

Ag offers input for Biden administration

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Groups representing farmers and ranchers are congratulating President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on their inauguration.

They say they are ready to work with the new administration and point out where that work needs to begin.

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall said addressing the needs of farmers and ranchers is important, including strengthening the farm bill, expanding trade, finding a fair solution to farm labor and extending broadband coverage to rural communities.

“We are also looking for partners in our efforts to achieve sustainability goals while ensuring climate policies remain market-based and voluntary. We have been meeting with President Biden’s nominees to discuss priority issues, and today we shift into high gear to achieve these goals,” he said. “All of this can be done if we commit ourselves to working together for a better America.

National Farmers Union President Rob Larew said the nation is facing multiple crises, including the pandemic, political and social divisions, economic inequality and a rapidly changing climate.

“In addition to these broader issues, the agriculture industry is also coping with its own internal battles: corporate control of the food system, chronic overproduction, an overdependence on exports, crumbling rural infrastructure and an aging farm population, just to name a handful,” he said.

“Tackling just one of these problems — let alone all of them — will be no easy feat. However, we are confident that President Biden and Vice



Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau Federation president

and diverse advisers and staff who will help guide them, and the incoming administration has issued comprehensive plans outlining how it will tackle many of the problems, he said.

“We hope this degree of foresight and fastidiousness is a harbinger of what’s to come, he said.

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture CEO Barb Glenn said the association remains committed to building partnerships within the incoming administration that guarantees the food supply chain remains strong.

“We are ready to work with the Biden administration to advance agriculture domestically and internationally, while ensuring America recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic,” she said.

The association’s policy priorities in the new administration are focused on food systems, food safety, infrastructure and capacity, climate resilience, international trade and workforce development.

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives President Chuck Conner said farmer cooperatives strongly support the administration’s No. 1 priority — taking every step necessary to beat back the COVID-19 pandemic and repairing the economic damage it has caused.

“Beyond that, we welcome working with the administration on many of the priorities they have outlined in the past few weeks. Issues such as cli-

President Harris are up to the task,” he said.

They have surrounded themselves with highly qualified



Rob Larew, president of the National Farmers Union

work on a bipartisan basis for progress on issues important to dairy farmers, their cooperatives and the greater good. We also look forward to engaging with the broader agricultural community to meet our common challenges and build a thriving rural America that lifts the entire nation,” he said.

Rural Voices USA Chairman Christopher Gibbs said President Biden’s message of unity to a divided nation is welcome in rural America. Rural Voices is a non-profit that advocates policies that benefit agriculture and rural America.

“The next year will prove critical to whether we can bridge the rural-urban divide in our politics. Rural America badly needs a return to practical economic solutions on everything from COVID, to energy, to trade and health care,” he said.

The vision President Biden has laid out includes policies badly needed in rural communities that have been battered by COVID and left behind economically for too long, he said.

“Investing in infrastructure would create jobs and support the American supply chain, which often starts on the farm. An immediate investment in COVID recovery, including vaccinations, would help safeguard processing plants and open small businesses that have been devastated by the pandemic. Committing to alternative energy sources would help guarantee that biofuels, like ethanol, will be part of a solution that both helps end our dependence on fossil fuels and supports our nation’s farmers,” he said.

“The key will be to ensure these legislative efforts are done in a way that doesn’t ignore the people they impact. To do that, we will need rural voices at the table,” he said.

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work on a bipartisan basis for progress on issues important to dairy farmers, their cooperatives and the greater good. We also look forward to engaging with the broader agricultural community to meet our common challenges and build a thriving rural America that lifts the entire nation,” he said.

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National Milk lays out legislative priorities

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Paul Bleiberg

The House Agriculture Committee will have plenty of issues to work on in the new Congress, and climate change is expected to be a major topic.

House Ag Chairman David Scott, D-Ga., and ranking member Glenn “GT” Thompson, R-Pa., have indicated a strong interest in holding early hearings on climate change, said Paul Bleiberg, senior vice president of government affairs for the National Milk Producers Federation.

National Milk will be working to educate the representatives’ staff and committee members on the importance of that topic and making sure the committee can play a good role in climate legislation, he said during the latest “DairyLivestream” webinar.

The last time Congress seriously considered climate legislation was in 2009. At that time, House and Senate Agriculture Committee Democrats were active in negotiations trying to make some headway, he said.

“So that’s going to be a major topic,” he said.

Another topic for the House Agriculture Committee will be reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. It doesn’t fall under the committee’s jurisdiction, but Scott and Thompson have been supportive of many of the dairy industry’s priorities as far as securing the gain on lowfat flavored milk and making other progress as well, he said.

“The ag committee has a lot of members that are going to be engaged in this space,” he said.

A third area for the committee is trade. With more people consuming dairy outside the U.S., that becomes more important to the industry, he said.

In addition to working on trade promotion authority,

National Milk has been partnering closely with Congress to make sure the U.S. Trade Representative holds Canada’s feet to the fire on its dairy commitments in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, he said.

“We are very optimistic about Katherine Tai, the U.S. Trade Representative nominee. We’re looking forward to working with her and her team, and she’s been a partner for many years on these issues,” he said.

Another major priority is agricultural labor. In December 2019, the House made progress in passing a bipartisan bill called the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. It reformed the H-2A guestworker program so dairy and other year-round industries could use it, and it provided a more stable legal status for the current workforce, he said.

“While that’s an issue for the House Judiciary Committee, then Chairman (Collin) Peterson and some other members of the House Ag Committee were very, very active behind the scenes in helping that bill move forward,” he said.

Many of the members that are champions on that issue serve on the agriculture committee. So surely it’s a space where they will be staying engaged, he said.

And of course, the committee will start on the farm bill after working through some COVID and climate issues, he said.

“From where we sit, we’re going to be wanting to make sure the Dairy Margin Coverage program is working as well as it can. There’s room for improvement around the edges, especially as it relates to the production history calculation,” he said.

Dairy processors outline priorities

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Dairy groups have a lot on their plate when it comes to issues on Capitol Hill, but they will also be dealing with a new administration and a new Congress, with Democrats gaining control of the Senate.

At the top of the agenda in the Senate in the coming days is the impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, confirming President Biden’s Cabinet nominations and appointees and a COVID-relief package, said Dave Carlin, senior vice president of legislative affairs and economic policy for the International Dairy Foods Association.

In terms of the Senate Agriculture Committee, members will also be focusing on several initiatives being championed by the Biden administration, he said in the “DairyLivestream” webinar.

“One of those things will be climate change and ... the positive role rural America can play combating global warming,” he said.

The new administration has a vision where rural America can take a leading role, and that will help rural America to continue the positive work it’s already doing, he said.

I think the Ag Committee under Chairwoman (Debbie) Stabenow’s leadership is going to focus on this,” he said.

Another likely issue is reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act for programs such as school meals, Women and Infants, and Children and others. It’s overdue for review and reauthorization, he said.

“And there are some opportunities there for dairy in terms of expanding potentially some of the milk options that are available in the WIC program ... and for preserving our ability to continue to serve 1% fla-

vored milk at schools,” he said.

Trade is another issue important to the dairy industry. The U.S. exports the equivalent of 15% of its milk production, and the industry is going to have another 33 billion pounds of milk between now and 2028, he said.

“We’re going to have to look for opportunities in new markets, expanding existing markets. And in order to do that, we’re probably going to have to pass a trade promotion authority bill at some point,” he said.

In terms of existing agreements, IDFA will be focused on holding Canada’s feet to the fire on its obligations under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, he said.

The committee will also be preparing for the next farm bill. It’s a few years out, but it’s probably time to start holding hearings on what’s working in the current farm bill and what isn’t, he said.

In that arena, IDFA will be focusing on preserving risk-management options for all classes of milk and expanding the Healthy Fluid Milk Incentives program from a pilot program to a nationwide program, he said.

The program puts milk in the good-for-you food category and encourages Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program families to drink more milk, he said.

In other areas, IDFA will be focused on implementing the recourse loan program to provide working capital for dairy processors who supply restaurants and foodservice. The program was in the last relief bill and will allow those processors to continue to operate through the pandemic, he said.

IDFA will also be focused on implementing the dairy donation program included in the last relief bill, he said.

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