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Farm Bureau is a voluntary, grassroots advocacy organization representing the social and economic interests of farm and ranch families at the local, state and national levels.
To enable agriculture to remain the state’s No. 1 industry, we urge the following actions:

1. Promoting tax policies to enhance agricultural viability.

Agriculture remains a major economic driver in Washington state. Taken together, the food production and processing industries make up 13 percent of the state economy and provide jobs for 160,000 people statewide – most in rural areas. In 2011 the total economic impact of agriculture reached $46 billion. Our current tax structure has enabled farmers to remain competitive with those in other states and countries. Now is not the time to increase taxes on this vibrant, job-creating sector of the state’s economy.

2. Stretching existing revenues without creating new taxes or fees.

Washington does not suffer from a lack of state revenue. Revenue collections have increased every year since fiscal year 2010, and state revenue forecasts show increases for the next four fiscal years. Implementing efficiencies and reforms, and cutting wasteful and unnecessary programs must remain a higher priority than raising taxes and fees. Taxpayers have survived using this approach, and it is time government embraced it.

3. Implementing state laws in a fair and unbiased manner, based on sound science.

Good stewardship is a way of life for Washington producers. Standards must be based on sound science, not political pressures, and regulatory burdens must not exceed what viable operations can reasonably afford. This is because over-regulation accelerates conversion of Ag lands to pavement and undermines local capacity to produce safe and affordable food.

Instead of win-lose regulations, government should aggressively pursue win-win solutions that improve both agricultural and environmental outcomes. Agencies must allow producers to benefit from federal incentives when conservation protections or buffers displace economically productive working lands. Solutions must be collaborative and workable.

4. Basing environmental enforcement on actual - not potential - harm.

A determination that an environmental standard or regulation has been violated must be supported by substantial evidence. Standards must be reasonably achievable, based on credible data, and grounded in sound, peer-reviewed science.

Environmental enforcement must be necessary and weighted in proportion to actual harm. Government should position voluntary incentive programs at the heart of any solution, including credit trading mechanisms. Such market-based mechanisms can deliver more cost-effective environmental benefits and better promote the economic viability of agriculture.

5. Reforming transportation budget and funding mechanisms.

Farmers understand the importance of having a transportation system that provides an efficient farm-to-market product distribution network. But they also need to keep input costs low so their farms can stay in business. Rural residents will be hard-pressed by approval of additional transportation revenue.

Reforms are crucial for getting the most value out of our transportation taxes, tolls and fees – both now and in the future. Budgeting needs to be done for the long term, rather than continual reliance on short-term projects and funding packages. Restoring balance and integrity to our transportation system must occur before new revenues are considered.