

Indiana Farmers Union

the SPIRIT of Rural Indiana
Standards and Policies Inherent to Rural Integrity and Truths

May 2006

Indiana Farmers Union

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Benham To Lead Indiana Farmers Union

Jim Benham, Versailles, was elected president of the Indiana Farmers Union during the organization's annual convention in January. He has been involved with agriculture his entire life and the fourth generation to work his farm where he raises corn, soybeans and tobacco.

In addition to his involvement in Farmers Union, he is currently president of his local church council a board member of Telemon Corporation, and Farm Bureau and a licensed real estate agent. He previously served 12 years on the local school board, two as president, and was president of the Indiana Tobacco growers.

Benham and his wife have been married 35 years and have three daughters, three grandchildren and one on the way.

Melina "Mel" Fox, Greensburg, was elected to serve as vice president. Fox's agricultural history is deeply rooted in Indiana, with nine generations having farmed in Shelby County. She grew up on a farm in Shelby County was in 4-H and was Indiana's Pork Queen in 1969, and is a champion hog caller. Fox was awarded the Sagamore of the Wabash, the highest honor for public service in Indiana.

Fox was the first woman to serve as chairperson of the Farm Service Agency, following a presidential appointment to state FSA committee in 1992. Her other agricultural activities have included: Farm Service Agency National Leadership Council; membership chairperson, National Pork Council Women; president, Indiana Pork Council Women; spokesperson, American Soybean Association; membership committee, American Seed Trade Association, and a member of the Government Affairs Committee for the Indiana Beef Cattle Association.

She is married to Bob White, state director of Indiana Rural Development.

Indiana Farmers Union Legislative Issues

Eminent Domain

Indiana HB 1010 will make it more difficult for government to use eminent domain for public projects. Public works projects will take longer and generally be more expensive, and using eminent domain for economic development projects will be incredibly more difficult.

Property taxes

HB 1001 grants homeowners a total of \$227 million worth of property tax breaks this year and in 2007; provides advance notice of property tax rates to taxpayers starting in 2009; caps property taxes so they can't go higher than 2 percent of a home's assessed valuation. Homeowners will pay about 4 percent less this year on property taxes than they would have; in 2007, they will pay about 6 percent less. Rep. Jeff Espich, R-Uniondale, has committed to consider long-term property tax relief next year.

Go to www.in.gov/apps/lisa/session/billwatch/ for more information.

INFU Policy Committee

Chris Campbell will chair the committee for the upcoming year. At the January meeting, changes and additions were made to Indiana Farmers Union policy.

The document will be posted on the INFU Website.

National Meeting

Indiana Farmers Union will host the National Farmers Union board meeting May 30 – June 2 in Indianapolis.

"We think this will help generate interest in the Indiana Farmers Union," said INFU President Jim Benham. "We are pleased that the National Farmers Union has taken a special interest in the rebuilding of Indiana's membership."

President's Prose

by Jim Benham, president, Indiana Farmers Union

I would like to give you all an update on the progress of the Indiana Farmers Union. We hope to soon have our own web site up and running to help keep you informed on current events and issues we working on. The site will also provide links to other sources of agricultural information.

We are also in the process of having professional brochures printed to give a good impression of the Indiana Farmers Union for potential new members. And, we have added a phone for Farmers Union business, 812-571-0102. Feel free to call me at anytime.

We all have experienced higher input costs, low commodity prices, and the banks are concerned that we can not cash flow our credit lines. On top of all of that, the government wants to cut 25 percent out of the farm bill and the farm bill represents one-half of 1 percent of the total federal budget. With all of that gloom and doom, let's take a deep breath for a minute and take this one step at a time. I think we need to get our own house, the Indiana Farmers Union, in order. Vice President Mel Fox and I are working to have our communications capabilities up and running in early May. I believe though good communication, we will have a better understanding of the challenges we face and, together we can work out a plan to overcome these obstacles.

Finally, we need your help. We currently have 723 certified members. It is our goal to add 600 new members this year. So I am asking each of you to sign on at least one new member. Let's show our support of our new national President, Tom Buis, and fellow Hoosier by reaching our goal. We need to get on the path of building a strong program. INFU received an \$18,000 grant from NFU to help with the expense of an in-state membership drive. If there are groups of people that you would like for us to speak with, please contact the INFU office at 812-571-0102.

I was once told by a man of great knowledge that "if your out-go exceeds your income then your upkeep will be your downfall." In a nut shell, this is our problem with agriculture. With your help, we can fix this problem. We must communicate and work together. Remember, communication is the key to all locks.

God Bless you and may the Lord's face shine on you,

James D. Benham, President

Communication Is Key

The Indiana Farmers Union board of directors is excited about the future of the organization.

"We realize much work needs to be done to support our organization," said Mel Fox, IFU vice president. "The board is taking steps to better serve our members and reach our friends and neighbors involved in agriculture."

The organization is launching a Website to help provide information. The site, www.infarmersunion.org, is being designed and managed by Kevin Geisler whose parents farm in Ripley County.

The idea to find a young person to develop our site and helping to stop "the brain drain" from the state came from Bob White.

In the era of technology, INFU would like to have the e-mail addresses of members and others interested in learning more about the organization.

Please send an e-mail with your name and contact information including fax numbers to: melina.fox@insightbb.com.

By having a database of member's information, INFU will be able to have rapid response communication.

INFU is exploring automated calls as a method to stay in touch with members.

"We realize that during election cycles these calls can be annoying," said Fox. "However, a call system can allow us to contact every member and leave a short message about important issues or matters for around 10 cents per call."

Membership Is Vital To Success

A major goal for Indiana Farmers Union is to develop and implement a membership program for associate and affiliate members. Current members are also challenged to participate in the membership rewards program.

"Membership goals are vital to the future of Farmers Union," said Indiana Farmers Union President Jim Benham. "Our voice will be stronger if we tell people about our organization and ask them to join our effort on behalf of family farmers and ranchers and rural America."

The National Farmers Union Silver Star Membership Award Program rewards top membership recruiters based on recruiting new and lifetime members, and renewals.

Individuals interested helping build the organization's membership base should contact Jim Benham or Mel Fox. Act now for your opportunity to win a cruise.

INFU is planning regional meetings to promote issues and recruit new members.

Hoosier Pride

All of us are very proud that a fellow Hoosier, Tom Buis, was elected president of NFU. He is truly a great leader with integrity who fights for family farmers and ranchers.

Farmers' Markets

Workshops to help producers learn how to operate an efficient farmers' market will be held in several locations across the state. The one-day workshops sponsored in part by Indiana Cooperative Development Center, will offer an overview of marketing ideas, state regulations for food handling, insurance and breakout sessions for both market masters and vendors.

Dates and locations include:

May 19 - Hamilton County Extension Office, 2003 E. Pleasant St., Noblesville, IN 46060. Register by May 12

June 15 - Elkhart County, Amish Acres, 1600 W. Market St., Nappanee, IN 46550, Register by June 8.

June 16 - Porter County, Pinney Purdue Ag Center, 11402 S. County Line Rd., Wanatah, IN 46390 Register by June 9

The registration fee is \$20.

For more information contact: Jennifer Dennis, at 765-494-9812 or jhdennis@purdue.edu, or Or Deb Conley, at 317-232-8771 or dconley@icdc.coop.