



## REGIONAL & FEDERAL

### House and Senate approve 2018 Farm Bill

Last week, both the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate advanced the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018*, also known as the Farm Bill. The legislation, which will authorize the nation's principal farm, rural support, and nutrition assistance programs, received overwhelming support in both bodies of Congress, passing by a vote of 369-47 in the House and 87-13 in the Senate.

The bill is expected to cost \$867 billion over a 10-year span, according to Congressional Budget Office estimates. Some of the major provisions included in the 2018 Farm Bill that may affect cooperatives and their member-owners are the following:

- Preserves U.S. investments in domestic co-op development and foreign assistance
- Price Loss Coverage, Agriculture Risk Coverage, Commodity Loans, Dairy Margin Coverage, Livestock Disaster Programs and Crop Insurance are all maintained and strengthened
- Strengthening of the promotion of U.S. agricultural exports and other trade initiatives
- Helps rural communities by improving broadband delivery
- Requires the United States Department of Agriculture to establish regionally located dairy innovation centers to assist dairy farmers with diversifying their products
- Legalizes and provides crop insurance for industrial hemp
- Reforms and reauthorizes farm and nutrition assistance programs for five years
- Re-authorization of the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, which will make mental health treatment more available for farmers who suffer from higher rates of depression and suicide

Among the members of the Minnesota delegation who voted in favor of the bill were Senators Amy Klobuchar (DFL) and Tina Smith (DFL), as well as Representatives Tom Emmer (R), Betty McCollum (DFL), Rick Nolan (DFL), and Erik Paulsen (R). Also voting in the affirmative was one of the lead negotiators on the bill, House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Congressman Collin Peterson (DFL – MN). The lone no vote from the delegation was outgoing Congressman Jason Lewis (R). In addition, Congressmen Keith Ellison (DFL) and Tim Walz (DFL) were not present for the vote. Walz is set to assume duties as Minnesota's next governor in 2019, and Ellison will begin his service as Minnesota's next attorney general.

Among the members of the Wisconsin delegation who voted in favor of the bill

## Kudos

Congratulations to Dave Larson, President/CEO, Affinity Plus Federal Credit, on being named to Minnesota 500 list of state's top business leaders, published by Greenspring Media. [Click here](#) to read more.

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## Calendar of Events

**January 9-10, 2019:**

### [Minnesota Cooperative Leadership Program](#)

Jackpot Junction Casino, Morton, Minn.

**January 29-31, 2019:**

### [Leadership Institute](#)

Madison College, Madison, Wis.

**January 15, 2019:**

### **WI Farm Credit Legislative Day**

Madison, Wis.

**February 12, 2019:**

### **WI Co-op Day at the Capitol**

Madison, Wis.

**February 21-22, 2019:**

### **Co-op Communicators Conference**

Eau Claire, Wis.

**March 4-5, 2019:**

### **Co-ops Yes! Youth Leadership Conference**

Eau Claire, Wis.

**March 19, 2019:**

### **MN Co-op Day at the Capitol**

St. Paul, Minn.

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were Senator Tammy Baldwin (D), as well as Representatives Sean Duffy (R), Glenn Grothman (R), and Mark Pocan (D). Those voting against the bill included Senator Ron Johnson (R), as well as Representatives Mike Gallagher (R), Ron Kind (D), and Jim Sensenbrenner (R). Congresswoman Gwen Moore was not present for the vote. Lastly, Representative Paul Ryan (R), who is also Speaker of the House, did not vote which is the custom of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.



President Trump is expected to sign the legislation into law later this week. Cooperative Network would like to thank the members of both Congressional delegations who voted in favor of the Farm Bill.

### **USDA launches program to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America**

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Perdue announced last week that the USDA will be offering up to \$600 million in loans and grants to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America. Rural electric cooperatives and utilities, as well as other entities, may apply for funding through USDA's new ReConnect Program to connect rural areas that currently have insufficient broadband service.

USDA will make available approximately \$200 million for grants (applications due to USDA by April 29), as well as \$200 million for loan and grant combinations (applications due May 29), and \$200 million for low-interest loans (applications due by June 28).

USDA is holding a series of online webinars and regional in-person workshops. The full list of upcoming public webinars and workshops can be found at the ReConnect Program's resource portal at [reconnect.usda.gov](http://reconnect.usda.gov). To view the report in its entirety, please view the [Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity](#) (PDF, 5.4 MB). In addition, to view the categories of the recommendations, please view the [Rural Prosperity infographic](#) (PDF, 190 KB).



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## **MINNESOTA**

### **Howe officially sworn in breaking 33-33 tie in Minnesota Senate**

Last week, Sen. Jeff Howe (R – Rockville) was officially sworn in to replace former Senate President and current Lt. Governor Michelle Fischbach. Howe ran for Fischbach's open seat in a special election last month. As a result of Fischbach officially assuming the office of the Lt. Governor, her seat in the legislature was vacant leaving the Senate deadlocked at 33 republicans to 33 democrats. With Howe now in office, the GOP's one-seat majority is solidified as lawmakers prepare for the 2019 legislative session. While the entire Minnesota House of Representatives was up for election this past fall, none of the Senate was up except for the one special election that Howe won. Cooperative Network continues to meet with current and newly elected legislators, as well as administration officials, in preparation for the 2019 session.

### **Cooperative Network participates in MDA's Grain Advisory Council**

Earlier this week, Cooperative Network participated in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Grain Advisory Council meeting. This group was created as a result of several elevator failures in Porter and Ashby over the past few years that has impacted producers. Due to these failures, legislation was introduced in 2016 to create a Grain Indemnity Fund, as well as an increase in surety bond limits. While the legislation did not advance out of either body of the legislature, MDA created the Grain Advisory Council earlier this year consisting of representatives from Cooperative Network, the grain elevator industry, farm groups, commodity groups, and MDA staff to discuss ways to mitigate negative impacts on producers when a grain buying entity goes out of business. This was the third meeting held by the group, with the intention to gather once again in January. If you are interested in participating with this group in the future or would like more information, please contact [Patrick Murray](#) or call (651) 280-4901.

### **40 Square Cooperative Solutions open enrollment deadline set for**

## **December 19**

Open enrollment for [40 Square Cooperative Solutions](#) closes tomorrow. 40 Square Cooperative Solutions was founded in 2009 by Cooperative Network and several co-op members to advocate for new health coverage options for farmers and their families. One of Cooperative Network's top priorities during the 2017 legislative session was to advance legislation allowing for the establishment of an agriculture cooperative health coverage option. We are proud of this major legislative accomplishment that has enabled these two farmer-led health care co-ops to become a reality.

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## **WISCONSIN**

### **Smith named to Governor-Elect Evers Advisory Council on Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources**

Governor-elect Tony Evers (D) and Lt. Governor-Elect Mandela Barnes (D) recently announced the members of an advisory council dealing with [Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources](#). The members of this council include Cooperative Network President & CEO Dan Smith, Brian Rude of Dairyland Power Cooperative, and Adam Warthesen of Organic Valley. The Council will work directly with the transition team on identifying strategies to protect Wisconsin's natural resources, strengthen agricultural industries, and work toward clean energy innovation.

### **Legislature back in session in January**

Cooperative Network's Government Relations team is busy making plans for the next legislative session which will begin on Monday January 7, 2019. In preparation, Cooperative Network has already held discussions with the Wisconsin Credit Union League and the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association on budget and legislative priorities.

Since the State Budget will be the first issue taken up by the new legislature, Cooperative Network has been visiting with members of the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) to discuss Cooperative Network's priorities in the 2019-20 State Budget.

Topics Cooperative Network presented to JFC members included ensuring adequate transportation funding, a full repeal of the Personal Property Tax, keeping the Office of Credit Unions, making sure Wisconsin's Premises Registration Program remains functional and supporting the UW Board of Regents request for the UW Vet School.

On December 11<sup>th</sup> Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) announced committee chairs for the upcoming session. Among the committees that Cooperative Network works with, Representative Gary Tauchen (R-Bonduel) was named Agriculture Committee Chair, Representative Cindi Duchow (R-Town of Delafield) will chair the Financial Institutions Committee and Representative Kevin Peterson (R-Waupaca) was reappointed chair of the Insurance Committee.

### **Ag Coalition**

Cooperative Network participates in the Ag Coalition, a group of stakeholders with an interest in agriculture issues. At last week's meeting, Joel Nilsestuen, the DATCP point-person for Governor Evers' transition team, visited with the Ag Coalition.

Coalition members told Nilsestuen of their priorities, which included transportation funding, an IT Update at DATCP, Farmer Led Watersheds, Rural Broadband funding and updating the UW-Vet School and Dairy Research. Nilsestuen told the group that his responsibility was seeking input from groups like the Ag Coalition. Position decisions are the job of another part of the transition team. Nilsestuen believes that Cabinet Secretaries will be named between Christmas and the new year.

### **Dairy Task Force 2.0**

Earlier this year, Governor Walker convened the Wisconsin Dairy Task Force 2.0 – a joint effort between DATCP and the University of Wisconsin – to keep the Wisconsin dairy industry strong. Among the 31 individuals appointed by Walker

to the task force was Cooperative Network's David Ward, who currently chairs the Regulatory Certainty Sub-committee.

The task force met on December 13 at UW-Oshkosh. During the meeting, Ward reported on the Regulatory Certainty Committee meeting held in October. He explained how the committee refined the 20 issues identified at the August task force meeting into four categories - Manure and Environmental Regulations, Economic Regulations, Government Regulations and Regulatory Certainty. Ward reported that the next meeting will be January 11, 2019.

The full task force voted on two action items. The first vote was a recommendation to the Governor requesting the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) create a pilot loan guarantee program under the existing Agribusiness Guarantee program to help rural dairy processors deal with lower collateral values because of their location. The second vote was to ask the Legislature and the Governor to provide funding to the UW system to create the Wisconsin Dairy Hub at UW-Madison, UW-Platteville and UW-River Falls. The Dairy Hub would support education and research that would allow Wisconsin to discover solutions to keep the dairy industry ahead of its challenges.

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