

## Executive Summary

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) — with its roughly 3,000 constituent state and county farm bureaus — ranks among the richest and most powerful non-governmental organizations in America. AFBF claims to have more than 4.9 million members. It has artfully portrayed itself as the voice and champion of our nation's family farmers for nearly 80 years.

The vast majority of the Farm Bureau's members, however, are either policyholders of one of numerous insurance companies affiliated with state farm bureaus or are customers of other farm bureau business ventures. (At latest count there were some 54 farm bureau insurance companies.) Such members have no say in establishing or carrying out Farm Bureau policies and, in most cases, have no particular interest in agriculture.

AFBF spends a great deal of money and time opposing environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air and Safe Drinking Water Acts, wetlands laws and pesticide regulations. But the organization's views may have more to do with its own financial interests than with the views of its members or the needs of the family farmer.

AFBF is allied with some of the nation's biggest agribusinesses. It has large investments in the automobile, oil and pesticide industries, often supports factory farming rather than family farming and regularly opposes government regulation to reduce air and water pollution and pesticide use and to protect wildlife, habitat, rural amenities and food quality. It is critical of efforts to counter global warming. It has opposed the registration and licensing of firearms. It has advocated repeal of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, one of the nation's key civil rights laws. It has advocated abolition of the federal Department of Education and of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It has launched lawsuits to halt reintroduction of endangered gray wolves. It is allied politically with, and provides funding for, right-wing interests and the so-called wise-use movement, which works for the supremacy of private property ownership and against the protection and conservation of public lands.

The Farm Bureau's policies are set by voting delegates at its annual meetings. Many high officers of the national and state farm bureaus also serve as officers or directors of the insurance companies and of Farm Bureau cooperatives and other businesses.

Defenders of Wildlife first investigated the Farm Bureau because of the longstanding Farm Bureau lobbying campaigns against wildlife and environmental protections. We found,

however, that the Farm Bureau not only opposes our core mission but also works actively against the interests of rural communities and mainstream America.

A significant problem facing rural communities in the last decade has been the rise in factory farms which produce hundreds of thousands of hogs every year. The Farm Bureau has sided with the corporations that own and operate these farms, often to the detriment of rural communities and local family farmers. Beyond significant pollution issues, these pig factories are putting family farms out of business.

Over the last decade, as market concentration has become an overwhelming force in American agriculture, hundreds if not thousands of family-owned farms have been forced out of business. The Farm Bureau supports, through investments and political clout, this concentration of the agricultural industry and, indirectly, the destruction of rural America.

When the cooperative farm bureau system was first set up in 1922, it empowered farmers and other rural residents to get the goods and services they needed while enabling them to sell their products at a better price. Unfortunately, what was once a beneficial arrangement for farmers and consumers has drastically changed. Many Farm Bureau-affiliated co-ops are now multibillion-dollar operations that compete directly with their farmer members. Furthermore, many of these cooperatives are partnering with the very companies responsible for the agribusiness megamergers that are putting smaller farmers out of business.

As can be expected, the Farm Bureau has taken positions that benefit its business interests or investments. Other lobbying priorities are more difficult to fathom. However, the theme that runs through all Farm Bureau policies seems to be less regulation and more power for business interests. To further this agenda, the Farm Bureau has developed close ties to the corporate-led property rights movement.

Plenty of farmers and ranchers see common ground with environmentalists. Some are Farm Bureau members who cannot make their voices heard. Others have dropped membership and are working for change in other ways. Yet the Farm Bureau has pursued a deliberate strategy of fostering enmity between farmers and environmentalists, two groups that could benefit from working together.