of America, but is the base of our long-time symbol, the Farmers Union Triangle. Our founders were well aware our legislative and co-

operative efforts would fail without investment in proper education.

Farmers Union is a very important part of my life and community. My family has a long history of involvement in the organization. My mother's family was paying dues in 1907, my father's family in 1906. I became a full-fledged member in 1975, when my father told me to write a check for dues since I was now old enough for my own membership. He was working Pawnee County membership that particular day, and got his first one before leaving the house!

Recently I was asked to serve as National Farmers Union (NFU) honorary historian. The highlight so far has been my trip to the NFU archives at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where I uncovered educational history to assist with the NFU All-States Camp 75th Anniversary celebration on July 16 in Bailey, Colo. Another project I hope to launch is recording oral history of the organization, starting in San Antonio, Texas, March 13-15.

During my research, I discovered nearly every local formed in the early years was associated with country schoolhouses. Schools were a natural meeting place in every community, as they were within walking, horseback ride or wagon travel.

Early pioneers of the organization recognized the commonwealth of educa-

tion and realized the great potential and future of their communities. They were also very cognizant of the fact that none of this would evolve without education on a local level. The communities were theirs to build and shape to the advantage of all. Thus, thousands of locals sprang up like blades of grass on the great prairie. Without locals, the state and national organizations could not exist. I believe this remains just as true today.

The great cooperative movement was the result of many of the educational endeavors of Farmers Union. This is a story in and of itself. I thought I knew the role cooperatives played in our history, but I was uninformed and underestimated the impact to a major degree. Cooperatives have been, and continue to be, the keystone of rural communities. Cooperatives and cooperative education remains essential to our future.

In 1906, Arkansas Farmers Union played an important role in the establishment of the state's four regional agricultural universities, to the point where the governor allowed Farmers Union to select three of the five trustees for each of the four schools.

The 1930s saw an explosion in organized education programs, which started on the state level and grew into a national effort. The organization offered activities such as speech contests, plays, bands, glee clubs, baseball teams, drill teams, picnics, jack rabbit hunts, and oyster feeds. Education has always served as the unifier of Farmers Union.

*To be continued...*

### Alaska Farmers Union

P.O. Box 1183  
Willow, AK 99688  
(907) 495-5462 • (907) 715-4669

**President:** Bob Shumaker  
**Vice President:** Jan Flora  
**Secretary/Treasurer:** Don Brainard

**Board of Directors:**  
Hans Geier • Jan Flora • Harold Green • Karen Olson  
Tiny De Priest • Dave Schade



### News to Share?

Contact Bob at  
Robert.Shumaker@matsuk12.us