Written by Iowa Farm Bureau News
Tuesday, 05 July 2011 14:14

WEST DES MOINES, IOWA – June 30, 2011 – Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), the state's largest grassroots farm organization, sees progress through passage of several IFBF-supported measures in the 2011 legislative session. IFBF members are pleased that lawmakers took steps towards achieving a more fiscally-responsible, sustainable budgeting process, which will ensure the state's future economic health, as well as bring significant property tax relief to Iowans.

Farm Bureau members have insisted that the state fully fund its promised share of education, which was under-funded by across-the-board cuts in recent years. As Farm Bureau members feared, three years of under-funding the state's share of schools pushed the burden onto the backs of Iowa property taxpayers. Farm Bureau members are pleased that this year lawmakers passed measures that will backfill the nearly $160 million that was not previously funded in the budget, creating significant property tax relief, said IFBF President Craig Lang.

The state legislature also adopted measures to prevent the practice of using one-time money for on-going expenses: a change in practice Farm Bureau supports. "Iowa lawmakers created the Taxpayer Trust Fund, which automatically takes the first $60 million of the state ending fund balance off the table and directs it towards tax relief. In years before, this money was rolled into the next year's General Fund budget to cover on-going expenses," said Lang. Additionally, almost $300 million of one-time federal stimulus money was removed from the budget, another step which helps create a sustainable and fiscally-responsible budget.

Another Farm Bureau priority passed by lawmakers this year results in the transfer of the Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) to Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey. The objective of the WRCC is to improve the coordination of watershed and water quality programs, making water quality programs more effective in Iowa. IFBF members believe this new change in responsibility will improve coordination of conservation and water quality programs in Iowa.

Work will continue on other IFBF priorities which didn't gain passage in this session, including regulatory reform, overturning a controversial ruling by Iowa's Electrical Examining Board which requires inspections of electrical installations on farm buildings and House File 589, the Agriculture Protection Bill. Under new Farm Bureau-supported language, an amended HF 589 would make it a crime when people make false statements about their motives, or have a "hidden agenda" for gaining access to Iowa crop or livestock farms. The revised bill has the backing of many Democrats and Republicans in the Senate, and did not include language prohibiting video recordings. "It's unfortunate a revised HF 589 didn't get to the Senate floor

this year, because this bill is about something very important, not just to Farm Bureau members, but to all Iowans; it's about misrepresentation of character," said Lang. "In a post 9/11 world, transparency is important for farmers and consumers alike. Responsible farmers take good care of their land and livestock and want to employ honest, hardworking people that have the welfare of their livestock as their top priority. The newly-worded HF 589 would've created penalties for those who make false statements to gain access to a farm to hide their intended misconduct or purpose. I think that's something that all Iowans believe in."

-30-