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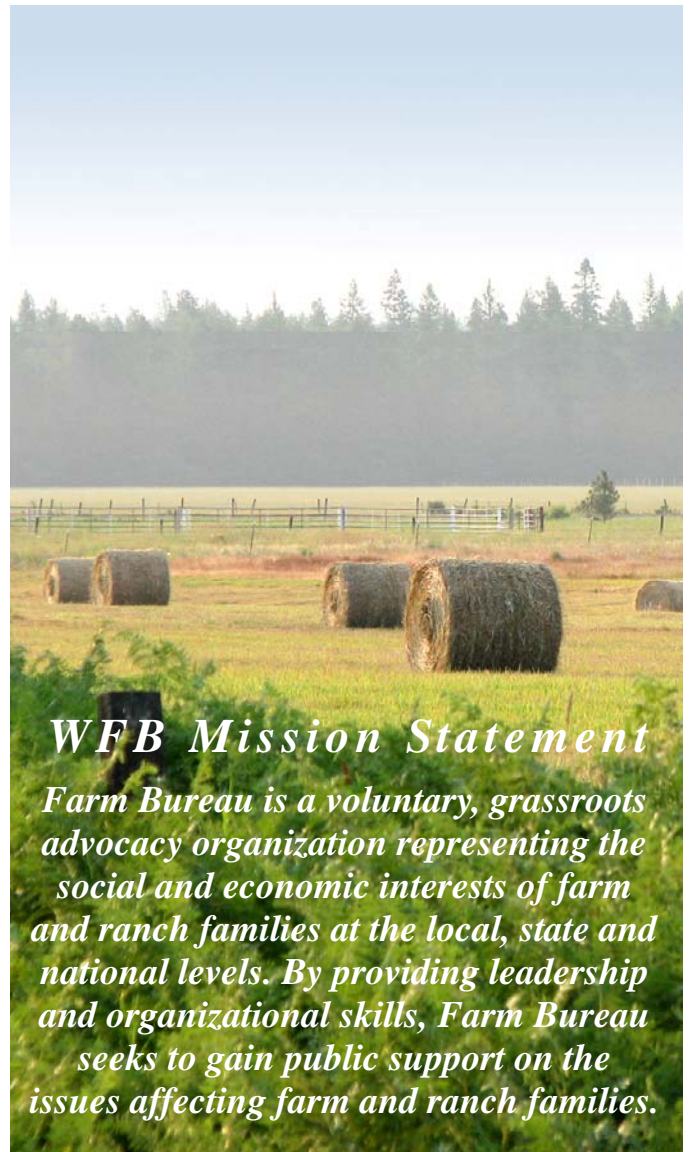


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# 2009 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA



### *WFB Mission Statement*

*Farm Bureau is a voluntary, grassroots advocacy organization representing the social and economic interests of farm and ranch families at the local, state and national levels. By providing leadership and organizational skills, Farm Bureau seeks to gain public support on the issues affecting farm and ranch families.*

*Washington Farm Bureau is committed to protecting the interests of farming and ranching families on our state. Our team of volunteer leaders and staff look forward to working with legislators and the governor to address legislation that promotes the viability of Washington's family farms who raise the food and fiber critical to our well being and our state economy.*

## **2009 Washington Farm Bureau Legislative Priorities**

### **1) Encourage water conservation by repealing or significantly modifying statutory relinquishment of water rights.**

Water is key to Washington's economic vitality and quality of life. Washington has 268.7 billion gallons of water passing through the state on a daily basis with a consumptive demand of only 4.7 billion gallons per day (or 1.75 percent). We can meet the needs of in-stream and out-of-stream users by carefully managing our water resources. This means eliminating practices that hinder efficient, predictable water supply availability and use.

The current "use-it-or-lose-it" relinquishment policy discourages water right holders from using less than their full right and clouds the validity of rights for transfer purposes. This runs counter to the desire to meet existing and future demand through transfers and efficiency measures. The elimination of partial relinquishment or limiting the period to which relinquishment applies will provide needed certainty and incentive to conserve water.

### **2) Promote a sustainable agricultural labor supply by enacting an essential worker program for agriculture.**

Agriculture is an economic engine that employs more workers than any other industry in our state, and the number one agricultural employer is the tree fruit industry. A vital component of labor intensive agriculture is the 50,000 migrant and seasonal workers who toil in our apple and cherry orchards, pick grapes, harvest berries and hops, and perform all of the other seasonal jobs that exist mainly in the six month period from May through October.

Every year our industry does more to make the workplace safer for seasonal workers; several innovative programs are underway. We need safe housing for seasonal workers, we need this workforce to be more stable, and we need to fix our immigration system so that the workforce is legal as well as stable. In short, we need to protect our migrant and seasonal workforce. Other states have. The federal government has not. Working together, we can create an Essential Worker Program that is the model for every state in the nation.

### **3) Foster sound environmental outcomes by encouraging voluntary stewardship and creating market opportunities that recognize environmental benefits provided by agriculture.**

Whether the discussion is on climate change, fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, or other areas, Washington's farmlands are a resource for providing desired environmental benefits. By creating a marketplace that rewards environmental stewardship, we can gain more progress in protecting and enhancing the natural environment and the agricultural economy.

### **4) Promote a sound economy by reducing the fiscal and regulatory burden faced by farmers and ranchers.**

During the gubernatorial campaign, both candidates emphasized the view that now is not the time to raise taxes. It is vital that Washington farmers remain competitive, both domestically and internationally. Washington state already loses an average of 85,000 acres of farmland annually. The economic situation, particularly in Eastern Washington, is not good, and we cannot afford new taxes, fees and regulations that would cause more farmers and ranchers to cease doing business because they cannot compete. Higher business costs for agriculture lead to higher consumer prices, a lack of international competitiveness, and adversely affect the state economy.

