



## *Dedication to Youth Development*

Youth involvement is an integral part of the farmers union agenda. It happens to be one of the legs of the triangle that we farmers union members aspire to. The three legs are: legislation, cooperation, and education. I always appreciate reading the FFA creed and especially enjoy the first paragraph, "I believe in the future of agriculture with a faith born not of words but of deeds-achievements won by the present and past generations of agriculturists; in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us from the struggles of former years." It has been my involvement with FFA, whether it was through my children or other avenues that caused me to sit up when Al Poindexter came to our annual meeting with a resolution to support the Future Farmers of America program. We at AFU have been busy making calls and setting up some meetings that we hope will benefit the future of FFA. To date we have had two important meetings; the first was with Representative Allen Dick. The individuals in attendance were Rayne Reynolds, Amy Harmon, Don Berberich, Brad Swartz, Sig Redstead, Al Poindexter, and AFU President Bob Shumaker. It was held in Wasilla, realizing Al had to drive a 500 mile round trip to participate. Rep Dick was more than helpful. He has agreed to "carry" the bill in which he will have drafted. Allen Dick



is the chairman of the education committee, he understands the real needs of our young people and the benefits of the FFA program. A big thank you to Rep Dick. The second meeting was in Anchorage with some of the governors staff. The governor has attended the FFA state convention in the past. This meeting was attended by Rayne Reynolds, Amy Harmon, Brad Swartz, Al Poindexter, and AFU President Bob Shumaker. Again, Al made the same trip less the valley leg. These are some dedicated people for youth development. We were lucky to get to visit with Jeff Jones and Karen Rehfeld. They were astute and attentive. We left with the feeling that the message was heard. I can not forget to mention those that helped set up the meeting including Lynn Castle and Lana Karlberg also of the governors office. Don't forget to thank the governor and his staff when the opportunity comes. If you have any questions or want to know what you can do to get involved, call President Shumaker at his home number, 745-2807.

## *From the President ...*

Have you noticed that lately the media is down playing the name "agriculture" or just plain eliminating it with new verbage like "Food Security" and "Food Safety." Heck, government grants are big if you use the security and safety language. I ask you what is wrong with the meaning or word agriculture or farmer for that matter? I am proud to be a farmer, an agriculturist you might say. We are the picture that food security and safety are in. We are conservationists, natural resources managers, common every day citizens who want to be our own boss and witness the fruits of our labors. We are proud to be called farmer and that we are part of the picture painted by agriculture. So, never take a back seat to other professions. Everybody has to eat. The third paragraph of New Hollands "A Farmer's Creed" sums it up for me: I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honorable way a man can spend his days on this earth. And to that I say it doesn't matter how straight your furrows are it just matters that you are putting them in. Until next time. --Bob

## *Understanding the Alaska Legislative Process Workshop 2012*

*How to Deal Effectively with Alaska State Government:  
The Alaska Legislature, the Governor's Office and State Agencies*  
**Anchorage: Jan. 9-10 or Bethel: Jan 12-13**

Conducted by the UAF Cooperative Extension Service. To learn more and to register, visit [www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/anchorage/NRCD/](http://www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/anchorage/NRCD/).

*National Voice on  
Local Issues:  
Join Alaska Farmers  
Union Today!*

Did you know that at the national level Farmers Union is working on issues in each of the following areas:

Biotechnology  
Climate  
Conservation  
Consumers  
Dairy  
Energy & Environment  
Farm Bill  
Financial Market Reform  
Hunger, Nutrition & Food Aid  
International Leadership  
Livestock/Competition  
Research  
Rural America  
Trade

Heck, our NFU President Roger Johnson was named an honorary cohost of the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign at their annual conference.

What other organization is dedicated to natural resources and our livelihoods?

So, If you are not a Farmers Union member please take time to join by going on our national website or getting in touch with our Secretary/Treasurer Hans Geier at [htgeier@alaska.edu](mailto:htgeier@alaska.edu). Thank you!



As 2011 comes to a close, we have seen a lot of activity on policy on Capitol Hill. The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (Select Committee) was unable to reach an agreement to reduce the national deficit by their Nov. 23 deadline. As part of the deal to raise the debt ceiling last summer, the Select Committee was given until Nov. 23 to agree to a deal that would have reduced the U.S. deficit by at least \$1.2 trillion over the next ten years. The failure to reach a deal triggers automatic across-the-board cuts starting in Fiscal Year 2013, known as sequestration. Under sequestration, the funding for the next farm bill will likely be cut by \$14-16 billion from current levels.

Since the Select Committee was unable to reach agreement, the next farm bill will not likely be passed until mid 2012 or sometime in 2013.

Moving forward, one of the top priorities for NFU will be to include a system of farmer-owned reserves, set asides, and other policy tools in the next farm bill. In September, NFU unveiled a study by Dr. Daryll Ray that found that if such a system had been in place over the last 13 years (1998-2010), prices for major crops would have been significantly higher during the low price years and somewhat lower during the high price years, while net farm income would have remained the same and taxpayer costs would have decreased more than 60 percent.

We are continuing our work with Feeding America on the Howard Buffett challenge to raise \$50,000 to support local food banks.

Howard Buffett will match what Farmers Union members and supporters do-

nate, up to \$50,000. The Feeding America network works to make \$1 into \$17 worth of food for hungry families. With the match, that means \$1 will bring \$34 worth of food to your local food bank. Mr. Buffett will be at the NFU convention. Visit [www.nfu.org/feedingamerica](http://www.nfu.org/feedingamerica) for more details.

Most recently, the NFU Board of Directors granted Hawaii Farmers Union official status as a non-chartered division of Farmers Union. With the assistance of Harley Danielson, NFU consultant, Hawaii Farmers Union leaders have been working hard on their own strategic plan in order to grow membership and receive a charter from National Farmers Union. We anticipate a lot of growth in the state and are pleased to have them join.

The 2012 NFU Policy Committee will be meeting in Washington in January. This is the grassroots starting point for the policy that will eventually be voted on by the delegates at the national convention in March. Since we will continue to work with policy-makers on the next farm bill, this policy discussion will be critical to making sure that the voices of Farmers Union members and family farmers, ranchers, fishermen and rural Americans are heard.

We encourage you to join us in Omaha for the next convention, to be held March 4-7, 2012. We have extended the convention by one day this year. With this extra time, we will offer tours of local agriculture and agriculture-related industries. The NFU website, [www.nfu.org](http://www.nfu.org), is continuously updated to reflect the most current information about the convention. We look forward to seeing you all there. Happy Holidays!

**Alaska Farmers Union**

P.O. Box 84080  
Fairbanks, AK 99708  
(907) 495-5462 • (907) 715-4669

**President:** Bob Shumaker  
**Vice President:** Dave Schade  
**Secretary/Treasurer:** Hans Geier

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

**Horticulture Experience Wanted:** The Farmer-to-Farmer volunteer program is looking for someone to help the women's groups in Senegal get access to new horticultural techniques and manage the surface under cultivation they have available. If interested, send an e-mail to [mmiller@nfudc.org](mailto:mmiller@nfudc.org) and we'll put you in contact with the National Cooperative Business Association.



# ALASKA FARMERS UNION

## *Happy Holidays!*

Special Edition Holiday 2011

### *Policy Matters* By Hans Geier

Alaska Farmers Union had a very productive annual meeting in Homer on Nov. 5, at the Elks Club. The highlight of the annual meeting is that we discussed and adopted (pending revision) the first Alaska Farmers Union Policy manual. This has been a long-term commitment for me. Now, when we are asked about our (AFU's) position on nearly any issue, whether Alaskan or national, we can reference our policy and rest assured that it has been thoroughly researched and vetted so that it is congruent with members' interests and our leadership's position. The policy serves as a statement of our values, and what we would like to see implemented in agriculture in Alaska as well as the rest of our nation. Over the next several weeks, I will be incorporating comments and changes that were agreed upon at our annual meeting, and then the policy will be made available to the membership. The AFU Policy document should be considered a living document, which should reflect new priorities of our members, as well as history and tradition.

I saw a good quote on an Alaska fishing website that I subscribe to. It said, "summer is for fishing, and winter is for meetings, in Alaska." If you substitute "farming" for "fishing," I think most Alaska farmers would agree. Of course, we have many farmers who tend to their animals and other chores throughout the year. But I always look forward to the seasonality of work in Alaska. And now is the time for meetings. It was good that we have our policy in a form where it can be used. I am taking our policy to meetings where I reference it often to provide appropriate input for whatever issue is being discussed. One organization to which I have represented AFU's interests at is the Alaska Food Policy Council

(AFPC). Executive Director Diane Peck made a presentation in Homer, which was very well received by the membership, talking about the AFPC and its role in policy in the state. This committee is already using portions of our policy to assist them in drafting their own policy. This is a very good illustration of how AFU can help other organizations to become educated about farming and agriculture in general.

We have collaborated with members of the fishing community in Alaska to support family fishing and cooperative enterprises. While farming dwarfs fishing in the U.S., fishing dwarfs farming in Alaska (so far). We have a significant number of shellfish farmers who farm on the water in coastal areas. These farmers are actively forming marketing coops, and we support their interests as well in our policy. We look forward to serving the needs of like-minded fishermen and shellfish farmers. By having strong supportive statements for our fellow producers in the fishing industries and the ability to get the messages across legislatively we hoping those interests will see the benefits of membership in our organization. We urge non-members to become part of the united front for the benefit of all!

You will notice that I have not discussed our policy in detail. At more than 60 pages, I hope that each of you will read the second draft of our policy in a few weeks, and I also hope that you will offer comments on specific parts. Then, next annual meeting, we will devote time to policy discussion and probably make changes, because the AFU policy is a living document, just like the U.S. Constitution.

### *From the President ...*

Hello to all, I have been very busy these last couple of months, to say the least, but before I go into some of that let me drop out a date -- March 4-7, 2012, is the National Farmers Union convention in Omaha, Neb. I will be flying out a day or two early in order to attend some meetings, but would be more than happy to meet up with fellow Alaskans. So plan now.

Back to business. While Hans attended the livestock conference, I was headed out for the Montana Farmers Union annual convention, then to Indiana for the FFA convention and the home farm. I have been in Alaska 20+ years and still call Indiana the home farm. I know it just can't be, I've sweated way more here, and spent way more hours tilling dirt. I guess some things we just can't explain. I do love the place and people where I am at and have been for the last 20 years.

The MFU convention was just plain fun and I got to see the Missouri river, learned a little more about "dry" land farming, as well as Lewis and Clark making it an awesome stop. Kudos to Montana. I met Alan Merrill's (MFU president) father Angus Merrill, a WWII vet who did some time in Alaska at Attua Island and other spots. He later served under General Patton, just a fact-filled man. My respect and admiration goes out to him and all our vets. On to the

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## Biography: Hans Geier

I would like to introduce myself to the members of Alaska Farmers Union, since I was elected to serve as the secretary treasurer of AFU and I feel that many people do not know my background. I was born on a 720 acre dairy, beef, and small grain farm in northwestern Minnesota. This is where I developed my deep love of farming which has lasted all of my life. We were cattle people, having 22 milk cows, and about 50 hereford beef cattle (cow/calf pairs). Our milk cows were holsteins, and I learned the quiet dignity and beauty of these animals. While this was before the days of “animal rights” and “Earth first,” I was instilled by my father to respect our animals and nature because they provided for our living. Our dairy cows were pastured and milked in a 22-stall barn. Each cow had a stall, and knew exactly where she belonged. When I was 10 years old, my father died of a cerebral hemorrhage while chasing the beef herd which had broken out of the electric fence. To this day I have a thing about poor fences and loose livestock.

Through the help of our extended family and neighbors we brought in the harvest that year. At 10 I was a combine operator, driving an H John Deere pulling a Case A6 combine powered by a Wisconsin engine. Unfortunately, my mother was forced to sell our farm and we had to move. After kicking around the country for awhile, I finally ended up back in Minnesota near my extended family’s farm near Hutchinson, Minn. My grandfather and twin uncles milked 125 cows, and produced beef, corn, and hay. Everything went into the cows, and they had the highest butterfat herd in Renville County.

After high school I worked for an elevator and large farmer (corn and soybeans) while I attended college part-time. After getting out of night class, I would often be plowing all night until the sun came up. Moving on to grad school at Washington State Univer-

sity, I continued working for farmers, driving hillside combines near Steptoe Butte in Eastern Washington, and working as a loader for a crop duster. Whenever I could, I found a way to be out in the field. When I came to Alaska in 1991, I found out about the Barley Project in Delta. I took a field trip to Delta with Charley Knight, who took me out almost to the end of Cummings Road, to meet Ron Robinson. Charley was looking at Ron’s barley to determine a nutrient deficiency a few weeks before harvest. Ron asked Charley if he knew anyone who could drive combine—I spoke up, and a few weeks later Ron called me and I spent the fall driving one of Ron’s 7720s.

After that, I began to learn more about agriculture in Alaska. I was quite amazed at how things worked here, coming from the background I did. It seemed to me that something was obviously wrong, since where I came from, farmers were the bedrock of rural communities and economies. This did not seem to be the case here. Was it, as many of my colleagues at the university told me, because farming in Alaska was not possible because of a lack of infrastructure? I knew that was not true, because everywhere else in the Lower 48, if the land was productive, a farm economy soon arose, many within the last 100 years. So, what was holding Alaska farmers back?

In August of 1994, I bought 160 acres at the end of Cummings Road near Delta Junction, and began my education in Alaska agriculture. Today I have about 400 acres at the end of Cummings Rd, and also a few smaller pieces around the state. At that time, ARLF was selling off much of the original Project farmers’ machinery in auction sales. I was amazed at the (low) prices it was bringing.

As an economist, I tried to understand what was going on, and looked to history to understand. One of the degrees

I picked up along the way was in Agricultural History. It was then that I began to understand that many of the persons that I knew personally who had been involved in the Project Agriculture had very little understanding of the role and aims of agricultural policy.

## Thank You from AFU Vice President

by David W. Schade, MPA

First, thank you to all of the participants of our recent annual meeting held in Homer, Alaska. I know it was a long drive (flight) for the folks from Fairbanks and Anchorage, and it was great to see the folks from the Kenai Peninsula. Also, thank you to National Farmers Union (NFU) President Roger Johnson and the entire staff for their continued and ongoing support of agriculture, the family farmer and rural communities in all 50 states.

Alaska had the great privilege of hosting NFU Vice President of Government Relations Chandler Goule at our annual meeting. Chandler, who has a wealth of experience “on the Hill,” grew up in and around agriculture. This gives him a great background when he talks to those of us in the industry, and vice versa, when he is explaining our plight in the halls of Congress or to the administration.

I met Chandler two years ago when I attended my first NFU Fly-In. I got to know him a little better when I returned last year, but hosting Chandler and his mom in Homer helped me to understand his passion for spreading the word about the needs of the family farmer and rural American families. Part of Chandler’s presentation was about the state of agriculture, and what was (then) the status of the “Joint Select Committee’s” inclusion of farm issues. While we now know that the committee ultimately failed, Chandler noted the agreement to abandon di-

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## Thanks

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rect subsidies, but a concurrent agreement to keep a basic security system in place for agriculture. He also noted that the Rural Energy Assistance Program (REAP), a program that is being used in Alaska, was kept in place with funding, and other high priority programs were authorized. However, he did explain that a huge number of other agricultural and energy programs were being consolidated and/or eliminated. That is due to the fact that the federal government must reduce its spending.

After our great meeting in Homer, Chandler and I were able to meet with Alaska Department of Natural Resources Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels at his Anchorage office. A good discussion about the state of agriculture in Alaska and in the U.S. ensued. An important connection between NFU and the state of Alaska was made. I hope we can continue to build on this important connection in the future.

I personally want to thank Chandler for his trip to meet with the Alaska Farmers Union, Alaska Farmers and Deputy Commissioner Fogels.

### Upcoming Events

**Jan. 30-31** NFU Board Meets - Minneapolis, Minn.

**March 4-7** NFU Convention - Omaha, Neb.

**June 21-23** NFU Women's Conference - Bailey, Colo.

**Sept. 10-12** NFU Legislative Fly-In - Washington, D.C.

## President's Corner

*continued from page 1*

FFA convention, and what an awesome opportunity that is. Young adults from all over converge on Indianapolis for three days of activity and fun. While there I sat in the NFU booth and we did something different this year that was neat! Mike Stranz and Maria Miller from national have developed fun-filled games that focus on the farmer's ever-decreasing share of the retail food dollar. The kids are challenged to use their math skills and develop the value a farmer receives out of each meal. Just do the easy thing and when purchasing a meal figure 14-16 percent of the retail cost and that is what goes into the typical farmer's pocket.

Advisors were invited to download the "Growing Good Taste" curriculum. It also gave me a chance to connect with some FU members like Larry Lieb of Illinois (farms under 1,000 acres), Mike Buis of Indiana (3,300 acres), Bob Kjelland of Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, and my daughter Lydia, who was working her college booth from CSU of Colorado. I spent two days in Illinois visiting the ILFU President Norbert Brauer and his 800 acre corn/bean operation. I could always go on about the Shumaker Brothers operation, but it all starts with a four letter word beginning with W and ending with a K.

Back to Alaska and now for the great news! We held our annual convention in Homer, staying at the Driftwood Inn and meeting at the Elks Lodge. The Inn is awesome, right on the ocean and the room was even better. The best news is that we approved our first policy to guide us. This was mainly through the hard work and efforts of Hans Geier. Hans has been an active Alaska Farmers Union member for a long time and is now assuming the duties of Secretary/Treasurer. Long-time member and asset in every way, Don Brainard, is passing those duties to Hans. A big thank you to Don and all his hard work over the

years. Don will still be helping out, just with one less duty. The membership turnout was not large by any means, but very effective. Board members Dave Schade and Harold Green pitched right in. It was nice to meet Dave's mother, a long time homesteader of the Homer area. Some people just humble me and when I think the work is hard while on the seat of a tractor, well my thinking is shortsighted at best!

We were blessed to have Chandler Goule out the national office as well as his mother, currently of Michigan, in attendance. If anybody has a finger on the pulse in the world of farm politics, it is Chandler. He did an awesome job with a handout regarding the then current state of the farm bill.

A new member, Al Poindexter of the Anchor Point area brought forth an issue regarding the future of the FFA within the state of Alaska. I will talk about that in another article. I then headed to Fairbanks for a one day meeting with the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) Board. Did you know that extension touches better than 25 percent of the Alaskan population? It could be adult education, youth development such as 4-H or many other ways; we are all benefactors of CES.

Our mission is to extend CES activities into the interior and continue to work on this new "theme based" approach to learning. Agriculture touches us in many ways, whether it is at home, CES, Alaska Farmers Union or other mechanisms--like eating. Thank you for being a part of the answer. If you are currently not a member please join us by going onto the National Farmers Union website and joining with us in the Alaska Farmers Union. Or, contact Hans at [htgeier@alaska.edu](mailto:htgeier@alaska.edu) and he will help you out. --Bob

*Happy Holidays!*

## Alaska Ties Farm Policy and Family Tradition Together

I had to look at my plane tickets twice to make sure I reading this correctly; My mother, Mary Goule Laughlin, and I were going to land in Anchorage at 1:00 a.m. I thought, “This must be a

The desire to go to Alaska was instilled in me during my childhood. My dad, Larry Goule (1940 -1992), used to tell great stories of his hunting adventures and exciting things he did when he was

ing.” The moment you arrive you can’t imagine the beauty and ruggedness of the state. The mountains are huge. The water is deep and blue and the snow sits on the branches sometimes 12 inches high--like each snowflake was individually placed there.



NFU Vice President of Government Relations Chandler Goule and his mother, Mary Goule Laughlin, traveled to the AFU Convention in November.

typo.” After a quick phone call to U.S. Airways, I found out that this was correct, and I wondered how I was to pick up our rental car at that hour. Then I discovered we departed Anchorage at 2:15 a.m. for our return. I wasn’t sure what I was supposed to do with my mother until 2:15 a.m. to board a plane. Luckily, we were not the first from the lower 48 to have these questions and it was great to find that there are even hotels that will give you a special rate until about 1:00 a.m. for you to sleep before going to the airport.

stationed in Alaska with the United States Army in the early 60s. Growing up, he always said he wanted to go back and take my mother to show her the great state of Alaska. Unfortunately, his life ended before he and my mom were able to make the trip.

When the opportunity for me to travel to Homer for the Alaska Farmers Union Convention became available, I immediately bought two plane tickets and called my mother and said, “we were going to Alaska in a month, start pack-

Once in Homer, my mom and I were met with the greatest of hospitality. President Shumaker and the rest of the members treated us as if we had been long-time residents and friends. What was the most refreshing about the entire journey was the true belief and heartfelt concern every person at the meeting had for each other, the local community, food sustainability and the desire to make this organization in Alaska grow. If we could harness that passion, put it in a bottle, and give it out to every state, there would be no way Farmers Union could help but to grow.

As I turned the pages of the policy book that the group had worked on so diligently on, you could see that had truly done their homework. They looked at other Farmers Union states that had been doing policy books for years, and to other states that were just starting theirs. Like Hawaii and New England, Alaska has some unique hurdles in the their production supply chains, growing seasons and basic needs that make many of this issues very unique to Alaska. I was personally impressed with how comprehensive their policy book was on rural, consumer and agriculture issues. This policy book is a step in the direction that these people take this serious and plan to continue to work to build this organization.

As I reflect on the days my mom I spent in Alaska, I can say many things, but two come to my mind. It was an honor to be invited, and definitely educational trip to meet the people of Alaska, but I know it meant even more to my mother to finally get to see Alaska. There are no better people to introduce you to a great state than the Alaska Farmers Union members.

### Alaska Farmers Union

P.O. Box 84080  
Fairbanks, AK 99708  
(907) 495-5462 • (907) 715-4669

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