

Foreword

In December, 1997, Defenders of Wildlife heard deeply disturbing news. A federal district judge in Wyoming had ruled that Yellowstone and central Idaho wolf reintroductions carried out by the federal government in 1995 and 1996 were unlawful and that the thriving new wolf populations must be removed. Since their former territories in Canada were by then occupied by other wolves and there wasn't room for them in the nation's zoos, it appeared that the wolves would have to be killed.

The ruling threatened to erase years of hard work by the government and conservationists and to destroy what has been called the most popular and successful wildlife restoration effort of the 20th century, an effort in which Defenders had been a leader for two decades.

The most significant plaintiff in the lawsuit responsible for the court decision was the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF — or the Farm Bureau). AFBF and its state and county units regularly oppose not only measures to sustain and recover endangered species like the wolf but many important environmental protection efforts. The organization also is negative toward other widely accepted laws and public policies. Its 1998 policy manual, for example, advocated repeal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, opposed registration and licensing of firearms and advocated abolishing the U.S. Department of Education.

From its name, one might suppose that the Farm Bureau exists to serve American family farmers. In reality the Farm Bureau is a gigantic agribusiness and insurance conglomerate. The majority of its “members” are not farmers, but customers of Farm Bureau insurance companies and other business ventures. Yet the organization's nonprofit status allows it to use the U.S. tax code to help build a financial war chest with which it pursues an extreme political agenda, while doing little for — and sometimes working against — America's family farmers.

We decided that we should try to find out more about this politically powerful organization and make what we learned available to the public. The result is the accompanying report. We would have liked to examine more of the Farm Bureau's operations but lacked the time and resources to do so. We believe the public deserves to learn the full facts about this huge financial conglomerate that purports to be the voice of America's family farmers.



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