



Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation "News & Views"

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Out on a Limb— President's Message

Now, and of course everyday is the time for FB members and all of Agriculture to speak out about issues affecting our lives. 6100 farm operations contributing \$380 million dollars into this state's economy and saving 500 thousand acres in productive open space—it means a lot to every person in this state.

Is agriculture becoming more of a part time profession, and if it is, why?

The cost of doing business in this area, high tax burdens, available labor resources, low commodity prices and an increasingly faster pace of life all around us—they all contribute to an industry that works smarter, uses resources better and leverages what they have against what they need. Preserving opportunity is our number one priority.

It is increasingly clear



farmers must take the initiative to clarify issues and to seek their own solutions of their own needs. We have a good record locally and in our state. A good record, not a great record. We are all aware of many that would speak on our behalf, and we appreciate

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Health Care Reform— How Will it Effect You?

Sweeping changes in health care insurance have been enacted by the Massachusetts Legislature in an effort to provide universal access to health care in Massachusetts and the changes may affect farmers and their families across the state. The following is a brief review of the changes.

BACKGROUND

On April 12, 2006, Gov. Romney and the Legislature came together and enacted a landmark Health Care Reform Act (chapter 58 of the Acts of 2006). The Health Care Reform Act is designed to reform health care insurance throughout the Commonwealth and bring near universal coverage to residents. It imposes new responsibilities on individuals, employees, employers and the Commonwealth.

The legislation is built on the concept of shared responsibility—between people, business, and government. It requires all persons to purchase health coverage if they can afford it. It requires businesses that do not provide coverage to employees to help pay for it. It requires the government to provide subsidi-

(Continued on page 10)

Newsletter Announcement:

This will be the last "regular" mail newsletter that associate members will be receiving. As of the new year, only full members will be receiving a paper copy of the newsletter.

Any associate members who wish to receive the newsletter are invited to go online to www.massfb.org and sign up for the online version of the newsletter. There is a signup sheet right on the first page—just type in your e-mail address and you will receive your newsletter even faster—right in your e-mail box the moment it is available.

Full members are also invited to sign up receive the newsletter this way.

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It'll work ...

... but, as with most other tasks in life, there's a much better way.



Take record-keeping, for example.

It's certainly one of those tasks that business owners can safely do on their own. But it's tedious, takes a lot of time and requires a certain level of expertise.

So doesn't it make sense to use the fastest, most efficient methods and tools available?

Your Farm Credit office employs ag-specific record-keeping experts who can assume all or any part of your record-keeping activities. From basic bookkeeping and payroll processing to tax planning and preparation, with the best software in the business at our disposal.

Let Farm Credit handle the details. That way, you spend more time out of the office and back on the farm, doing what you do best.

Get a better understanding of how we can help by logging on to www.RealCostOfRecords.com

RECORD-KEEPING OPTIONS:

- **Mail-in service.** You provide basic data; we provide reports.
- **CenterPoint™ software.** For all your accounting needs.
- **Software support.** For payroll, management reports, etc., regardless of the software you choose.



First Pioneer Farm Credit

USDA Names New State Conservationist

AMHERST, Mass. (December 15, 2006) -- The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has selected Christine Clarke to serve as State Conservationist for Massachusetts. As State Conservationist, Clarke will oversee the federal agency's programs, operations and staff in the Bay State. She succeeds Cecil B. Currin, who recently retired.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to Massachusetts farmers and other landowners to help them improve and protect the commonwealth's soil, water and other natural resources. The agency's state headquarters is in Amherst and it has seven field offices across the Bay State. For more information, visit www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

Previously, Clarke served as Geodata Coordinator for NRCS in Beltsville, Maryland, supporting agency policy analysis and development needs, as well as business needs, related to spatial data.

A Rhode Island native, Clarke began her career with the agency – then known as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) – in 1981 in the Newport field office as a soil conservation technician. She later

served as a Soil Scientist with the U.S. Peace Corps and U.S. Agency for International Development in

Jamaica. Upon returning from overseas, Clarke served as a Soil Scientist in Tolland and Hartford, Connecticut.

"I'm pleased to return to New England and look forward to working with our staff and partners to serve the commonwealth's conservation needs," said Clarke. "I'm impressed by the wealth of experience in the NRCS Massachusetts staff and their strong commitment to the NRCS mission of 'helping people help the land'."

Clarke has served as Acting Director of the National Geospatial Development Center in Morgantown, West Virginia; Standards Lead for Geospatial One-Stop; NRCS representative to the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC); National Soil Digitizing Coordinator; and GIS Specialist, Morgantown, West Virginia.

Clarke, who enjoys kayaking, gardening and anything outdoors, holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Rhode Island in Resource Development and Soil Science, and a graduate certificate from the University of Connecticut in GIS. She is a certified Soil Scientist.

Governor's Transition

There is no way you could have missed it—Massachusetts has elected the second African American Governor in the history of the United States, who just happens to also be the first Democrat to hold the corner office here in Massachusetts in 16 years. Change is coming. As your voice to the government here in the commonwealth, we are actively seeking to give input to the Governor's transition team, and to assure that your voice is heard.

We have made sure to illustrate the current economic and environmental importance that agriculture has here in the state. Highlighting those programs and policies that we see as a success, as well as those that need work, has taken much discussion within Farm Bureau to determine, but now we are carrying those forward. We seek to assure adequate funding for UMass Extension, the Department of Agriculture and our many buy local organizations. Bringing our regulatory system in line to recognize the unique status and needs of agriculture as both a business and a land use, gaining slaughter facilities for those regions that are under severed, addressing rising farm energy and insurance costs, and many other issues have been the topics of many conversations with those that matter.

I can't possibly list all of the items we are working on, but perhaps one of the most important is assuring the continuation of our current Commissioner's efforts. Commissioner Gillespie has fought hard for agriculture here in the Commonwealth, and we would hate to lose such an amazing advocate for you, the farmers of Massachusetts. A common line in this kind of work is "support those who support you" - and there is no bigger supporter of agriculture in this state than the present commissioner.

Senate Bill 2683—The Chapter Lands Reform Bill Enacted by the House and Senate!

If you remember back a few issues or if you were at the annual meeting, you may have heard us mention a reform bill that we have been working on. It was enacted by the House and Senate during informal session on December the 14th. As of this newsletter going to print the governor has not yet signed the bill, but if he takes no action the bill will become law on the 25th of December (MERRY CHRISTMAS), and take effect 90 days thereafter. For details on the bill, see the April 2006 issue of News and Views, or stay tuned for a complete analysis of the impact of the bill.

Janet's Agricultural Tour to France—Paris, Normandy, Brittany & Loire Valley: March 25—April 4, 2007

Sun., March 25—Depart from Logan Airport to catch our overnight flight to Paris. Relax with in-flight meal service and entertainment.

Mon. March 26—Arrive Paris and transfer to hotel in Paris city centre, "the City of Lights" is truly one of the world's great cities. Although it has a population of over 10 million, the historic core of the city is largely untouched by modern development. Its broad boulevards and wide open spaces create stunning vistas punctuated by world famous landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe.

This afternoon there will be a guided panoramic sightseeing tour of the city including the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs Elysees, Place de la Concorde and Notre Dame Cathedral. This evening there will be a welcome dinner in the hotel. Overnight **PARIS (D)**

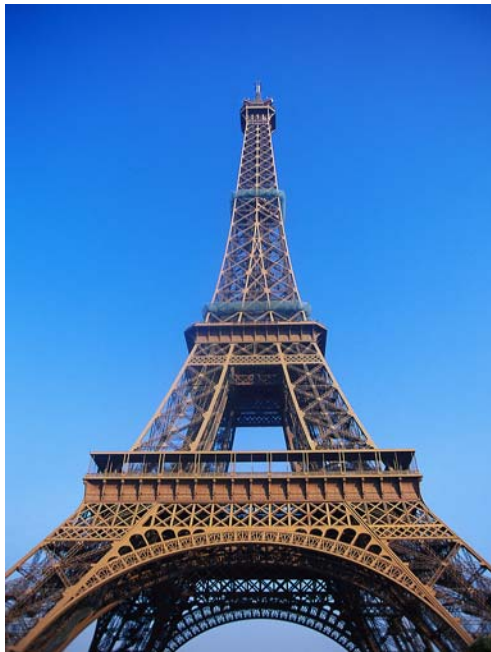
Tues, March 27—Depart this morning heading southwest and passing through Le Beauce region of France, a vast limestone plateau and one of the most fertile agricultural regions of France. There will be a programme of farm visits in the area visiting some large arable operations growing wheat, maize, sugar beet, canola, potatoes etc.

There will be a stop in Chartres for a guided tour of the magnificent gothic Cathedral, one of the finest in Europe, with some of the best examples of medieval stained glass in the world.

Afterwards continue on to the town of Blois in the heart of the Loire Valley. The Loire is France's longest river stretching east to west for over 600 miles. The mild climate and fertile alluvial soil make this a region well suited for growing fruit, vines and vegetables. In addition the region is home

to a unique concentration of chateaux, some of the most extravagant and stunning examples of Renaissance and Baroque architecture to be found in all of Europe. Overnight: **BLOIS (BD)**

Wed. March 28—Today you will visit two of the best-known and impressive chateaux in this region – Azay le Rideau and Chenon-



ceaux. With its elegant arches spanning the river Cher, Chenonceaux is for many the most visually appealing of all chateaux along the Loire valley. There will also be a visit to a local vineyard with a chance to sample some of the wines produced there. Lunch is also included locally. Return to your hotel later today.

Optional Son et Lumiere (Sound and Light) Show possible tonight at one of the Loire Valley Chateaux.

Thurs. March 29—Depart your hotel this morning and head north leaving the Loire Valley and heading towards Le Mans, home of the 24-hour endurance motor race held annually in June.

Le Mans is also the centre of an important agricultural district and

we visit a typical farm of this region with a mix of arable and livestock. Afterwards continue north

into the part of France known as Brittany, a region characterised by its own independent language and culture. Overnight **RENNES (BD)**

Fri. March 30 This morning visit the Fougères livestock market, the biggest in France and one of the biggest in Europe with around 100,000 head of cattle sold annually.

This afternoon continue north to the "Emerald Coast" of Brittany. Visit the Mont Saint Michel, the great monastery island-fortress that seems to rise out of the sea from the vast Bay of Mont St Michel. This is one of the most famous sights of all France. We tour the little town and visit the medieval Abbey, built atop the rocky hillside. Overnight **ST MALO/DINARD (BD)**

Sat. March 31—Depart hotel this morning and head east today leaving Brittany and crossing over into the neighbouring region of Normandy. Normandy is of course closely associated with the D-Day invasion at the end of WWII and today we visit the landing beaches at Arromanches. Visit the Pointe du Hoc where the Rangers attacked one of the strongest German fortifications and the huge American Military Cemetery near Omaha Beach. En route there will be a stop Bayeux with a visit to the tapestry included and the village of Villedieu-les-Poêles famous for its production of brass and copper ware. Overnight **CAEN (BD)**

Sunday 1st April Today there will be a programme of agricultural visits reflecting Normandy's rich agricultural tradition. Normandy is famed for its apple orchards and lush pasture land. Visit a typical dairy farm (Race Normande) with also the opportunity

(Continued on page 12)

Delegates to the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation's Annual Meeting Set 25 New Policies

Farmers gathered in Northampton this past month to set Farm Bureau Policy for the upcoming year and to discuss issues of the day, and learn about various topics ranging from 61A to possible projects for their recently formed agricultural commission to tackle.

As always a high point of the annual meeting was the Delegate's Session where representatives from each County Farm Bureau debated, modified, and adopted policy to guide the organization in it's upcoming year. The new policies represent a broad spectrum of categories. For a full listing of past policies and those adopted by this year's delegate body, see our website at www.massfb.org

SAMPLE RESOLUTIONS

WINE: Whereas the number of wineries in Massachusetts has grown from seventeen to twenty seven in the last two years,

Whereas wine grapes and fruit wines represent among the highest value-added agricultural products,

Whereas almost all farm wineries are family owned businesses, and,

Whereas the moderate consumption of wine in conjunction with family meals is increasingly understood to be part of a healthy and happy lifestyle,

Be it Resolved that the Massachusetts Farm Bureau initiate legislation to create a Massachusetts Wine Council which will represent the interests of all Massachusetts wineries and grape and fruit growers. Among its goals will be the education of the legislature and public and to seek enlightened measures to promote this vital, rapidly growing segment of Massachusetts agriculture.



BUY LOCALS: Whereas: We all agree that the promotion of local agriculture through the efforts of the four "buy local" programs (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), Southeast Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), Berkshire Grown and Essex County Buy Local) has benefited farmers and consumers throughout the Commonwealth,

Be it Resolved that Massachusetts Farm Bureau will work to secure funding and provide support to these local efforts.

AGRICULTURAL CO-EXISTANCE: Whereas, farmers can sometimes be at odds due to specific production requirements, and

Whereas, efforts have been made by some growers and grower groups to ban certain production methods,

Be it Resolved that Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation supports the principles of Co-existence in agriculture. Co-existence has been defined as existing together (in time or place) and to exist in mutual tolerance.

GREENHOUSES: Whereas municipalities assess real estate taxes on greenhouses as though they are permanent structures;

Let it Be Resolved that Mass Farm Bureau work toward an exemption or at least a fair method of calculation.

DAIRY: Whereas Dairy Farmers are suffering from low prices that are similar to those paid in 1981 and milk is in tight supply in the area;

Be it Resolved that MFBF work together with neighboring states to develop a regional pricing structure that exceeds federal order pricing.

ANIMAL ID: Whereas the equine industry is dependant on the movement of animals within and out of the state and,

Whereas potential health threats to the industry do exist,

Be it Resolved that Mass Farm Bureau Federation supports an animal identification program that ensures privacy for both individuals and other government entities; an easy manageable system for informational input and maintenance; and cost effectiveness with minimal expenses, for the ultimate goal of ensuring the security of the equine industry.

AG IN THE CLASSROOM:Whereas Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom (MAC) previously had a line item in the State budget of \$125,000 which was subsequently cut out in the 1980's budget crunch;

Be it Resolved that Mass Farm Bureau Federation work with whatever means possible to restore the line item in the State budget for this great organization.

FOR A COMPLETE LISTING OF RESOLUTIONS, SEE www.massfb.org



Agricultural • Regulatory • Land Use
Environmental • Municipal / Zoning Law

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(**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE** Continued from page 1)

the support, farmers must be willing to speak on their own behalf. We must do the extra, to expand on our issues, from the local level, to the state and into the national level of consideration. Massachusetts agriculture has much to offer; it is an important part of our communities. We are in the forefront of changes and challenges. If we are to allow others to define our issues and to carry the job of convincing others for support, then we give over control of our lands, our industry and the future for ourselves and our families. There can be no better time than right now, today, and each day going forward to promote, to protect and to preserve your role.

Farmers talking of and for agriculture. I challenge every member of Farm Bureau to get in the conversation and be passionate about what you do. The Congress, the State Legislators, the Governors office, the University and your local elected officials and your non-farm neighbors must hear the voices of our farming industry. They must hear from you.

Farm Bureau is the tool box for change. You as a member of Farm Bureau must learn to use all the tools available and then put them to work for all of agriculture. Our challenges are substantial and the rewards achievable.

By Alex Dowse, President of Massachusetts Farm Bureau and the President of C.A. Dowse & Son, Inc.—Home of "America's Best Crunchin' Apples Since 1778."

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Offers 2007 "Exploring Your Small Farm Dream"

Are you, or is someone you know considering starting an agricultural enterprise in Massachusetts?

- Do you need to test the feasibility of your idea before you invest?
- Is self employment right for you?
- Is there a market for your proposed product or service?
- What regulations will govern your enterprise and impact its cost?
- How will you manage the new risks associated with agriculture?
- How long can you afford to wait to break even— and how much contribution do you expect from this piece of your livelihood?
- Are there others in your family that share your vision and want to join you in its pursuit?
- What are the threats to your success?



How will you know that you are on a sustainable track?

The *Explorer* Program is intended for those who are considering farming as a business. Its purpose is to help pre-venture, aspiring farmers learn what it would take to start and manage their own commercial agricultural businesses, and decide whether this is a path they really want to take. *Explorer* makes use of four guided group sessions, an acclaimed workbook, instructors experienced in starting ag businesses, and extensive supporting resources. It was created as a decision-making tool to help you establish the clear vision and goals you will need to guide a new agricultural venture. It will help you identify and assess personal motivations, business and farming skills, and available resources. The goal of *Explorer* is to help you decide whether starting an agricultural business is right for you and, based on that decision, to help you plan practical next steps.

Please join a congenial group of your peers at Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner for four evenings March 7, 21 April 4, 18, 2007. This course is sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Agricultural Business Training Program, in cooperation with the *Explorer* creator, the New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) in Belchertown – with additional support from Mount Wachusett Community College.

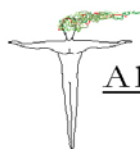
For a Registration Form, please contact: Rick Chandler at (413) 577-0459 or via e-mail at rhandler@umext.umass.edu

www.aliveanddreaming.com

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*Farm Bureau members
receive a 10% discount off all packages*



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DESIGNS

USDA Changes Course on Animal ID

After a recent announcement by Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, participation in an animal identification system is a choice entirely up to individual livestock producers in all but a handful of states. That's a significant departure from previous USDA statements on this initiative, which is aimed at identifying and tracking livestock to help contain any animal health challenges.

Secretary Johanns said recently that USDA is altering its initial goal of establishing a mandatory national animal identification system and instead supporting a voluntary system. That is a significant shift in thinking that comes on the heels of a vocal minority of individuals voicing opposition to any system.

Chuck Conner, USDA deputy secretary, joined his boss by adding further clarity to the matter. "This is 'voluntary' with a capital 'V.' Not a currently voluntary, then maybe a mandatory system. This is a permanently voluntary system at the federal level," he said.

One thing that has not changed is that the goal of any national system is focused on identifying where cattle, hogs and other animals lived any part of their lives. This would allow for timely identification and tracking in the event of a livestock disease incident.

It is unclear what this shift in federal policy will mean on the ground in the short term. The American Farm Bureau Federa-

tion, the country's largest grassroots organization for farmers and ranchers, adopted a policy supporting a mandatory animal identification system last January. Much discussion has occurred since then, and Farm Bureau members will have the opportunity to review that policy after the first of the year, at the AFBF annual meeting in Salt Lake City.

In addition, the incoming chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Collin Peterson (D-Minn.), has been Congress' strongest and most consistent supporter of a mandatory system for years. It will be interesting to see what will happen now that the leader of a key Congressional committee holds a view so different from the administration on this issue.

Another uncertainty centers on confidentiality of the data contained in any such animal tracking database – whether voluntary or mandatory.

While USDA repeatedly mentions the need for confidentiality in the most recent version of its animal ID Basic User Guide, the document does not address an important reality: The presumption of confidentiality has never been court-tested, so the data cannot actually be proved confidential.

No matter what, you can be assured AFBF will continue to stress the importance of ensuring confidentiality to USDA officials and other leaders.

One reason Farm Bureau has supported a coordinated animal identification system is because it would make it easier to control and eradicate diseases affecting livestock. Being able to determine



within 48 hours where an animal was born and what other livestock it came in contact with would be easier if a comprehensive tracking system was in place.

For competitive reasons, we also should be aware that countries like Australia and Canada – two of our primary competitors in beef exports – are going ahead with tracking systems. Where will this leave the U.S. beef industry?

It may end up that consumers and the marketplace ultimately determine the future of animal ID in the United States. If there is a market signal, one way or the other, American agricultural producers are sure to respond.

Here in Massachusetts, DAR is revising its participation in NAIS. Records for premise registration will continue to be gathered by MDAR, but prior to any submission to USDA, premise owners will receive notification with the opportunity to "opt out" of NAIS. MDAR will continue to maintain its state records, as they have for decades, to be utilized in instances of animal disease or other biosecurity matters.

More information about the US Agriculture Department's perspective on animal identification can be found at <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/> and information on Massachusetts' participation can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/agr/animalhealth>



AFBF Membership Exceeds 6 Million - All Time High

WASHINGTON, D.C., December 7, 2006 – Farm Bureau membership across the nation has surpassed the 6 million mark – 6,200,338 member families. The milestone was passed as state Farm Bureaus reported 487,823 additional members signed up for Farm Bureau membership in 2006. This is the largest growth in the history of the organization, according to AFBF President Bob Stallman. The second-largest membership gain for one year was in 1977, when 219,098 new members were added.

According to Stallman, the organization's growth was fueled by recognition of Farm Bureau's strong record as an advocate for policy positions developed by its members at the local, state and national levels, and on the strength of many outstanding programs and services designed to boost members' families, businesses and standards of living.

"Reaching the 6-million-member mark is a matter of pride for the organization, its leaders and everyone who believes in Farm Bureau's mission," Stallman said. "It has been another challenging economic year for many of America's farm families, due to drought and other factors, but our membership strength will bolster Farm Bureau as we work with our members and for our members to surface new ideas and solutions in the coming year."

The membership gain of nearly 500,000 member families was also due to the Alabama Farmers Federation re-establishing its affiliation with AFBF. Stallman said he is pleased that members of Alabama's largest farm organization are once again a vital part of

AFBF. Along with 431,384 Alabama member families rejoining AFBF, Stallman outlined a number of membership highlights from the recently concluded 2006 membership year.

The Tennessee Farm Bureau continues to claim the title of the nation's largest state Farm Bureau, with 619,951 member families. Joining Tennessee in the 2006 "top 10" Farm Bureau membership states were: North Carolina, 487,614; Kentucky, 453,123; Alabama, 431,384; Georgia, 429,710; Illinois, 417,618; Texas, 395,854; Indiana, 282,537; Mississippi, 235,125 and Arkansas, 230,076.

2006 Final Farm Bureau Membership

Alabama	431,384
Alaska	318
Arizona	17,939
Arkansas	230,076
California	91,677
Colorado	27,259
Connecticut	5,406
Delaware	3,005
Florida	143,979
Georgia	429,710
Hawaii	1,605
Idaho	62,960
Illinois	417,618
Indiana	282,537
Iowa	153,401
Kansas	109,244
Kentucky	453,123
Louisiana	147,858
Maine	3,128
Maryland	27,520
Massachusetts	6,202
Michigan	201,177
Minnesota	28,343
Mississippi	235,125
Missouri	98,527
Montana	12,046
Nebraska	55,007
Nevada	19,873
New Hampshire	5,347
New Jersey	15,198
New Mexico	14,821
New York	31,165
North Carolina	487,614
North Dakota	26,947
Ohio	229,616
Oklahoma	166,355
Oregon	52,716
Pennsylvania	40,471
Puerto Rico	675
Rhode Island	3,096
South Carolina	130,568
South Dakota	9,251
Tennessee	619,951
Texas	395,854
Utah	20,098
Vermont	3,840
Virginia	148,194
Washington	34,685
West Virginia	15,278
Wisconsin	42,432
Wyoming	10,119
AFBF	6,199,285

Following the "top 10" states in total membership for 2006 were nine other states with more than 100,000 members, including: Ohio, 229,616; Michigan, 201,177; Oklahoma, 166,355; Iowa, 153,401; Virginia, 148,194; Louisiana, 147,858; Florida, 143,979; South Carolina, 130,568 and Kansas, 109,244.

Georgia Farm Bureau, the nation's fifth largest, achieved the largest 2006 membership gain – 17,024 member families. Tennessee's membership increase of 11,700 was the second largest membership gain. Texas Farm Bureau posted the third highest gain – 7,991 new members. The Kentucky Farm Bureau posted the fourth highest membership gain with 5,959 new members. The fifth highest increase was Florida Farm Bureau with 5,642 new members.

Following the top five membership gain states, with increases of more than 3,000 members were: Ohio, 4,398; Oklahoma, 3,914; Illinois, 3,768; California, 3,309 and Nevada, 3,308.

Four other states also posted gains of more than 2,000 members: New Mexico, 2,985; Pennsylvania, 2,923; Maryland, 2,896 and Oregon, 2,426.

The state with the largest percentage gain in membership was Nevada with a 19.96 percent gain. Second was Alaska Farm Bureau with a 14.85 percent gain. Maryland also increased by double-digit percentage – 11.76 percent.

A total of 34 states reached membership quota increases during 2006; this is three more than last year.

"Across the board, Farm Bureau members need to be proud of the unified voice for agriculture they have formed across the country and Puerto Rico," said Stallman.



the AG AGENDA

Bob Stallman

President, American Farm Bureau

2006: A Fine Year for Farm Bureau

The year is winding down and a new one is bellowing like a newborn calf at our fence gate. As do most folks this time of year, I find myself remembering joyous occasions and achievements that greeted myself and loved ones over the past 11 months. During my reminiscing, I always include my Farm Bureau family and those endeavors that proved especially successful to strengthening our organization; and I rejoice in the year that was.

Realm of Success

While Farm Bureau had many policy triumphs during 2006, there are several that really stand out. On the trade front, we felt a major setback early on when exports of beef to Japan were once again cut off. But holding the line, we persevered in July when exports recommenced. Agreement was also reached to resume limited beef trade to South Korea, Colombia and Peru, lifting long-standing bans.

Another highlight was the World Trade Organization's decision against the baseless European Union moratorium on biotechnology approvals. The WTO ruling, which declared the EU ban illegal, sends a strong message to other nations that protectionist behavior regarding biotechnology will not stand.

On the home front, Farm Bureau took a devastating U.S. Supreme Court decision on eminent domain and worked tirelessly at the

grassroots level, telling lawmakers to Stop Taking Our Property. The STOP campaign resulted in helping 25 states pass new eminent domain legislation to protect all homeowners, farmers and ranchers.

A list of successes wouldn't be complete without holding off the tax man. Because of our efforts, taxpayers will save billions of dollars over the next several years. To be exact, we will save \$31 billion as the result of an increased alternative minimum tax exemption, as well as \$20 billion because of an extended capital gains tax reduction.

Things to Come

As the old saying goes, it ain't over, 'til the cows come home. We still have some priority issues to resolve hopefully before we head into the new year. Energy policy that would expand research and exploration in the Outer Continental Shelf is sitting in the wings awaiting final congressional enactment.

Immigration reform, a top priority for Farm Bureau, has passed both the House and Senate. Favoring many provisions in the Senate version, AFBF will now work toward a favorable conference and try to press for additional reforms.

Also in conference is a bill that authorizes \$2.5 billion for locks and dams on the upper Mississippi and Illinois rivers. Farm Bu-

A Huge Thanks to Those Who Helped!

On behalf of the members of Franklin and Hampshire Counties, we would like to extend our thanks to all those who participated in the activities at the annual Massachusetts Farm Bureau meeting recently held at the Clarion Hotel in Northampton. While we are generally accustomed to traveling in snow for this meeting, the weather actually turned out to be perfect.

On Thursday, the workshops were well attended, with great feedback on the topics covered. It seemed as though the day "was food from the time we arrived until after the banquet in the evening." The Taste of the Counties was extremely well received and seemed as though it were another meal, just mid afternoon. And as guests left the banquet in the evening, the favors – small containers of donated maple syrup – were most definitely NOT left behind.

We introduced a new event – the delivery of food donated by Massachusetts farmers to ServiceNet, Inc., a service agency with a number of shelters in the area, by horse drawn wagon. The amount of produce donated, from eggs to vegetables to fruit to ground beef to maple syrup, was most appreciated and needed. As you can imagine, most "shelter pantries" become quite empty after the holidays, so the timing was perfect. Commissioner Doug Gillespie was in attendance, and rode the wagon along part of the delivery route. Television stations and newspaper reporters covered the event, giving Massachusetts Farm Bureau and Massachusetts farmers the credit they deserved for making this event successful.

The Spouses' Tour on Friday was an enjoyable day. The first stop was Magic Wings (a butterfly conserva-

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued on page 12)

(**HEALTH CARE:** Continued from page 1)

dies to ensure affordability. Full implementation of the plan is expected by July 1, 2007.

The first major element of the legislation is the creation of the Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority ("Connector"). The purpose of this new Connector is to "connect" individuals and small businesses statewide to affordable insurance plans. The Connector will review existing health insurance coverage plans in the marketplace and give certain plans the Connector "seal of approval." Plans offered through the Connector will not be subject to minimum contribution and participation rules, as is presently the case.

The Connector acts as a clearinghouse where both individuals and workers in businesses with 50 or fewer employees will be able to purchase from insurers personal health insurance coverage that meets their needs and is portable.

The Health Care Reform Act mandates that statewide health care coverage be the responsibility of three sectors of society:

I. Individual Mandate

Beginning July 1, 2007, all Massachusetts residents 18 years of age and over are required to carry the minimum level of health insurance. Those who can afford health insurance will be required to purchase it. Enforcement will be accomplished through an individual's state tax return. Financial penalties will be imposed on uninsured individuals up to 50 percent of the cost of a health insurance plan.

To make coverage affordable, the legislation requires persons who are less likely to need care and who are now uninsured to obtain health insurance, thereby generating premiums that help support coverage for uninsured persons currently requiring care. Those who cannot afford coverage will be covered through a

combination of employer contributions, parental inclusions (as a dependant) and/or government subsidies. Dependents up to 25 years of age can also opt to remain on parental policies. The Connector will also put forth specially designed, lower-cost coverage plans for 19-26 year-olds. An insurance plan may be purchased through the Connector utilizing pre-tax dollars.

Individuals purchasing coverage through the Connector, such as the self-employed, will have the right to switch coverage during the annual open season without new underwriting—just like those who work for large employers.

II. Business Mandate

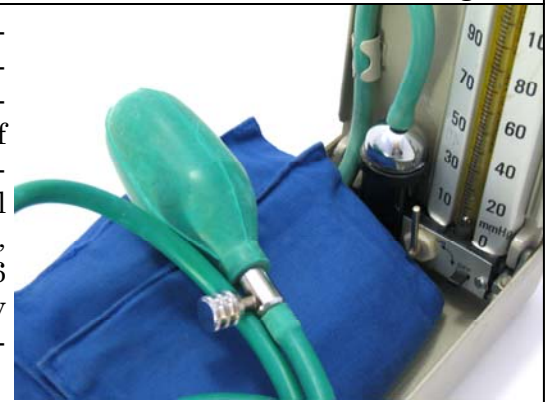
Employers are required to contribute to the solution. The new legislation requires that employers "play or pay."

Any Massachusetts business with 50 or fewer employees will be able to designate the Connector as its group health insurance plan. After that, each of its workers will be able to choose the health plan that best suits him or her from among those offered by the Connector. Workers will be able to switch plans during an annual open season and will be able to take their coverage with them as they move from job to job. The Connector is designed so that all premium payments made by both employers and workers will be on a pre-tax basis. And with the Connector in place, the state government will have a single place to send premium subsidies for those who need extra assistance to buy coverage.

Thus, under the new health care reform:

A. Employers with 10 or fewer employees

- No requirements for employers of this size.
- No need to pay a "Fair Share" fee per employee.
- Employers in this range can



opt to purchase or make insurance available to employees through the Connector.

B. Employers with 11- 50 employees

- Provide health insurance coverage or pay a "Fair Share" fee of up to \$295 annually per employee.
- The fee is limited to \$295 per year per employee and is calculated based on usage of free health care by those employees who are not provided coverage. The fee will be pro-rated for temporary or seasonal employees.
- Employers will also be required to offer a Section 125 "cafeteria plan" to their employees, which allows employees not offered health care by their employer to purchase health care through the Connector with pre-tax dollars.
- Employers in this size range can purchase or make insurance available to their employees through the Connector.
- Employers in this range may also be subject to the free-rider penalty.

C. Employers with 51 or more employees

- Same as employers with 11-50 employees.
- *Except:* Employers in this range can purchase or make insurance available through

(Continued on page 11)

(**HEALTH CARE** Continued from page 10)

the Connector for part-time or seasonal workers ONLY.

III. Government Mandate

A. Subsidies

Government-funded subsidies will assist low-income individuals with the purchase of health insurance. Through subsidies the total cost of health insurance for individuals with income at or below the federal poverty level is paid. Partial payment of insurance costs for other uninsured, qualified individuals also exists.

B. MassHealth Expansion

The legislation includes an expansion of MassHealth to cover all children in families with incomes of up to 300 percent of the poverty level. Enrollment caps on existing MassHealth programs for adults will also be raised. Adults with incomes less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level (\$9,800 for an individual) will also be covered and will not be required to pay any premiums.

Plans offered through the Connector will not have deductibles, and will be offered by managed care organizations that participate in the MassHealth program.

IV. Seasonal/Temporary/Part-Time Employees

The Connector makes it easier for all businesses to offer insurance.

- Businesses with 10 or fewer employees not subject to the "Fair Share" fee.
- Farms/Businesses with 11 or more employees not providing or contributing to health insurance required to pay the "Fair Share" fee of up to \$295 per employee per year.
- "Fair Share" fee pro-rated for employers with seasonal, temporary or part-time employees.
- Connector allows for multiple employers to pay into one person's insurance premium and allows for portability.
- Individuals who leave a small business that offered coverage through the Connector will be able to maintain the same health plan on their own.
- Workers able to switch plans during an annual open season and able to take coverage with them as they move from job to job.
- A worker with two part-time jobs able to combine both employers' contributions to purchase coverage.

CONCLUSION

The application of the new health care insurance reform can be a complex issue. This summary is intended to be a brief introduction. The Department will pass on more information, as the program unfolds. Farm operators are encouraged to seek out further information.

Additional information is available by calling the new Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority customer service center toll-free at 1-877-MA-ENROLL (1-877-623-6765). A representative will be available to speak with you Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. or by going to:

<http://www.mass.gov/connector>



GREEN TOMATOES: RUBBISH OR RELISH?

*A one-day seminar
on value-added products.*

Now's the time to learn if value-added could equal added profits for your business. Join us for this one-day seminar to get answers to all your questions, including:

- Will a value-added product make money for my business?
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 - How will I grow it, market it, sell it?

Presenters:

Farm business consultants: Gene Gouthier,
Rick Hermonot and Jon Jaffe

Moderator:

Joanna Samuelson

Date: Wednesday, January 17, 2007

Location: Sturbridge Host Hotel, Sturbridge, Mass.

Time: 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Registration: Contact your local First Pioneer Farm Credit branch office or Brenda Emrick at 800.562.2235 or brenda.emrick@firstpioneer.com

A business improvement program sponsored by:



First Pioneer Farm Credit

(**FRANCE TOUR** Continued from page 4)

to see some of France best-known cheeses being made (Camembert, Livarot, Pont l'Éveque). In the afternoon visit a Calvados distillery and enjoy a tasting of this famous and traditional Normandy product. Lunch included today at a traditional ferme auberge. Overnight **CAEN (BL)**

Monday 2nd April Depart hotel this morning and continue east along the coast via the fashionable seaside resorts of Cabourg and Deauville en route to the charming old port town of Honfleur with its picturesque harbour and unusual Gothic church with a wooden bell tower.

Continue on to the city of Rouen, a place associated with the trial and burning of Joan of Arc. Badly bombed during the war, the city has been carefully restored and is one of the most attractive cities of northern France. There will be a guided sightseeing tour of the old town including the cathedral, made famous by the many versions of it painted by Claude Monet. Afterwards there will be free time for exploring independently. Overnight **ROUEN (BD)**

Tuesday 3rd April Depart Rouen for the return journey to Paris. En route there will be a stop in Giverny to visit Monet's Garden. Visit the house and garden where the foremost exponent of the Impressionist movement lived between 1883 and 1926. It is still possible to admire the arched wooden bridge over the lily pond, the subject of so many of his paintings. On arrival in Paris check in to your hotel with the rest of the day free for independent sightseeing and shopping.

There will be a farewell dinner tonight on the Bateaux Mouches. With most of the major monuments illuminated at night, cruising along the Seine in a glass topped boat is a great way to enjoy Paris in its most romantic setting. Overnight Paris (BD)

Wednesday 4th April There will be some more free time for independent sightseeing and shopping before reassembling for the transfer to the airport and return flight to USA.

Tour Includes:

- Round trip air from Boston to Paris
- 9 hotel nights based on sharing twin room
- 9 breakfasts, 7 dinners and 2 lunches (As indicated by BLD on the itinerary)
- Coach services for duration of tour as specified on itinerary
- Guided sightseeing of: Paris, Chartres, Mont Saint Michel, & Rouen
- Entrances to: Chartres Cathedral, Chenonceau, Azay-le-Rideau, Fougères Livestock Market, Bayeux Tapestry, Giverny
- All farm and technical visits

- Services of Stita tour manager
- Tips and gratuities for included services
- Baggage handling in hotels, 1 piece per person

Tour does not include:

- Travel arrangements to Logan airport
- Gratuities for driver, escort and local guides
- Any other meals not listed in itinerary and any personal expenses

Prices Per Person:

Double Occupancy \$2795.00

Single Supplement \$550

Due to the weak US dollar against the British Pound, and jet fuel surcharges, there may have to be a fare adjustment at the time of final payment.

For a registration form or for more information, please contact:

Janet Spear, at (207) 832-4488 or via e-mail: rwspear@adelphia.net

(**ANNUAL MEETING** Continued from page 9)

tory). The next stop was Mapleline Dairy Farm, with a tour of the bottling plant. From there it was a delicious lunch at Flayvors (the Cook Family Farm) and then on to Atkins Fruit Bowl. Thank you to Anne Blizniak who volunteered (or rather, was drafted) to drive and conduct the guided tour.

For this meeting to be as successful as it was, it was to the credit of all those who contributed:

Taste of the Counties: Outlook Farm – pulled pork; Diamond Egg Farm – quiche; Hamilton Orchard – apple pie; Pine Hill Farm – apple pie; AgriMark – cheese; Fellows Farm – cheese; Atkins Fruit Bowl – cider donuts; Flayvors – apple ice cream; Bashista Farm – apple cider; and Northampton Brewery – beer.

Favors (maple syrup) for the Banquet: Boisvert Farm, Shattuck Family, McKinney Family, Facey Family,

Wagon load of Produce: Brookfield

Farm (vegetables & eggs); Food Bank (root vegetables); Mill Iron Farm (100# organic ground beef); Atkins Fruit Bowl and Bashista Farm (apples); Boisvert Farm (squash); Warger Family (potatoes); Judd Family (maple syrup); Hibbard Farm (carrots);

A huge thank you to Barry and Kathy Roberts, of Muddy Brook Farm, for providing the Belgian draft horses and wagon to deliver all the goods. It was quite an eye attraction!

We tried to keep track of who donated items, but if somehow you slipped through the cracks, please know that your donation was most appreciated. And lastly - our apologies to the gentleman who was exiting a package store with a case of beer on his shoulder in downtown Northampton as the horse drawn wagon passed by – he was so astonished at what he saw, he walked into a street sign, dropping his beer to the ground! Hopefully, he was able to retrieve it all!



"Tilling the Soil of Opportunity"

An In-depth Business Planning Course for Massachusetts Agricultural Enterprises

Registrations are now being taken for the course to be held January 24, 2007 through April 4, 2007 on Wednesday Afternoons from 2-5PM (10 sessions). This course is located at the Franklin County Community Development Corporation's facilities in Greenfield, MA.

The course is limited to twelve Massachusetts-based agricultural enterprises that have been operating for at least two years.

Created in 1998 by a nationwide team of 15 business writers and ag consultants, NxLevel's "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity" was further revised after testing with farmers. The course uses 35 hours of classroom time, individualized technical assistance and confidential financial planning to walk you through creation of a business plan that can help guide decision making on your farm. Over 240 Massachusetts farmers have successfully taken this course. Many have also commented that the farm-to-farm networking during the class was one of the biggest ongoing benefits. Some of the course groups are still getting together on their own.

Features of the Massachusetts Course:

- Your nationally certified Course Instructor will be supported by a Program Manager familiar with your region and the available local resources.
- After the course, you will receive additional individual technical assistance in topic areas most needed to complete your plan.

- Guest speakers will be drawn from local agricultural businesses and business service providers to personalize the key principles of many sessions.
- The business plan you will create in this course can simplify your eligibility for federal, state and local assistance programs.
- This course qualifies as a "Borrower Training Program" for the USDA Farm Service Agency, and can enhance your efforts to secure funds from any lender.
- Some courses will include extra features such as computer training and extra sessions on special topics, depending on class needs and schedules.

Our enhanced version of the course includes 35 hours of classroom time, individualized paid technical assistance and confidential financial planning. We walk you through creation of a business plan to help guide decision making on your farm. Many graduates have commented that the farm-to-farm networking during the class was one of the biggest ongoing benefits.

Session Titles:

- Take Stock of Your Resources
- Basic Planning and Research
- The Legal Terrain
- Manage from the Ground Up
- Bring Your Product to Market
- Reap the Benefits of Market Strategies
- Get Your Budgets in Line
- Analyze Cash Flow and Financial Statements

- Cultivate Your Money Resources
- Harvest Your Future - Using Your Plan

For additional information and an application form, contact:

Rick Chandler, ABTP Director

Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources

25 West Experiment Station

University of Massachusetts

Amherst, MA 01003

(413) 577-0459

rchandler@umext.umass.edu

(AG AGENDA Continued from page 9)

reau defeated efforts in the House to strip the locks and dams modernization project from the Water Resources Development Act and holds the bill as a high priority for completion.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the Doha Round of world trade negotiations. Farm Bureau was successful this year in keeping the U.S. negotiating position focused on agriculture. While talks are at a standstill, we should take pride in the fact that our government never once wavered in our appeal for meaningful market access.

As for all the issues facing us in the new year, I look forward to working on them with you. As the newborn calf of 2007 nuzzles up to its mama, we all know it won't be long before she's frolicking around the pasture on her own.

MFBF Annual Meeting a Resounding Success



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FOR SALE: Amer. Paint, mare, good fast horse, for a good experienced rider!! \$1500/BO 413-568-3783

FOR SALE: Dump wagon 14 ft high, good

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FOR SALE HAY: 1st cutting: \$4.00/bale, 2nd cutting \$5.00/bale, at barn in Westford, MA Telephone 978-692-8881

WANTED: Looking to purchase 6+ acres of Ag Land in Worcester or Middlesex County for growing Beekeeping business. Contact Andy at Reseska Apiaries, Inc. (508) 429-6872

WANTED: High Wheel Sulky, 4 wheels, Colonial Carriage, 413-258-4554

HONEY, CANDLES, BEESWAX PRODUCTS FOR SALE: 978-356-5041 cathychadwick@verizon.net interested in acquiring old beekeeping, candle making equipment.

1979 FORD 800 9 BAY DELIVERY TRUCK: Standard transmission, gas, setup with shelving former local town fire and rescue truck. Great condition \$3000. or best offer. Bob 508-797-3237

HIGHLAND CATTLE; Registered heifers, 1 black, 1 red, & 1 red yearling. Excellent blood lines, show quality breeding animals. Halter trained. Transportation available. Middleborough, MA Call Colonial Maintenance 800-333-1776

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\$200, a Kicker for a 336 baler \$200 978-256-9089

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Kelli Ann Kinney, Pepperell, MA

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Please consider supporting Farm Bureau’s Land Preservation Corporation with your donation. Any amount helps. Because the corporation is administered by Massachusetts Farm Bureau, 100% of your donation can go to capital purchases of either easements, or fee simple land. If you know of anyone considering donating land or easements on their land to a non-profit organization, please have them contact us. We are non profit organization and 100% of any donations are tax deductible. We consider all types of arrangements including life rights, lease back programs, trusts, and other such estate planning vehicles. Contact the Farm Bureau office for more information. (508)881-4766

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