

Duncan keynote speaker at FCFB gathering

Key questions to address policies

BY JOHN FROEHLING

Illinois Farm Bureau Vice President Brian Duncan said he tends to get in a hurry as he is farming. His kids give him a hard time for not having warm, fuzzy conversations with them, especially during busy season. They joke when he calls them, he doesn't ask how they are or their day is going. He asks: Where are you? When can you get here? And how long is it going to take to get this fixed?

Duncan said it was true he pops off those three questions in pretty short order. He said at the Fulton County Farm Bureau's 105th Annual Meeting last month there was more truth to those questions than there might seem to be in other ways.

Farm Bureau leaders should brace themselves and be prepared to face such questions from members. Duncan said he served 13 years as president of Ogle County Farm Bureau, so he knows the challenges of running a county Farm Bureau. "You're the

point of the spear, you're closest to the members. And don't ever take for granted your presence in the county," he said.

Where are you? Geographically, the Farm Bureau is in the heart of the county. No organization is more influential than the Farm Bureau in the county in this state. Illinois is the only state that has the county Farm Bureau network, the only state in the American Farm Bureau Federation with county managers. It is unique and its grass-roots are so effective, Duncan said.

Farm Bureau members may ask their leaders where they are on local issues that impact them. Well, talk about how Farm Bureau's positions are determined. This is the policy court. Every year the Illinois Farm Bureau policy book is completely new. There are no outdated policies. Either new ones go in or existing ones are reaffirmed, he said.

Each county Farm Bureau appointed representatives to attend the annual Illinois Agricultural Association convention in Chicago to provide input on issues and to vote on policies, he noted.

"This book is opened by our staff, by our board members, by our leadership, and we do what the delegates tell us to do. And the policy book sets the guidance and the direction for the organization," Duncan said.

He added it may seem surprising, but he was much more impatient when he was



BRIAN DUNCAN
Vice President Illinois Farm Bureau

younger. It seemed like the policy process moved so slow. When can you get here? When can you pay attention to my issue?

Duncan said he does not think the process is slow now. It is deliberate. As Farm Bureau

experts vet policies and he oversees the Resolution Committee, both intended and unintended consequences are reviewed. They ask hard questions and their capable staff in Bloomington researches issues thoroughly, so they're well vetted.

How long will it take to fix this? Sometimes there are "hair-on-fire moments" like the inheritance tax and stepped-up basis – which Congresswoman Cheri Bustos said she's heard about and is going to fight, said Duncan.

He did not elaborate, but sources say stepped up-basis is a tax provision that allows heirs to reduce their capital gains taxes. When someone inherits property and investments, the Internal Revenue Service resets the market value of those assets to their value on the date of the original owner's death. When the heir sells the assets, capital gains taxes are applied based on this reset value.

Carbon sequestration is another long-term issue. Policy is a roadmap there, too, Duncan said. Other issues involve private property rights, the rule of law, market-based opportunities and incentive-based opportunities.

"I love a quick fix. When the only tool in the toolbox is a hammer, everything looks like a nail," he quipped.

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