

Nebraska Farm Bureau Outlines Top Agricultural Issues in 2023 and 2024

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Farmers, ranchers, and Nebraska agriculture remained resilient in 2023. From widespread drought conditions and uncertainty in commodity markets, to economic recoil associated with higher interest rates and input costs, Nebraska agriculture navigated some challenging waters. Nebraska Farm Bureau (NEFB) worked alongside Nebraska's farm and ranch families to help lighten the burden by helping deliver historic property tax relief, promoting growth opportunities for livestock agriculture, working on the next Farm Bill, helping achieve an unprecedented Supreme Court win for Waters of the United States (WOTUS), and continuing to ensure strong agricultural advocates are elected. Those issues round out Nebraska Farm Bureau's top agricultural issues list for 2023.

"Today, Nebraska represents the third-largest agriculture production complex in the country worth \$100 billion. The things we need to do to grow agriculture at this level will come with difficult conversations about taxes, trade, water, energy, and the environment, and we must get comfortable with speaking out about the things that are important for our future," said Mark McHargue, NEFB president.

2023 brought historic tax relief for all Nebraskans, lowering property taxes by an estimated

30 percent by 2030. State funding for K-12 schools is at an all-time high, and income tax rates continue to decrease. As Nebraska saw landowners voice concern when their agricultural land was annexed into city limits. Through grassroots advocacy, NEFB was able to help those landowners preserve their special valuation status, saving up to \$50,980 annually for affected farms, ultimately saving their family operations.

With Nebraska as the protein production capital of the world, NEFB continues to promote and support animal agriculture. Increased state tax credits for livestock operations growing their employment and a lowered investment threshold to qualify for the livestock modernization program have expanded the Livestock Modernization Act making over 9000 additional operations eligible for those tax credits. Also of note was the aftermath of the unfavorable Supreme Court ruling on California's Proposition 12 (Prop 12) which established animal welfare standards for pork, poultry, and veal products imported into California. It is imperative that Congress pass a federal legislative fix to ensure one state does not dictate production practices for the entire country. NEFB is thankful the entire Nebraska congressional delegation is actively supporting legislation to rectify the situation.

"Growing Nebraska's livestock sector is vital to Nebraska's agricultural economy and thus, the state's economy. It is crucial our state allows for

this expansion and does not stand in the way of new and much more sophisticated facilities going in place. We need to actively engage at the federal, state, and local county level to support the new frontier for livestock growth, communicating the beneficial economic impact these livestock operations could have on local economies," said McHargue.

While Congress spent much of 2023 hearing from farmers and ranchers about what they'd like to see in a new Farm Bill, ultimately, a one-year extension was passed pushing completion of the bill into 2024. Protecting federal crop insurance and ensuring it is not tied to climate focused practices or incentives were two of NEFB's top priorities. Reforming USDA disaster programs to provide better flexibility in the event of natural disasters is also key. While a more evolutionary than revolutionary Farm Bill continues to be likely, getting a bill out of Congress that works for Nebraska's farm and ranch families remains paramount.

2023 continued to prove the adage, "whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting." This summer, the U.S. Supreme Court scored a major win for private property advocates concerning EPA's WOTUS regulations in the Sackett v. EPA case. Eliminating the significant nexus test was a huge step in Farm Bureau's fight to ensure the federal government's regulatory reach over water remains limited. The development of the Perkins County Canal remained

an important issue. The finalization of this project would help ensure Nebraska's receive the water from Colorado that it is entitled to. Lastly, there is no question that every Nebraskan deserves access to safe drinking water. Utilizing money from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), NEFB secured funding to help defray the cost of reverse osmosis units to help protect those with high nitrates in their homes. Nebraska Farm Bureau remains committed to protecting this vital resource for generations to come.

Agriculture could not have made the progress legislatively it did in 2023 without having strong agricultural supporters in elected positions. We must elect the right people to get the right policies passed. Every election gives us the opportunity to expand on our past success. The Nebraska Farm Bureau Political Action Committee (NEFB-PAC) prioritizes cultivating and supporting agricultural advocates seeking office on the local, state, and national levels. In the last election, 82 percent of NEFB-PAC endorsed candidates were elected, including Nebraska's first agricultural governor in more than 100 years. As Nebraska heads into another election year, it is critical that we continue to elevate the importance of agriculture in communities across the state and strengthen agriculture's voice. Electing the right people into office lays the foundation for progress to be made.

"We need good, purposeful leaders across the state and in our nation's capital," said McHargue. "We need to identify people who will step up to be our next state senator, school board member or county commissioner, and find new leaders willing to carry the torch for our local County Farm Bureau boards. Fewer things are more important than getting the right people in positions to make important decisions for agriculture."

With 2024 on the horizon, there is continued growth and progress to be made. At the federal level, NEFB calls on Congress to provide a solution for Prop 12 and complete the next Farm Bill. In terms of state is-

sues, the future looks bright on finding balance of the three-legged stool of property, income and sales tax. Getting the right individuals elected will push us one step closer to achieving that

balance and creating a sustainable future for agriculture. Continued growth of the agriculture complex will lead to a prosperous, sustainable Nebraska.

Utilizing the Best Programs for Nebraska's Children

Shannon Grottrian, Director
of the Office of Economic
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Department of Health and
Human Services

Ensuring the safety and well-being of Nebraska's kids is our state's top priority. Providing access to programs that best guarantee the delivery of nutritional foods is vital.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, person-to-person interaction was severely restricted. As a result, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program. At the time of this emergency, P-EBT was an important program to deliver services for Nebraskans most in need.

In 2021, Governor Ricketts declared an end to the pandemic. President Biden declared it over in May of this year. Recently, the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (S-EBT) was created to essentially continue the pandemic era P-EBT. Continuing a pandemic-based policy is not reflective of Nebraska's current social or economic conditions.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is committed to fighting food insecurity and improving the economic self-sufficiency of Nebraskans. Nebraska has a robust infrastructure of established and time-proven programs already in place connecting Nebraskans to the resources and support they need.

It includes the continued utilization of the Summer Food Services Program (SFSP). This program is designed to meet the needs of school children during the summer months, by providing no-cost healthy meals and snacks to children and teens at various sites. These programs also include enrichment activi-

ties such as reading, physical activity, and nutrition education. SFSP allows program organizers to interact with children in a safe and supervised environment. Organizers also identify whether additional support services may be required.

Another option is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). It provides supplemental food, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food benefits to low-income families so they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being. There is also the SNAP E&T program which partners with Ignite Nebraska. It assists those who are receiving assistance in gaining needed training and skills to obtain high-paying careers.

DHHS also connects families to other programs for help with food assistance, such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) through local food banks, and the Double Up Food Bucks program operated by the University of Nebraska. In addition, DHHS has earmarked \$10 million in funding to help support food banks throughout Nebraska. I encourage Nebraskans to visit iServe.Nebraska.gov, or call the Office of Economic Assistance at (855) 632-7633. Knowledgeable, dedicated, and compassionate public servants are ready to assess families' situations, determine eligibility for economic assistance programs and refer families to community resources.

Blood Drive Falls Short



Thedford Public Schools

Members of the senior class manning the check-in table for the second blood drive of the season were, l-r: Brady Dahlberg, Zeb Wilde and Coby Higgins.

The senior class held their second blood drive of the year on November 30. Due to illness, they fell short of their goal, but they were very thankful for everyone who came in to donate.

The seniors will host another blood drive on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. at Thedford High School. You can schedule an appointment online at RedCross.org or by calling the school.

They hope to see you in the new year!

Pictured at left if some of the donors at the November 30 blood drive, clockwise from top left, Spencer Burk, Bridger Chytka, Christina Dahlberg and Jane Haake.



Valentine is friendliest, unforgettable small town

There are so many interesting and lovely things about Nebraska. Notably, a state with lighthouses and no ocean, home to carhenge, and the home state of billionaire, Warren Buffett, among other remarkable things. There are small towns of this

Midwestern state that are incredibly gorgeous, charming, and surrounded by natural endowments. These towns may not receive massive attention like Omaha and Lincoln, but once here, it is impossible to forget the experiences and sights. Rolling hills, lakes, rivers, friendly locals, festivals, laid-back pace of life, and charming scenery combine to make Nebraska's small towns amazing.

WorldAtlas.com has listed eight small towns

to create unforgettable experiences in Nebraska.

- Dodge - a small town with just below 600 residents.
- Brownsville - a small village of under 200 residents above the Missouri River Valley.
- McCook - a sensational town with unspoiled natural beauty, lakes, recreational areas, and wildlife like buffalo.
- Chadron - a charming town located within the Pine Ridge Region of Nebraska.
- Minden - a small town with just over 2,500 residents. The town calls itself "Nebraska's Christmas City."
- Valentine - in Cherry County is home to less than 3,000 people which makes it a scenic hideaway for unforgettable ex-

periences.

- Ogallala - Travelers looking for a small, charming town with western cowboy vibes and atmosphere will feel at home in Ogallala. Then of course there is Lake McCaughy with white sand beaches.
- Ashland - a small but popular town in Saunders County that offers visitors relaxation and great outdoor adventures.

Valentine also made the list of the seven friendliest towns in Nebraska. This picture-perfect small town is recognized for its relaxing main street and you'll always be met with a warm welcome. Valentine is also a wellspring of verdant beauty in the state.