

Written by Andrew Wheeler

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WEST DES MOINES, IOWA – January 14, 2014 – Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF) members will continue to work to advance Iowa’s water quality and soil conservation efforts, protect property taxpayers, and improve Iowa’s road and bridge infrastructure in the 2014 legislative session.

A strong push to continue to improve soil and water quality is one of several priorities identified by IFBF members. “It’s very important to maintain the momentum we have already seen for these voluntary conservation efforts by Iowa farmers through the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy,” said Craig Hill, IFBF president. “The strong demand last fall for water quality and soil conservation funds which were allocated during the 2013 legislative session clearly shows that farmers are stepping up to reduce nutrient loss and improve the soil for generations to come.”

In 2013 the Legislature allocated on-going and one-time money to implement the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, and the majority of that money has been allocated. Iowa Farm Bureau will seek an additional \$10 million in one-time funding to continue these new efforts in crop management and watershed projects. In addition, Farm Bureau will advocate for one-time funds to help address the \$18.5 million backlog of conservation cost-share projects to reduce soil loss, where demand has significantly outpaced cost-share funding, as well as one-time money to help close Iowa’s remaining ag drainage wells. “Allocating one-time funding for these important conservation projects is an ideal use for the state’s ending fund balance,” Hill said.

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Ensuring that property taxpayers' contributions to the mental health system remain limited and controlled will be another emphasis for Farm Bureau during the 2014 legislative session. As a result of previous mental health reform legislation, the current funding formula for property taxes is set to expire, and will need to be addressed this session.

Farm Bureau members will also advocate for increased funding for Iowa's roads and bridges, many of which are deteriorating and in need of repair or rebuilding. Studies have shown that an additional \$215 million per year is needed to meet the critical needs of Iowa's aging roads and bridges. "Our delegates have strongly supported policy which says that any additional revenue for transportation infrastructure should be generated from the state's fuel tax," Hill said. "Increasing the state fuel tax, which has not been increased since 1989, would ensure that the users of the roads, including out-of-state motorists, are paying directly for infrastructure repairs."

An increase in the user fee would also reduce pressure on Iowa's property taxpayers. In fiscal year 2013, rural property owners paid over \$153 million in property taxes to their local roads and bridges. Additionally, with no other alternatives to pay for the needed repairs, more and more local governments are turning to bonding as an alternative source of revenue, with this debt being financed by local property taxpayers. "This is a disturbing trend that we have seen throughout the state, and it will only continue into the future until the fuel tax is increased to cover road and bridge funding needs," Hill said.

Farm Bureau will also push for a continued commitment to agricultural research that adds value to ag products, aids the environment, increases farm efficiency, and improves health and safety. In order to accomplish that, Farm Bureau will work to increase state funding for the Iowa State University (ISU) Ag Experiment Station and other ISU research programs.

- 30 -

About Iowa Farm Bureau

The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation is a grassroots, statewide organization dedicated to helping farm families prosper and improve their quality of life. More than 153,000 families in Iowa are Farm Bureau members, working together to achieve economic growth, educational improvement, and environmental quality in their communities. For more information about Farm Bureau and agriculture, visit the online media center at www.iowafarmbureau.com.

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