**Erroneous attack ads slander Farmers Union, divide our rural communities**

*By Kara O’Connor
Government Relations Director*

In the last week campaign ads attacking Wisconsin Farmers Union have gone from false and sarcastic to downright bizarre – attacking state senate candidate Kriss Marion for positions that Wisconsin Farmers Union took before she was even a member, or positions that WFU has never taken at all.

Take a look at the fine print, and you’ll notice the ads are funded by the Wisconsin Alliance for Reform, a group backed by undisclosed donors. The attack ads against Marion are essentially identical to ads that attempted to ridicule Farmers Union member Jeff Peck for his ties to the family farm organization back in 2014.

These attacks diminish the dignity of democracy and are out of step with Wisconsin values like honesty and civility. They are also not in keeping with the collaboration that we aspire to in our rural communities. Just last week, in fact, Wisconsin Farmers Union collaborated with DATCP, Farm Bureau, DBA, PDPW, and Dairy Girl Network to put on a session at the World Dairy Expo about Farm Employment in Wisconsin.

So what is Wisconsin Farmers Union? We’re an organization of farmers and rural residents from all over the state who believe in a fair farm economy and thriving rural communities. In the face of negativity in our political system and in the farm economy, we persist in our belief in democracy and in the ingenuity of farmers and rural entrepreneurs. We think that the best government is the one that is closest to the people. We believe that rural residents have the same right to clean water, decent health care, and fast internet as our urban counterparts do.

There are times that Wisconsin Farmers Union politely disagrees with politicians of both parties. At the end of the day, our loyalties lie with our members and rural communities, not with any party or politician. In 2012, for example, we were the only major ag organization that questioned Governor Walker’s Dairy 30x20 plan to increase milk production in the state, believing that ramping up milk production, without having anywhere to sell it, was short-sighted. The current flood of milk on the market and resulting low prices have demonstrated the wisdom of that position.

Instead of slogans or quick fixes to the dairy economy, Wisconsin Farmers Union is bringing together farmers from every organization (and no organization at all) through the Dairy Together campaign to work together for comprehensive dairy policy reform that balances supply and demand. We form cooperatives like the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, launched in 2012, to help farmers access new markets and build the regional food economy. We hosted and co-sponsored over 30 pasture walks and on-farm events this year to help farmers share best practices for conserving soil and protecting water resources.

Wisconsin Farmers Union does not endorse candidates or make campaign donations. We do advocate for policy positions – that are established by our grassroots membership – and stand by our values. Political attack ads violate our values of honesty, collaboration, and civility. That’s one of the reasons that we have long advocated for reining in campaign spending, so that races are decided on the issues, rather than on sensational claims by dark money groups with undisclosed donors.

In 2015, Governor Walker and the legislature made significant changes to state law pertaining to campaign finance and elections fairness. For example, AB388/SB294 dismantled the nonpartisan Government Accountability Board, and replaced it with Ethics and Elections boards comprised of political appointees. Another bill, AB387/SB292, doubled the limits on direct contributions to candidates, allowed unlimited donations from individuals to political parties, and permitted corporations, for the first time in more than 100 years in Wisconsin, to give directly to political parties. It also allowed candidates to coordinate directly with outside “issue ad” groups to run attack ads against their opponents.

Wisconsin Farmers Union urges all voters to ask the candidates about their voting record on campaign spending laws, and what they will do to put a stop to mudslinging political ads.

*Kara O’Connor lives in Madison and is Government Relations Director for Wisconsin Farmers Union.*

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**Additional Notes in response to attack ad claims:**

Wisconsin Farmers Union would like to address the specific false claims that have been made by the Wisconsin Alliance for Reform and the Jobs First Coalition about our policies on renewable energy.

These dark money groups cite a Mackinac Institute website that in turn links to a study from the now-defunct George C. Marshall Institute that analyzes a National Low-Carbon Fuel Standard. Wisconsin Farmers Union does not support a National Low-Carbon Fuel Standard.  The state-based LCFS referenced in our policy is different than a national LCFS.

The attack groups cite a Columbia Center on Global Energy Policy report from July 19, 2018 that analyzes a Carbon Tax.  Wisconsin Farmers Union does not support a Carbon Tax.  The Carbon Fee and Dividend referenced in our policy is different than a Carbon Tax.

The groups cite a Heritage Foundation study form August 19, 2009 that estimates job loss from the Waxman-Markey Cap-and-Trade legislation.  Of all of their critiques of WFU's renewable energy positions, this one is arguably the most defensible, as WFU policy does support Cap-and-Trade in concept.  However, we would challenge the economic conclusions in the Heritage foundation study.

Importantly, the Heritage Foundation study fails to take into account the many studies that show the positive impact that renewable energy growth is *already having* on the economy. We don’t have to rely on a speculative analysis – we already know that renewable energy will yield more jobs than coal or gas*.* For example:

From US News and World Report:

"The U.S. wind and solar industries employ more than 300,000 people. The wind energy sector employs nearly 90,000 Americans, 20 percent more than in 2015. Jobs in the solar sector have increased 123 percent since 2010. One of every 83 new jobs in 2015 was in the solar sector. On the flip side, low oil prices resulted in the loss of nearly 100,000 jobs in the oil industry."

<https://www.usnews.com/news/at-the-edge/articles/2017-03-15/clean-energy-is-seeing-explosive-job-growth-dont-let-budget-kill-it>

From Business Insider:

"Solar energy jobs are growing at a rate 12 times faster than the rest of the US economy"

<https://www.businessinsider.com/solar-energy-job-growth-2017-1>

From a Bloomberg analysis of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report:

"Renewable energy is creating US jobs twice as fast as any other industry"

<https://qz.com/1111998/renewable-energy-is-creating-us-jobs-twice-as-fast-as-any-other-industry/>

A report by the Environmental Defense Fund found that job growth in the solar energy sector increased 24.5 percent from 2016 to 2017, and job growth in the wind energy sector increased 16 percent from 2016 to 2017. Solar and wind energy jobs outnumber coal and gas jobs in Wisconsin, and the declining coal industry now employs less than a quarter as many Americans as the renewable energy industry.

<https://www.edf.org/energy/clean-energy-jobs>

Unlike the Heritage foundation report, which is speculative, the EDF report is retrospective – reporting on documented job shifts that have already occurred.