

**AFBF President Zippy Duvall**  
**Annual Address to Members**  
**98th AFBF Annual Meeting, Phoenix, Arizona**  
*United in Mission and Vision*  
**Sunday, January 8, 2017, 9:30 a.m.**

Good morning!

Farm Bureau leaders and honored guests ... Welcome to the American Farm Bureau Federation's 98<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention!

And welcome to Phoenix, Arizona—the Valley of the Sun!

In this season of resolutions and new beginnings, I feel so blessed to be with you today, giving my first annual address as your American Farm Bureau president. It has been a long road for a country boy from the little town of Greensboro, Georgia.

I, like many of you, started my Farm Bureau leadership as a member of the Young Farmers & Ranchers program. My wife, Bonnie, and I have wonderful memories of meeting other young producers who were going through some of the same challenges and had the same hopes and dreams we had.

Farmers and ranchers are a small percentage of our population—feeding, fueling and clothing the nation and the world. The YF&R program gave us the opportunity to connect with other members of our small but important minority—something that would not have happened without Farm Bureau.

And I certainly wouldn't be standing here—speaking with you this morning—if it wasn't for Farm Bureau. Many of us are thankful to Farm Bureau for where we are today—and grateful for what this organization does for all farmers and ranchers.

Of all the things Farm Bureau does for us, the most important thing is that it gives us a voice.

I also would not be where I am today without my wife of 37 years, Bonnie Duvall. Bonnie, please stand and let us recognize you. Thank you for being my partner in life, in farming and in Farm Bureau.

And I would not be able to fulfill this role without the support and help of my children: Vince, Corrie, Zeb and Zellie. Thank you.

I was actually here in Arizona back in June. The weather was a little different then—the average temperature was around 114 degrees. Of course, it's a little more comfortable out there today.

But I was so honored and glad to be able to get out to the countryside. It was an eye-opening

visit to a state that is an agricultural powerhouse.

President Kevin Rogers and his team arranged for me to take a helicopter ride to see the irrigation projects in the Salt River area. It was just one of many things I saw on that trip. But it really stuck with me because it showed that farmers are problem solvers. Farmers funded that project—and today it benefits not only farmers and ranchers, but thousands of residents that live in this area.

It's yet another great example of what agriculture can accomplish when farmers and ranchers unite to find solutions -- when we work to ensure that all of agriculture can be productive. Thanks to the reservoirs and irrigation canals across the state, Arizona is the salad bowl of America during these winter months and much of the year—and this state is a leading producer of cattle, dairy, cotton and other commodities.

Arizona agriculture is an impressive sight. But I've been fortunate to see many impressive farms and ranches across our great country.

In fact, I have visited 33 states this year. My goal is to visit all 50 states in my first term as your president.

The reason I think that it's important is so I can represent all of you—no matter where you farm, no matter what you grow and no matter what your concerns or opportunities might be. To be your voice, I have to learn about agriculture and ag issues in every region and state. I have to meet farmers and ranchers face to face.

You know, we can spend our whole lives farming and ranching and still have a lot to learn about American agriculture.

If it's difficult for those of us within agriculture to understand all types of farming and ranching across the country, just imagine how difficult it is for the general public that does not have any direct connection to agriculture! That's why it is so important that we farmers and ranchers tell our story.

There's a big difference between how farmers and ranchers talk about their issues when they are in Washington, D.C., versus when they're on their own land. When they are on their farms, they talk about their issues with passion.

So it has been a wonderful opportunity to visit with so many Farm Bureau members on their farms and ranches over the past year.

- Dan Bell, border rancher in Arizona, immigration and ag labor
- Judi Whittaker, NY farmer, had to move silage pit
- Montana rancher, bison and brucellosis.
- Jimmy Harrison, fruit farmer in Alabama, ag labor
- In Illinois, I heard about the importance of our locks and dams system for farmers in the Midwest.

Hearing these stories first-hand gives me the opportunity to bring reality to these issues when I'm on Capitol Hill or speaking to other groups.

So I want to hear your stories. I want to work to unite us to support each other within agriculture.

In addition to working together within agriculture, we must also find common ground with consumers, whether they live just down the road or far away in the city.

We must help consumers understand that we all want the same things:

- A safe and plentiful food supply—for our national security and for the health of our families and our children.
- A strong farm economy—agriculture supports over 17 million American jobs.
- A wide range of food choices—whether organic, conventional, genetically modified ... or a mix of all types of production.

The fact is farming is more sustainable now than ever before.

Just think about it for a minute; by using modern technologies, today's farmers grow more crops on the same amount of land, using less plowing and pesticides, and feeding more people. By developing more uses for our crops, like energy, we are making our economy more sustainable.

If farmers don't take care of our land, we cannot stay in business!

By providing food for all Americans, we are sustaining their freedom -- so they can pursue the careers they are interested in.

We have a great story to tell. We need to take back the concept of sustainability—because nobody is working harder to be sustainable than America's farmers and ranchers!

For agriculture to be sustainable, farming and ranching has to be profitable.

And farmers need access to a sustainable supply of farm workers. Many of the farmers and ranchers I've met with say that if we don't fix our ag labor problem, none of the other issues will matter. Without a legal supply of labor, too many farmers face lost crops, and they can't compete on the world market.

It's time for the American people and our leaders in Washington to decide if we're going to import our labor -- or import our food.

Last spring, farmers in more than 20 states told us they were seeing delays in getting their applications for H2A guestworkers approved. There are delays every year, but this time it was even worse than usual.

What was frustrating was some of the delays were due to the Labor Department requiring follow-up information to be sent by regular mail. That's ridiculous!

We also heard that government workers who would normally be working on farmers' applications were being pulled away to handle a backlog of H2B applications from hotels and other types of businesses.

Whatever the reason, AFBF had an opportunity to call attention to the problem before it became a crisis – with crops rotting in our fields and orchards. We held an event and invited partners from the state departments of agriculture, state Farm Bureaus and, of course, individual farmers to tell their story. The event resulted in extensive media coverage of the labor delays.

It might just be happenstance ... but one of those farmers who told us about the problem got his H2A application approved just days after our event. Folks, that is the power of a united, national voice of agriculture.

While we are proud to have pulled together people from across agriculture to bring attention to the H2A problem, we still have a lot of work to do, to fix our broken immigration system. We must have a new agricultural visa program that actually works for farmers and farm laborers. We must find a way for experienced farm workers to legally remain in the U.S., working on our farms.

President-Elect Trump cares about immigration reform. He has talked about it for years, and we know that he wants to find a solution. We want to solve it, too. And his team has promised us that agriculture will have a seat at the table. So there is hope, if we take action and make our voices heard.

Mr. Trump says he wants to keep American jobs from going overseas. One way he can do that is by keeping America's food production in America!

Another issue that I have heard a lot about as I've visited with farmers and ranchers is the need to stop the over-regulation of agriculture.

On this issue—just like on ag labor—so many farmers have told me: If we don't fix this, none of the other issues will matter, because overregulation will put our farms and ranches out of business.

Farm Bureau members worked harder than anybody to bring attention to the real impacts of the Waters of the U.S. rule. The rule would let federal agencies regulate nearly every low spot on the land, even if it holds water for just one day.

The rule is temporarily on hold—but it still looms as a federal land grab and a major threat to our private property rights.

I am so proud of the role that Farm Bureau played in raising this issue. Hardly anybody would've talked about WOTUS two years ago if we had not sounded the alarm. And they certainly wouldn't still be talking about it today without the actions of Farm Bureau members. That is the power and influence of your national voice of agriculture.

Over the past year, I've gotten a firsthand look at the impacts of mismanagement of federal lands and regulatory overreach.

- Utah, overpopulation of wild horses and burros
- National forests—rotting trees, pine beetle and fire risk
- Massachusetts cranberry farmer—box turtle
- California wheat farmer John Duarte, fined for plowing his land.

The Clean Water Act regulations clearly state that plowing in a wetland is allowed. But the Corps tries to get around the rules by claiming that he created “small mountain ranges.” It almost makes you want to laugh. But there's nothing funny about the federal government coming onto our land and dictating what we can and can't do with our own farms.

It amounts to federal control of what we do—and it is UNWARRANTED and UNLAWFUL.

Farm Bureau has pushed back for years against over-regulation by the federal government. And we will continue to defend farmers' rights.

In fact, we had one of our greatest legal victories in 2016 when we won our lawsuit against EPA over the release of farmers' personal information in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

Whether it's in the courts or on Capitol Hill, the American Farm Bureau is the Voice of the American farmer and rancher.

But legal battles take years and millions of dollars.

To make real progress, we have to reform the regulatory process. We can't just pull up the weeds. We have to get right down to the roots that allow those weeds to keep coming back, again and again.

And there IS hope. I am optimistic about making progress with the new Congress and the new president. In fact, President-elect Trump has said that regulatory reform is at the top of his agenda.

Do you want to make a difference?

Wouldn't it be something, if the thousands of agricultural leaders who are here in this room sent a message of support for reform? I'm about to ask you to do something ... because Congress is moving a reform bill forward, and we have a chance to help.

Take out your phones. I want you all to text “AFBF” to 52886. We should all be getting messages back with a link you can click on. Go ahead and click that link now.

You now have the opportunity to email your Representative. Enter in all of the requested information and then click “send email.”

I just did that before I got on stage and it only took me 20 seconds. It was easy.

Each time one of you takes action, a pin will drop on the map. You can see a count of the number of people responding and the number of messages sent. I don't want to see 100 actions. I want to see THOUSANDS of actions right here at this Opening Session. Can you help us get to 1,000?

Thank you so much everyone for participating in the call to action. Give yourself a round of applause.

Right now, thousands of emails are hitting Capitol Hill – and your voice is being heard. That's how we show our strength and influence.

You are influential. You should expect your elected leaders to listen and make decisions that benefit agriculture and rural America.

Rural America showed up last November, when the rural vote was a big factor in the outcome of the elections. The election should send a message—loud and clear—to our politicians: ignore rural America at your own risk!

Now, we expect the Congress and the president to listen to us and work with us to strengthen agriculture and rural communities.

We expect to make real progress on a whole wide range of issues:

- tax reform
- growing trade and exports
- regulatory reform and ag labor

But to be truly influential, agriculture and rural America must be united. Last year, we saw the impact that we can have when we work together for one goal. In a year when Congress was more focused on politicking than legislating, we got Congress to pass a bill preventing states and counties from creating a patchwork of GMO labeling rules.

I can't tell you how many people from food companies and other farm organizations have told me that we could not get that bill passed without the leadership of Farm Bureau. And we succeeded because of you and your willingness to make your voices heard—the way you did just a few minutes ago.

I tell you that because I want you to be proud of how influential your Farm Bureau is. But also because it shows how important it is for all of us in agriculture to set aside our differences—across commodity lines, across regional lines and across state lines—to present a unified front and achieve our goals.

Several members of Congress have shared with me how important it is for agriculture to unite and go to them with one ask. They don't want to have to pick winners and losers. They need us

to work together and figure it out on our own.

That's why I have focused in my first year as your president on reaching out to other groups, building relationships with ag leaders and learning from farmers and ranchers across the country.

A good example of this is the presidential transition team meeting we hosted at AFBF last Wednesday.

An issue where agriculture must unite to help our farmers and ranchers survive the current farm economy is the farm bill.

Congress will start debating the farm bill this year—and thanks to our grassroots leaders and our policy development process—Farm Bureau will be ready to lead the debate about how to make the safety net work for all producers. I look forward to seeing what our voting delegates will do this week, so we can go to Congress with one ask.

That's why Farm Bureau exists -- so that, together, we can accomplish great things -- things that none of us can do on our own.

In the Bible, Nehemiah tells the story of the Jews working together to build a defensive wall around Jerusalem. The job was IMMENSE. Some thought it was impossible. The invading army laughed when they heard about the wall. They said it would be built so quickly—and would be so flimsy—that just a little fox walking on it would make it crumble.

But every citizen of Jerusalem worked side by side with one another, contributing according to their skills and abilities and putting their hands to the good work. They built that wall in just 52 days—and defended their city from invasion.

Folks, I know we often feel as if we as farmers and ranchers are under attack. We have to work together to build our defenses. But we don't need to build walls between us and consumers. We need to tear down those walls.

This story in Nehemiah illustrates the three ingredients that are essential to doing great work:

- A clear purpose and plan;
- People who are passionate and willing to work hard;
- And a determination to get the job done.

In Farm Bureau, we have all of those ingredients. Our mission is clear, and our delegates vote on policies to outline our plan. Our grassroots members are passionate and engaged.

Times have changed, but that character of our organization—a clear mission, grassroots passion, and determination to achieve our goals—is as powerful as ever.

Your enduring values of being a united and grassroots-driven voice for all of agriculture is what sets us apart. Up and down the halls of Congress, respect for Farm Bureau is drawn from that

deep well that goes back 98 years and counting. Thank you for being Farm Bureau leaders.

Thank you for all the hard work you do throughout the year in your states, counties and communities, for American agriculture.

I am honored to serve as your president and I thank each and every one of you for making me Farm Bureau Proud!

God Bless you. God Bless Farm Bureau. And God Bless America.

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