

## **IFB Offers Policy, Passion, Talent at AFBF Annual Convention**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Over 4,000 farmers across the country registered for the 103rd Annual Convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), held Jan. 7-12 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The event, held in a hybrid capacity to accommodate both in-person attendance and virtual participation, brought together 345 voting delegates, including 20 delegates from Illinois. Delegates addressed Illinois Farm Bureau's (IFB) policy submittals on issues of urban agriculture and labor, 2023 Farm Bill priorities, renewable energy, dairy and livestock price transparency and climate change.

The event, themed 'People, Purpose, Possibilities – Growing Tomorrow, Together,' opened Sunday evening with AFBF President Zippy Duvall's annual address to members. Duvall celebrated meaningful progress on sustainability initiatives and climate policy recommendations, highlighting the work of AFBF climate coalitions such as the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance. In driving home the theme of growing together, Duvall called on Farm Bureau members to apply the 'same energy and passion' on priority issues, such as defeating the proposed Waters of the U.S. rule, just as members did with a proposed repeal of stepped-up basis.

"With last year being an all-virtual setting, it was incredible to see our nation's farmers gather again to continue advocating for and protecting the interests of Farm Bureau members," said Richard Guebert Jr., president, IFB. "I'm very proud of what our delegates have accomplished at the state level and brought forth here to Atlanta for consideration. My thanks go out to every farm family watching from home or getting ready to travel back to their home state for their engagement and support of our Farm Bureau traditions."

Monday's closing session featured remarks from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack as well as a recorded statement from President Biden. Vilsack touched on the work he had returned to finish at USDA, including the recent announcement to improve markets for livestock producers.

### **Policy Debate**

"Today's national delegate session was a great example of our grassroots at work," said Guebert. "Illinois again was successful with advancing all but one policy resolution to the AFBF policy book. Our urban ag policy was picked up and adopted, so I'm glad to see our state taking the lead on a growing part of agriculture. Our delegates also were successful with our additions to livestock, renewable energy and broadband. We take policy development seriously in Illinois and it shows with the level of support from the AFBF delegates."

Climate change initiatives and carbon sequestration, farm labor, dairy and livestock market price transparency, urban agriculture and biofuels were some of the larger themes of this year's policy debate.

"When we talk about the climate change arena, it's critically important that we have clear policy on how farmers will be incentivized around their participation in some of these climate change initiatives," said Mark Gebhards, executive director of Governmental Affairs and Commodities, IFB. "While it's a new area, it's certainly an area that is here to stay as a focus of this administration. Farm Bureau wants to ensure clear policy on how we can engage in these opportunities, especially for farmers who have already been engaged in ongoing conservation practices."

Additionally, IFB delegates introduced policy on maintaining base acres on renewable energy projects, particularly with solar. The policy passed with 'flying colors.'

### **Illinois Farm Bureau Recognition**

Illinois Farm Bureau Young Leaders excelled in several of AFBF's national competitions. Nowell Moore of Woodford County was named the runner-up in the national Young Farmers and Ranchers Discussion Meet following the Final Four round. Moore engaged in discussions surrounding farmer mental health, enhancing international trade relationships, reduction of climate change and weather risks and big data.

Chad Bell of Mercer County was named 4th place finalist as the Illinois representative for the AFBF Achievement Award.

Cassie and Tyler Schleich of Warren Henderson County represented Illinois in the Young Farmers and Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture Competition.

While they did not advance to the top 10, the Schleiches said they were proud of their performance. "We've been fine-tuning our presentation and practicing," Cassie Schleich told FarmWeek after they presented. "Today was really good — I think this was the best one yet, which was what it needed to be."

Their presentation covered their background in agriculture and Farm Bureau, agribusiness, family, issues surrounding their farm and their future goals.

The Schleiches manage an Angus and Simmental cow/calf operation in Monmouth, and also own and operate Schleich Cattle Services. They are independent contractors for Genex and custom breed 1,000-plus head annually.

Both have held multiple leadership roles at the state and county levels, and are involved with local 4-H and FFA chapters. They have two daughters, Scarlett and Sutton.

"Tyler and I grew up in agriculture, we went to school for ag, we work in ag, it's who we are and it's how we want to raise our kids," Cassie Schleich said. "It's important to be involved in Farm Bureau because they're standing next to us fighting for our way of life and advocating with boots on the ground so that our kids have the opportunity to be in agriculture and take over what we worked so hard for, if they so choose."

IFB received a New Horizon Award in recognition of its efforts on mental health. The award, recognizing new innovative state Farm Bureau programs, stemmed from IFB's one-day Illinois Ag Mental Health Summit in March and its collection of mental health resources.

Additionally, IFB was among six state Farm Bureaus recognized for exemplary financial support of the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture. The Scholar Award is given to state Farm Bureaus with the highest total donations to the Foundation within their membership groups.

IFB received Awards of Excellence in four program areas for implementing outstanding member programs and membership achievement in 2021. IFB earned awards in Membership Value; Advocacy; Leadership & Business Development; and Engagement & Outreach.

***(Photos below)***



Tyler & Cassie Schleich represented Illinois in the Young Farmers and Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture Competition in Atlanta, Georgia in early January. Their presentation covered their background in agriculture, Farm Bureau, agribusiness, family, and issues surrounding their farm and future goals.







