2017 NEBRASKA FARM BUREAU
POLICY DEVELOPMENT GUIDES
THE PATH TO POLICY

IMPORTANT POLICY DEVELOPMENT DATES:

Nov. 9, 2017 NEFB Policy Issues Forum – Kearney Holiday Inn
Dec. 4-5, 2017 NEFB Annual Meeting and Convention – Younes Convention Center Kearney
Jan. 6-10, 2018 AFBF Annual Meeting and Convention – Nashville, TN

These Policy Development Guides were researched and written by the NEFB Governmental Relations Department and the American Farm Bureau. They are designed to assist Farm Bureau members in state and national policy development and in writing policy resolutions.

NOTE: County Farm Bureau policy resolutions must be mailed, emailed, or faxed by Monday, Oct. 30, 2017.

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Transportation and logistics investments are becoming increasingly reliant on high-speed internet access. In addition, rural broadband is vital to connecting residents, businesses, healthcare facilities, and community facilities such as schools, libraries, and first responders.

The Federal Universal Service Fund (USF) Connect America Fund is a system managed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) intended to promote universal access to telecommunications services in rural areas. In 1999, the Nebraska Legislature created the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF), with the goal of maintaining and expanding telecommunications and broadband infrastructure throughout the state. The NUSF is administered by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and funded through the state's Public Service Commission (PSC) and funded through a percentage collected on sales tax to infrastructure (PSC) and funded thru a Public Service Commission (PSC) and funded thru a percentage collected on each monthly phone bill.

Nebraska Farm Bureau has been asked to participate in a task force, formed by the PSC, focused on leveraging federal funding for broadband infrastructure development as a means of bolstering Nebraska's rural economy. Additionally, access to rural broadband services will be part of ongoing federal Farm Bill discussions and negotiations.

NUSF monies have been the main source of assistance in funding broadband projects in Nebraska. Despite these monies, the PSC estimates that building and maintaining a statewide, state-of-the-art broadband network that meets the needs of Nebraskans from border to border could cost $160 million per year, above and beyond the federal support already provided to Nebraska companies.

**RURAL BROADBAND**

**Background**
A 2016 Brookings Institute report revealed rural areas have significantly slower internet access, with 39 percent lacking access to broadband compared to only four percent for urban areas. Agriculture equipment and operations are becoming increasingly reliant on high-speed internet access. In addition, rural broadband is vital to connecting residents, businesses, healthcare facilities, and community facilities such as schools, libraries, and first responders.

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**Current Farm Bureau Policy**
**RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS (2014).** Page 47. We believe rural areas should have access to affordable and reliable telecommunications services and support the Federal and Nebraska Universal Services’ Funds. We oppose diverting dollars from these funds for other non-communication related purposes. We support ways to improve and expand local service options and improve equity in high-speed access between rural and urban areas.

**Questions:**
1. Should Farm Bureau policy more strongly endorse the expansion of broadband in rural areas at both the state and federal level?
2. Where should states and the federal government look for funding to expand and enhance rural broadband services?

**TRANSPORTATION**

Farm Bureau has been asked to participate in the Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) Nebraska Statewide Freight Plan (NSFP), and the parallel Supply Chain Analysis, in an effort to effectively optimize Nebraska’s freight network allowing stakeholders to prioritize investment opportunities, lower transportation costs, and promote business growth.

The most recent federal surface transportation law, the Fixing America’s Surface (FAST) Act, includes a provision to provide stable funding for freight investments identified in such statewide freight plans. NDOR is looking to leverage the Build Nebraska Act (a 20-year plan passed in 2011 which redirected a quarter-cent of our current state sales tax to infrastructure) to secure available federal funds. As part of the NSFP, NDOR is hoping to identify transportation and logistics investments to drive statewide economic growth and assess how freight technology trends will affect Nebraska.

**Current Farm Bureau Policy**
**HIGHWAY REGULATIONS AND STUDIES (2015).** We oppose burdensome regulations and studies that add time and cost to the repair and construction of roads and bridges.

**RULES OF THE ROAD (2017).** State laws should reflect the needs of modern agriculture and consider the impacts of slower moving vehicles when establishing height, width and weight requirements for farm equipment. Non-licensed agricultural equipment should be exempt from weight limits on public roads. We support further clarification of weight limits for exempt agriculture equipment and to increase ability for rural Nebraska to efficiently haul commodities to market with double trailers. We believe trucks hauling agricultural commodities, including livestock, should be eligible to receive overweight permits, with compliance determined by gross vehicle weight. We believe haulers of agricultural products should be eligible to receive over-height and over-length permits to be uniform with neighboring states. We also believe truck hays movers with chain beds should be exempt from load strapping requirements.

**TRUCK LICENSES (2014).** We support modifying regulations concerning farm-licensed trucks to facilitate the transportation of farm produce and supplies across state lines. We support the elimination of mandatory filing of RS Form 2290, enforced by the county treasurer, for farm vehicles traveling less than 7,500 miles per year. We encourage the Nebraska DOT to seek reciprocity agreements for all farm plated trucks with all states bordering Nebraska.

**Questions:**
1. Should these issues to be brought forward as part of the NSFP?
2. Are there additional funding or regulatory-related issues to be brought forward?
3. Will these issues require changes or updates to state policy?
By utilizing gene editing technology, this revolution in livestock biotechnology has shown significant promise. The use of genomics and genomic editing allows for the examination of the entire set of genes found in a particular animal; sometimes left out of the conversation. Advances in the livestock industry are harnessing these advances to improve animal-derived foods. At the center of this revolution in livestock biotechnology are genomics and genomic editing. The use of genomic editing shows significant promise, By utilizing gene editing technology, scientists have been able to produce Tuberculosis (TB) resistant cattle and Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) resistant hogs to name a few. However, even though these advances show great promise, we have very little policy that speaks directly to gene editing in the livestock industry. In a world that is changing quickly, where should Farm Bureau stand on this issue?

**Questions:**

1. What are the potential short-term and long-term benefits of engaging in incremental beef access agreements?
2. What are the potential short-term and long-term costs and challenges of engaging in incremental beef access agreements?
3. What policies, if any, should be developed in accordance with these benefits and costs?

**Current Farm Bureau Policy:**

**POLICY 252 – INTERNATIONAL TRADE – TRADE AGREEMENTS - LINE 6.1**

Our government should insist on strict adherence to bilateral and multilateral trade agreements to which the United States is a party to prevent unfair practices by competing nations and to assure unrestricted access to domestic and world markets. All trade agreements should be continuously monitored and enforced to ensure they result in fair trade.
For more than 100 years Nebraska Farm Bureau has been working to make life better for Nebraska’s farm and ranch families. In a business where margins are everything and profitability is determined by the weather, markets, regulations, politics, and everything in between, it’s good to have a friend looking out for you.

Nebraska Farm Bureau has been that friend to farmers and ranchers; bringing them together to discuss challenges, identify solutions and to advocate on issues they have determined are critical to keeping current and future generations on the land. The Nebraska Farm Bureau has become the public face of Nebraska agriculture. Farm Bureau is focused on the key issues that help save our members time, money, and reduce government red tape. If an issue matters to you, it matters to us! Here are some of the issues we are working on.

Property Taxes
Nebraska Farm Bureau is leading the charge to better the tax climate in Nebraska. That starts with fixing our state’s broken tax system that’s become far too reliant on property taxes to fund state priorities, like education. Our failed system now has Nebraskans paying the 7th highest property tax rate in the nation. Partnering with rural and urban interests, Farm Bureau is working towards solutions. Whether it’s fixed through the legislature, going to the citizens of Nebraska, or working through the legal system, Nebraska Farm Bureau is evaluating all options to lessen the property burden on Nebraska’s farm and ranch families.

Trade
Today, roughly 30 percent of U.S. farm income is tied to our ability to move agriculture commodities and products into international markets. Whether it’s helping to open doors with international partners through trade missions, promoting new trade deals, or protecting the trade agreements we already have, Nebraska Farm Bureau is pushing to add value to our home grown crops and livestock that ultimately puts more money in our member’s pockets.

Federal Tax Reform
Farmers and ranchers need a tax code that recognizes their unique financial challenges. That’s why Farm Bureau backs comprehensive federal reforms to lower the overall effective tax rate, repeal estate taxes, lower taxes on capital gains, and allow businesses to deduct expenses when incurred. We’re also working to simplify the tax code to reduce the tax compliance burden. We’re committed to creating a tax code for agriculture that encourages success, savings, investment, and entrepreneurship.

Livestock Expansion
Growing Nebraska’s livestock sector brings value-added opportunities to the state. Whether it’s creating local markets for Nebraska grains, providing opportunities for farm diversification and opportunities for beginning farmers, or serving as a market for co-products from our state’s ethanol industry, livestock lifts the state. That’s why Nebraska Farm Bureau is working to encourage local officials to use planning tools like the state’s livestock siting matrix to help ensure rural Nebraska can embrace livestock growth in a way that works for all rural residents.