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Contact:

Greg Leaf

greg@groupleaf.com

715-381-0123

Vinehout Proposes Comprehensive Plan to Help Farmers

Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, a Democratic candidate for Governor, Monday released a comprehensive plan to help Wisconsin farmers cope with the crisis in the farm economy.

“We need both short term help and a long term fix,” Vinehout said, who herself is a Western Wisconsin farmer who understands the financial stress farmers face this year and the need for changes to bring about long-term health for agriculture.

“We must get farm families the immediate help they need,” she said. That would include protection from foreclosure and adequate consumer protection, access to health care through BadgerCare, and technical assistance to help with necessary innovations and improvements.

“My long-term vision for Wisconsin agriculture is based on the importance of value-added products produced in Wisconsin,” Vinehout said.

“Every consumer dollar we capture is more money for Wisconsin farmers. I support and will enact state policies that increase farmer’s income. This means developing value-added strategies across Wisconsin that increase opportunities for sales directly to consumers. For example, I support creating a farmer to consumer program that protects public health and allows on-farm direct sales of raw milk.”

The state Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection must assist in the marketing and processing infrastructure with new products from Wisconsin-grown hemp, according to Vinehout. “I intend to expand the number of farmers involved in the hemp program,” she said.

“New laws should incorporate the best practices of other states and encourage farmers to experiment with different varieties of *cannabis sativa*.”

“As Governor, I will fully fund the school breakfast and school milk program including the use of whole milk. I will fully fund the Buy Local Buy Wisconsin and the Farm to School programs both of which were cut back by Governor Walker.”

“I will establish assistance for new farmers entering ag with mentoring, technical assistance with local ag agents and access to capital. I strongly oppose any efforts to weaken our county-based agriculture extension agents and their resources,” Vinehout said.

For long-term help with dairy prices, Vinehout pledged to work with the state’s Congressional delegation to support a federal supply management program and transparent dairy pricing to replace the Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

She supports a national market loss assistance program directed at family farms and would advocate for a cap on payments based on production.

The USDA has predicted that farm income will drop to a 12-year low this year. Corn and soybean prices dropped about 20 percent. Hog prices sank to their lowest price since 2003 as both China and Mexico imposed tariffs on U.S. pork, in retaliation for U.S. tariff action.

Dairy farmers face a fourth year of milk prices below the cost of production. “Not surprisingly, Wisconsin lost 500 dairy farms in 2017 and about 340 farms in the first half of 2018,” Vinehout said. The number of milk-cow herds has declined 20 percent decline in just five years.

“I will invest in a massive build-out of broadband in Wisconsin. Called Moving Broadband Forward, my plan will require broadband expansion that meets the federal definition of broadband and be targeted to areas of the state most in need. “My proposal loosens the restrictions on cities, counties and towns -- allowing local communities to decide their own broadband future. My plan tightens accountability on private companies using public money to build out broadband.”