



GRASSROOTS LOBBYING

Building relationships with elected officials

A guide for county Farm Bureaus



Table of Contents

Grassroots Lobbying: A Guide for County Farm Bureaus.....	2
Being an Agriculture Champion	2
County Farm Bureau: Your Advocacy Hub	2
Core Programs	3
Top Ten: Program of Work	3
Being an Influential & Impactful Advocate	4
Write to Your Legislator	4
Interact on Social Media.....	5
Make Timely and Effective Phone Calls.....	6
Visit Your Legislators	7
Top Ten Tips for a Successful Legislative Event	8
Electronic Resources	9





**Be the first to know
when it's time to act!**

Sign up to get text alerts when Farm Bureau needs you to contact lawmakers or regulators — and help shape the future of agriculture.

Text **FBACT** to **(855) 374-5673** to sign up —
it's quick and easy.

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A guide for county Farm Bureaus

Being an Agriculture Champion

Implementing Farm Bureau policy depends on champion advocates like you. We need you to support policies that help farmers around the country, in your state and in your community. Whether you are an established leader or just getting started in Farm Bureau advocacy, you can raise your voice to influence policies impacting agriculture.

County Farm Bureau: Your Advocacy Hub

Effective grassroots lobbying starts with the county Farm Bureau. This guide is intended to help you maximize member interests and better engage in local, state and national legislative and regulatory activities.

To help implement Farm Bureau policy, counties are encouraged to appoint and utilize a public policy committee.

Public Policy Committees

County public policy committees consist of individuals focused on developing relationships with elected officials. Members are chosen for their qualifications and respect in their community. The public policy committee should represent the different areas of the county and its demographics, as well as the major commodities produced.

Objective

Develop relationships with elected officials and deliver results for member policy implementation.

Public policy committees are not intended to be issue experts; their task is to establish and enhance the county Farm Bureau's relationship with local, state and national elected officials.

Qualifications

The ideal member should have an interest in policy and politics, a focus on building a relationship, and an interest in planning events with a legislative and regulatory focus. The following characteristics should be considered in making selections.

SUPPORT OF FARM BUREAU POLICY

Public policy committee members must be willing to actively support Farm Bureau policy and put policy ahead of personal feelings or friendships with legislators. Any success in implementing Farm Bureau policy will only come as a result of unity.

RECRUITMENT

Public policy committee members should be recruited and selected to serve on an annual basis. The county president and board of directors should complete the selections annually.

Core Programs

Lansing Legislative Seminar

Michigan Farm Bureau's Lansing Legislative Seminar (LLS) gives members the chance to meet directly with state lawmakers and regulators. Staff share policy updates, answer questions on pending legislation, and help members explain agriculture's challenges and priorities.

Held each February. Details: michfb.com/LLS.

Washington Legislative Seminar

The Washington Legislative Seminar (WLS) connects Michigan farmers with national leaders in Washington, D.C., to discuss federal issues impacting agriculture and advocate for policy solutions.

Held each March. Details: michfb.com/WLS.

Top Ten: Program of Work

Wondering what to include in your annual program of work? Here are our top ten recommendations:

1. A list of interested volunteers.
2. Your public policy committee's goals and activities.
3. The local, state and national issues the county Farm Bureau plans to address.
4. The local, state and national elected officials the county Farm Bureau plans to meet with.
5. A list of recommendations to the county board of members interested in attending Lansing Legislative Seminar and Washington Legislative Seminar.
6. Ensure county board members and members engaged in advocacy efforts are signed up to receive text action alerts through the Farm Feed program.
7. Develop a list of potential topics and issues for the policy development committee to consider when crafting resolutions.
8. A plan for sharing your work with the county Farm Bureau board and county members.
9. Complete the Champions of Excellence Advocacy award application by highlighting a legislative event or issue your county has worked on. Additionally, the Grassroots Lobbying award aims to annually recognize a county Farm Bureau for outstanding efforts in lobbying elected officials. The winner receives recognition at Lansing Legislative Seminar, a traveling plaque, a permanent plaque and a \$500 donation for use towards grassroots activities.
10. Communicate regularly with your county Farm Bureau board, county administrative manager and regional manager about your committee's work and ask for assistance when needed.

BEING AN INFLUENTIAL & IMPACTFUL ADVOCATE



Write to Your Legislator

As a constituent, you carry a lot of power with your elected officials — remember, they work on your behalf.

If Michigan Farm Bureau shares an action request, pre-written letters will be provided that you can personalize with your thoughts. Many legislative staff say that a personalized letter carries more weight than a pre-written letter since it illustrates the constituent took the time to tell their story.

Here are some tips on writing to legislators:

- Begin by introducing yourself as a constituent and a member of Farm Bureau. Many legislators won't accept letters or emails from outside their district.
- Make it personal. In the first paragraph, specify what action you want taken and, if possible, refer to bills by name or number. Legislators can't know what you want them to do unless you tell them.
- Briefly share your story about how your legislator's actions will directly impact you, your community, your job and your family.
- Ask your legislator to support your point of view.
- Keep the length of your email to three or four paragraphs and 100 words or less.



Interact on Social Media

Seek Them Out | Follow your local, state or national elected officials on social media networks.

Interact | If your elected official discusses an issue important to Farm Bureau, weigh in as appropriate.

Tell Your Story | Explain how the issue/legislation affects you as an individual and your farm. Personal examples are memorable.

Share Farm Bureau Policy | Communicate Farm Bureau's grassroots, member-adopted policy position. State and national policy books are available online at bit.ly/MIFBpolicy.

Refer to Accurate Resources | Visit michfb.com for additional information to share with elected officials or contact one of Michigan Farm Bureau's many expert staff.

Recruit Others | Encourage other Farm Bureau members to chime in on social media — often times more constituent comments equate to greater online influence.

Highlight Events | Recognize legislators when they attend legislative events your county Farm Bureau hosts. Post photos or news stories from the event, and don't forget to tag lawmakers.

Give Thanks | When elected officials take action that aligns with Farm Bureau policy, like and share their social media posts about these efforts. Customize your own posts publicly recognizing and tagging the legislators.

BEING AN INFLUENTIAL & IMPACTFUL ADVOCATE

Make Timely and Effective Phone Calls

The window of opportunity to influence legislation when Congress or a state legislature is in-session can be very small. A personal phone call to your legislator's office is always an effective and timely advocacy tool.

When calling your legislator's office:

- Provide your name and address so you are recognized as a constituent. Also identify yourself as a Farm Bureau member.
- Identify the bill or issue you are calling about by its name and/or number if you have it.
- Briefly state your position and how you would like your legislator to vote.
- It is important to keep your phone calls quick and simple since most staff multitask during calls to keep up with the volume of communication from constituents.

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF A GOOD INTRODUCTION/90-SECOND SPEECH:

"Hi, I'm John Smith. I am a constituent who lives at 12345 Main Street, Springfield and a Farm Bureau member. I am calling to ask you to vote yes on H.R. 1234 and support farm programs. My phone number is 555-555-5555 if you have any questions. Thank you for your time today."

IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME OR NEED TO RELAY A DETAILED POSITION, FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

1. Ask to speak to the staff member who handles the issue; they will share your comments and concerns with the legislator.
2. Ask for your legislator's stance on the bill or issue and for a commitment to vote for your position. Remember to make "the ask."
3. Don't guess at answers to questions. If the elected official's staff requests information you don't have, tell them you will gladly follow-up with requested information.
4. Follow-up with a note restating your position and thanking the legislator or staff member for his or her time.

Visit Your Legislators

Visiting your legislators is by far the most effective means of conveying your message. A face-to-face visit connects the issues you care about to the people your legislators were elected to serve.

Visiting your legislators may sound intimidating, but remember: their offices are open to the public, they are elected to work for you and they need to hear your story and opinions in order to vote on issues that will benefit the communities they serve.

Your visit helps legislators do their job well. Visits can be conducted in your home state or congressional district, as well as in Lansing or Washington, D.C.

Building a positive face-to-face relationship requires planning. If you would like to visit your legislator, you may want to consider contacting the Michigan Farm Bureau government relations staff to ensure that your efforts and messages are coordinated.

Please note that legislators often can't control their calendars and frequently ask their staff to handle meetings with constituents. A meeting with the appropriate staff member is often just as effective as a meeting with the legislator.

Follow-up with a thank you letter or email and include any information that was requested by the legislator or staff. This will strengthen your relationship and leave a positive impression with the legislator's office.



Top Ten Tips for a Successful Legislative Event

- 1** Decide what type of event you want to host. This determines how far in advance you need to plan.
- 2** Host your event on a Monday or Friday to best coincide with the legislative schedule. Legislative sessions in Lansing and Washington D.C. are typically held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Always check the legislator's schedule prior to choosing an event date.
- 3** Call the legislator's office first, then send a personal invitation to the legislator(s) via email or mail. Send it four weeks or more in advance, with reminder phone calls or emails one to two weeks before the event.
- 4** Craft an agenda and allow time for interaction among farmers and legislators. Keep your event to no more than two to three hours.
- 5** If you plan to have a list of formal questions, consider sending them to the legislator(s) in advance. If the event is more informal, conversational structure works best.
- 6** Designate someone to do the welcome, describe the purpose of your event and moderate the discussion if needed.
- 7** Be prepared to talk about pertinent issues and answer difficult questions.
- 8** Send a thank you card, email or letter to the legislator(s) for attending.
- 9** Use resources like: Farm Feed promo cards, Michigan Government Directories, priority and emerging issue pages, legislative accomplishments list, etc.
- 10** Engage your Michigan Farm Bureau Regional Manager in the planning process.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Numerous resources are available that provide local, state and national legislative and regulatory information.



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Text **FBACT** to **(855) 374-5673** to sign up — it's quick and easy.

Once you're in, we'll send you action alerts when your voice is needed.

Pro tip: Save our number in your contacts so you never miss a message.

Michigan Farm Bureau *michfb.com*

The Michigan Farm Bureau website offers a multitude of information from current news and press releases, event information, electronic policy books, and more.

State

State of Michigan *michigan.gov*

Michigan Legislature *legislature.mi.gov*

Michigan House of Representatives *house.mi.gov*

Michigan Senate *senate.mi.gov*

National

U.S. Senate *senate.gov*

U.S. House of Representatives *house.gov*

Congress *congress.gov*



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