

**Annual Address of AFBF President Zippy Duvall**  
**99<sup>th</sup> AFBF Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee**  
*Enduring Mission and Impact*  
**Sunday, Jan. 7, 2018, 9:30 a.m.**

Farm Bureau leaders and guests...Good morning!

And welcome to the 99<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation!

99 years. That's pretty special!

And what a line-up we have for you!

Reba.

The Secretary of Agriculture.

The President of the United States!

And let's not forget the Foundation Night Out at the Grand Ole Opry House—with Wynonna and Friends.

We hope you enjoy every minute of it!

I can't think of a better place than here in Nashville to kick off our year of celebrating Farm Bureau's RICH history and BRIGHT future.

The people of Nashville are proud of their history, but they are not limited by it. This is one of the fastest-growing cities in America.

I would like to know how many of you grew up listening to the Grand Ole Opry?

The Grand Ole Opry broadcast is about the same age as the American Farm Bureau.  
We only have about six years on them.

And like Farm Bureau, Music City is still going strong—attracting a whole new generation of artists and listeners.

I still like a lot of the old songs. My little granddaughter Jocee and I enjoy singing Conway Twitty's "Hello Darlin'."

Patsy Cline was one of my father's favorite artists—and I still enjoy her music today.

Those old songs are classics.

They told our story as rural Americans working hard to transform agriculture into the economic engine of this great country.

All of us in Farm Bureau are proud of our history.

But we're also EXCITED about the changes AHEAD for agriculture and Farm Bureau.

The most exciting change for my wife Bonnie and me over this past year has been watching our family grow.

We welcomed a new daughter-in-law, Katie, who married our younger son Zeb. We had a wonderful wedding celebration on our farm in Greshamville, Georgia.

One of the highlights of that night was when several of the guys got together and sang the Alpha Gamma Rho song. Agriculture is always part of our family celebrations!

In addition to growing his veterinary practice, Zeb is helping us run the family farm while I'm in Washington and traveling the country for Farm Bureau. I could not do this job without him, and it was a blessing to celebrate his marriage.

Just since I've been your president we have welcomed two new grandchildren into our family.

Savannah Claire joined Ava and Tripp in my son Vince and his wife Erin's family.

And of course "Grumpy Gus" came along the side of Jocee in my daughter Corrie and her husband Jared's family.

And then there's Zellie, our daughter, who is growing in her career on Capitol Hill, working for Congressman Rick Allen.

We are proud of all of them.

And I am so grateful and blessed to have Bonnie by my side as my partner in farming, family and Farm Bureau.

Thank you, Bonnie, for being the rock we stand on and the glue that holds us together.

Many of us are filled with the same pride as we watch our farms and families grow. We are also proud and excited about the opportunities ahead of us as members of the Farm Bureau Family!

Let me tell you things have CHANGED a LOT in Washington, D.C.!

President Trump has put a team in place that is getting good things done for farmers and ranchers.

Farm Bureau is a non-partisan organization.

We applaud anyone from ANY party who works to protect farmers' and ranchers' ability to feed the nation.

We have recognized members of Congress on both sides of the aisle for their commitment to American agriculture.

**WE CALL IT LIKE WE SEE IT!**

And there's no question that the change in administration has TRANSFORMED the opportunity we have to implement the policies of this great organization.

The door to this administration opened up for farmers and ranchers LITERALLY on Day 1—when I was proud to be part of the RFD-TV tractor brigade in the Inaugural Parade—and be part of showing the world that agriculture is a major player in our national identity and national economy. I want to thank Patrick Gottsch and all the folks at RFD-TV for the opportunity to be a part of the celebration.

But even before that, we were invited to bring representatives of about 30 farm groups together in our office to talk with the President's transition team about the major issues that are facing our

nation's farmers and ranchers.

There is no question—we have had a seat at the table with the Trump administration—just as Ray Starling promised me after he was hired to be Special Assistant to the President for Agriculture, Trade and Food Assistance.

And we've made real progress on some of our biggest issues because agriculture has been UNITED.

We are getting things done because our leaders have ENGAGED like never before.

It's thanks to YOUR engagement that Congress passed tax reform last year—giving farmers a new 20 percent deduction on their business income...doubling the estate tax exemption...preserving tax credits that farmers depend on and lowering the individual tax rate.

I've served as your president for two years—one under the current administration and one under the previous administration.

Folks, I can tell you that it has been a breath of FRESH AIR to be able to advocate FOR getting things done...instead of having to constantly DEFEND agriculture against a steady stream of challenges from our own government.

And I'm proud that we will be able to thank the President in person when he joins us tomorrow.

Probably the biggest challenge we faced in recent years was the Waters of the U.S. rule. That over-reaching regulation would have allowed the federal government to dictate not just HOW you farm—but whether you could farm at all.

It treated ditches and even potholes the same as flowing rivers. The rule invited the feds onto our fields to essentially take over management of our farms and ranches.

Our land is our heritage. Nothing gets us more riled up than someone coming onto our land to tell us how to do a job we and our ancestors have done for generations.

That's why Farm Bureau members worked so hard to DITCH that rule!

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we are well on the way to DITCHING the RULE!

Thanks to YOUR engagement, and thanks to EPA administrator Scott Pruitt, the old rule is being reconsidered. And we are urging the agency to propose a new rule...one that draws clear lines that protects WATERS without regulating FARM FIELDS!

Administrator Pruitt spoke at our Advocacy Conference last year and got two standing ovations.

Now that's a first!

For an EPA administrator to get that kind of reception from a Farm Bureau audience that tells you how much things have TRANSFORMED in our nation's capital.

And he deserved that standing ovation. We appreciate the work that the Administrator is doing to bring common sense back to environmental stewardship.

Another member of this administration who deserves our appreciation is Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.

Late last year, President Trump and Secretary Zinke reduced the size of two “national monuments” that were expanded by the previous administration.

When President Obama enlarged two land monuments in Utah, we saw that as an abuse of power—one that denied farmers and ranchers access to grazing land and water resources.

In fact, the previous administration locked up more than 5 MILLION ACRES of potential grazing land.

Secretary Zinke understands that the law requires monuments to be the smallest area needed to protect historic land—and we appreciate his leadership.

And then there is President Trump's executive order to reduce federal red tape. He is requiring agencies to get rid of two rules for every new one.

And he has put a mighty good man—former Governor Sonny Perdue of Georgia—in charge of both the U.S. Department of Agriculture AND a new interagency task force on agriculture and rural prosperity.

That task force is looking for regulatory burdens that stand in the way of growing our farm economy and rural communities.

Secretary Perdue has worn a few different hats: husband, father, Air Force captain, veterinarian, state senator, governor and a member of the University of Georgia football team as a walk-on quarterback in his freshman year back in 1965. GO DAWGS!

And you can add FARMER to the list!

In fact, it might surprise you to know that he is only the fourth Secretary of Agriculture that has farmed in his adult life.

So he knows what it means to plant a seed or help birth an animal and pray that it will sustain your farm and your family.

He knows what it's like to farm in the face of bad weather, bad markets and bad regulations that make our job even harder.

And he is no stranger to regulatory reform.

As governor of Georgia, he signed an executive order to help small businesses cut through state regulations.

And he certainly has his work cut out for him to do the same thing on the national level.

Secretary Perdue is also a tremendous advocate for us on trade.

He knows that exports generate 20 percent of farm income. He exercised the right to create the FIRST Under Secretary for Trade at USDA. And he put a good man in that position, Ted McKinney from Indiana.

They are making sure the president knows how critical trade is to farmers and ranchers.

But I have to let you in on a little secret. I think this president understands that. And I think he believes—as I do—that ENFORCING our trade agreements is JUST as important as signing agreements in the first place.

In the NAFTA renegotiation, I believe his team is doing the BEST they can do, to get a better deal for all of American business, including agriculture.

In fact, the president has told us that.

I was honored to attend a meeting the president hosted last year with a group of farmers. He promised us that what comes out of the NAFTA negotiations would be EVEN BETTER than what we have today.

I intend to take him at his word.

And we intend to work with him and his team to MAKE GOOD on that promise.

YOU can help us do that today.

I would like every single person in this hall to help us tell the president that our trade agreements BENEFIT America's farmers and ranchers.

Last year, we used this amazing tool we all carry around in our pockets to send a message to Congress to pass regulatory reform. And guess what happened. That same week, the House passed the bill!

We can have just as much impact this year. So I'm going to ask everyone to take out your phones.

And I'm going to ask some friends to come up here on stage to help me.

Julie White of Mississippi and Matt Niswander of Tennessee are members of the Farm Bureau GO Team!

The GO Team is a group of volunteers who have been trained in agricultural advocacy.

They are using their skills WHENEVER we call on them to speak out—especially on social media.

So they're the perfect leaders to help all of us use social media this morning to advocate for open markets and ag exports.

Take it away, Julie and Matt!

Great job! Give yourselves a round of applause!

And let's thank all the members of the GO Team for everything they do to advocate for agriculture all year.

The USDA forecasts that ag exports will total \$140 billion this year. Our ag trade surplus will grow to \$23 BILLION. That's right—I said a SURPLUS.

Earlier this year, we joined the Farmers for Free Trade campaign, to work alongside our partners from other groups and ag companies and set the record straight about trade.

They are here at our trade show and they brought a banner that everybody can sign to send a message in support of trade. I hope everybody will take time to sign that banner and make your voice heard.

As I have traveled, I have discovered that even some within agriculture don't understand what's at stake if we lose our trade agreements.

Trade should not be a dirty word. Because without those global markets...our already-depressed farm economy would go down EVEN more.

We sell about half of what we produce to foreign markets around the world.

If we lose those markets, where is that agricultural production going to go?

How will farmers and ranchers make up the lost income?

We cannot afford to lose our foreign markets.

In fact, we need to be opening NEW markets.

We need to pursue opportunities to eliminate trade barriers in Asia and the European Union and all around the world.



We all need to be talking to our friends and neighbors to help them understand that ag trade is an American SUCCESS story.

We also have some work to do on immigration and ag labor.

This is yet another issue that has been overtaken by politics.

But I have met many farmers and ranchers across the country who deal with the REALITY of farm labor shortages on their farms.

Everywhere I go, no matter which region or state, farmers tell me this is the No.1 problem they face—not enough ag workers to get their crops out of the field.

We produced a video last year featuring Burr and Rosella Mosby, vegetable farmers in Washington state. The Mosbys say they lost about 100,000 DOLLARS on their small farm because they had to leave an entire field of zucchini unharvested.

That's just one example.

We hear from farmers every year who apply for temporary guest workers, only to wait MONTHS and MONTHS for a decision. All the while, they worry that they won't get workers in time to plant and harvest their crops.

We hear from livestock producers and dairy farmers that lose all their workers whenever ICE comes looking for one bad guy.

We need enforcement of our laws.

We agree with that.

But we also need the government to do it in a way that doesn't stop us from farming.

I believe we are closer to a solution than ever before.

Last year, Congressman Bob Goodlatte of Virginia introduced a bill that would let existing workers apply for visas to stay in the U.S.—and keep working on our farms and ranches.

We need Congress to pass that bill so we can keep from losing ag production to other countries that have better access to labor.

We CAN have an impact...if we ENGAGE.

Grassroots leaders like YOU are TRANSFORMING national policy to make agriculture stronger.

And thanks to Farm Bureau's leadership development programs, thousands of Farm Bureau members have been TRANSFORMED into stronger advocates.

Farm Bureau is transforming members into leaders...so they can impact agriculture and the world.

Our PAL program helps Young Farmers and Ranchers continue to build their leadership skills. We've put almost 100 grassroots leaders through this elite training program. It has transformed them into strong advocates who can tell our story.

And then there's the GO Team that I introduced earlier. This group of advocates have put their hands up and said, "I'm here and ready to fight whenever I can help influence farm policy and public opinion." We need MORE soldiers in that army!

For decades, farmers often complained that we couldn't get our message out, because the media ignored us or the consumer took us for granted.

That has changed with social media. Anyone can have a platform. We have so many opportunities to engage, educate and inform.

But, to realize those opportunities, we need trained, dedicated volunteers who are willing to stick their hands up and say, "Use me! Let me join your army. Put the tools in my hands and show me where I can have the greatest impact."

We have developed thousands of advocates and leaders.

One good example of this is in Arizona, where both the new president and vice president of Arizona Farm Bureau are graduates of the PAL program.

Many of us, including MYSELF, have been in the Young Farmers and Ranchers program.

Hundreds of Farm Bureau women have been empowered to speak out for agriculture, thanks to the Women's Leadership Committee and the Women's Communication Boot Camp.

Graduates of our programs have become leaders of farm organizations, commissioners of agriculture, and even members of Congress.

And they are making a difference.

The polls say people are feeling more positive about American agriculture.

Thanks to our grassroots advocates and the agricultural literacy work of the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, more Americans understand our CRITICAL role in their lives.

And, folks, THIS YEAR, we are going to need our ag advocates more than ever!

That's because Congress is working NOW to pass a new farm bill.

Farm programs are so important right now, as we have seen farm income PLUMMET.

But I want everyone to understand our opponents will be out in force, ONCE AGAIN, to attack the farm bill.

Many people refer to the farm bill as a safety net for farmers.

Just think about that...if you talk to your nonfarming friend or relative about why they should advocate for a strong safety net for your business...they will be wondering why the government isn't providing a safety net for their business.

I think we should stop calling it a safety net and call it what it is...and that is a food security bill.

The farm bill is the place where ALL Americans can make a very small deposit to invest in the security of their food system.

But, as important as the farm bill is to overall food security, it is CRITICAL to the sustainability

of our farms and ranches.

Last year, Farm Bureau gathered input from farmers and ranchers across the country to develop farm bill recommendations. We shared those with the House and Senate Agriculture Committees.

Members of Congress told me that it was important to work out our differences across regions and commodities, and come to them as a united front and that's what we have done.

THAT'S what Farm Bureau is all about.

One thing that came out of the input we gathered is that risk management programs are critical.

Last summer, I visited with a blueberry farmer in Mississippi and toured his packing operation, which wasn't very busy that day because his fields were flooded.

I asked him if crop insurance was important to his operation. He told me that without crop insurance, he would be out of business after JUST ONE year like 2017.

This is a business that is creating jobs in a very small, rural community...and, of course, growing food for consumers.

The fact is the farm bill is a **FOOD SECURITY BILL FOR EVERYONE!**

It's for consumers.

And it's for conservation.

It's for rural development.

It's for energy security.

It's for research...so we can continue to increase production and meet future demand.

And, yes, it is...and should continue to be...for those low-income Americans who need extra help to put food on their table.

Those of us who grow our nation's food want EVERY American to have enough to eat.

As a matter of fact, through our Harvest for All program, Farm Bureau members have donated more than 7 MILLION dollars and over 200 million pounds of food to local food banks. And they have volunteered over 100,000 hours to assist local hunger charities.

We want to raise future generations that are well nourished so they can learn, become good citizens and be strong soldiers—keeping our nation secure.

We believe in helping people...but we want it to run efficiently.

We need Congress to pass a farm AND food security bill this year! And it is important to keep them together to draw the support we need to get it passed.

I promised you early on that I would visit with farmers and ranchers in all 50 states in my first two years.

Well I have completed that goal.

These are the things that have struck me as I have toured farms and talked with the men and women who grow our food and fiber.

- Farmers and ranchers are the hardest working people I know.
- Farmers and ranchers are innovators and problem solvers.
- Our farmers and ranchers want to do the right thing for their animals and their land.

We understand that mothers and dads are buying the food we produce...to feed their children. And we have to do the right thing.

And, yes, we want to do the right thing for our farms...so we can be sustainable.

These ARE challenging times for us. The farm economy is bad. And farmers in several states are hurting from fires, hurricanes and other disasters.

But no one is more resourceful and enduring than the American farmer.

If we keep our eyes on the horizon—if we ENDURE and PERSEVERE—there is tremendous opportunity ahead.

Remember that in Romans, Paul tells us we should GLORY in tribulation...

Knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.

Perseverance produces character.

And character...hope and strength.

During this year of celebrating 99 years of success, we have to focus on the future and stay UNITED and ENGAGED.

We must PERSEVERE and ENDURE.

So we can TRANSFORM our farms, our nation... and our world.

God bless you all.

God bless the American farmer.

And God bless America!

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