



2017 State Legislative Priorities

One of AgriGrowth's three strategic priorities is to advocate for a positive business climate for Minnesota's food and agriculture sector. The Minnesota AgriGrowth Council will be actively engaged at the State Capitol, both in promoting new initiatives and reacting to challenges.

These legislative priorities are based on an assessment of AgriGrowth member interest, informed by discussions that occurred during regional meetings around Minnesota as well as other membership interaction. The priority list does not reflect the entire scope of AgriGrowth's anticipated activities at the legislature during the 2017 legislative session and the list may be modified as new issues emerge.

Water Quality Issues

Much of the water debate as it pertains to agriculture production and agribusiness will center on water quality, buffer strips, sustainability, appropriations, water usage fees, and the Department of Natural Resources' oversight of wells. AgriGrowth recognizes the importance of water to agriculture production, manufacturing and our communities. To assist farmers with implementing additional measures to protect water quality, we urge the prioritization of state investments toward more cost-share and technical assistance at the local level for individual site solutions. AgriGrowth also recognizes that not all farms and agribusinesses are the same, hence these entities should be allowed to utilize a variety of personalized local water solutions that result in proven outcomes. We will continue to engage on these issues through the legislative session, ensuring that water related policy changes and the use of existing funding sources appropriately balance competing interests and are based on sound science.

Investments

While the legislature and governor will be setting the state budget for the next biennium in the next session, and AgriGrowth will again support additional funding for agriculture productivity research at the University of Minnesota. Funding for research that benefits Minnesota farmers and agribusinesses has declined significantly over the past 20 years, and we believe that funding should be restored to support this important research. In

addition, AgriGrowth supports a bonding bill that includes projects that benefit rural Minnesota – including funding for road and bridge projects, rural water treatment and other critical infrastructure projects.

Environmental Regulatory Reform

While other parts of the country are limited by water shortage and the need to import feed, Minnesota has plentiful opportunities with respect to both of these essential elements, allowing agribusiness and livestock operations the chance to thrive. However, excessive rules, regulations and a subjective environmental permitting process continue to hamper the expansion of Minnesota's agribusiness community. Existing and future regulations should be transparent and based on sound science that allows Minnesota business to be competitive regionally, nationally and globally. AgriGrowth will continue proactive legislative efforts that seek to reform the state environmental permitting and rules process to enhance Minnesota's livestock and business communities as well as protect the environment.

Taxes

Property tax reform on agricultural lands and agribusiness property remains a high priority of AgriGrowth, and it is expected to be a high priority for the incoming legislature. AgriGrowth supports a tax system that improves business competitiveness, enhances job growth, and fosters economic growth. This includes, but is not limited to, reductions in agricultural and agribusiness property taxes and conforming the estate taxes to the federal standard. AgriGrowth will continue to advocate for tax policies that lower agribusinesses tax burdens and public policies that allow our state economy to grow.

Transportation Funding and Infrastructure

Transportation is essential to a healthy, vibrant business climate in Minnesota. Significant investments need to be made in the state's road and bridge system for moving agricultural and value added commodities to market. AgriGrowth supports long-term investments that provide targeted and sustained transportation funding that relies on a combination of several funding streams such as more efficient use of existing Minnesota Department of Transportation resources, general fund spending, bonding, dedication of existing transportation-related revenues

Health Care

In 2017 individuals who purchase their insurance on the individual market are likely to see a substantial increase to their health care premiums - some will see an increase of over 50 percent. These premium jumps occurred where about 5 percent of Minnesota's residents (or 123,000 people) buy coverage. Many Minnesota farm families are a part of that population. With low crop prices and increasing costs, our farm families and small business owners are having to decide if they can afford to purchase health care insurance. AgriGrowth will work cooperatively with other groups to seek solutions to this urgent problem so that quality health care is affordable and available to Minnesota farm families and small businesses.

Agriculture Technology Restrictions

AgriGrowth understands the importance of agriculture technology for the production of agriculture crops and the health of the agriculture system as whole. Minnesota agriculture's competitiveness in the international market place is dependent on the these current and future technologies. It is important that policymakers let science dictate the action, not activism. AgriGrowth opposes state legislation that would ban or impose

restrictions on agriculture technology that puts our agriculture producers at a competitive disadvantage.

Workforce Development

Minnesota's agriculture industry continues to see shortages of skilled workers in areas such as agricultural mechanics and equipment, animal science, farm business operations and management, food science and technology, and plant and soil science. AgriGrowth supports initiatives that ensure higher education institutions deliver the quality programs, provide graduates with the skills necessary for the future success of Minnesota's agricultural economy and strengthens the state academic infrastructure..

Animal Care

Animal care is a priority for Minnesota's livestock producers, as demonstrated by numerous producer funded animal care initiatives and certification programs. A strong animal agriculture sector keeps our rural communities vibrant and supports agribusinesses that create jobs and value added agriculture in other parts of the state. AgriGrowth supports these industry led and funded efforts, and opposes state legislation that would restrain farmer's ability to manage the health of their animals based on sound science and best practices.