



South Dakota Farm Bureau®



CANDIDATE Q&A

Dan Ahlers

Tell us about your view of agriculture's role and impact on the state currently and where you believe it should be for the future?

Agriculture is fundamental to South Dakota's economy, communities, and way of life. It supports not only farmers and ranchers, but businesses, schools, hospitals, Main Streets and families across our state. Agriculture should remain a cornerstone of our economy while we look for ways to create more opportunity for producers to keep more of the value of what they produce here in South Dakota. That means supporting value-added agriculture, expanding markets, investing in infrastructure and helping the next generation of farmers and ranchers get started.

We should reinvest in SDSU's Dairy Research and Training facility. We can't grow the dairy industry without properly investing in our educational training. It is the very reason we invested in the Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab and the Precision Ag facility. We need to invest in local farmers like the Peterson's in Wakonda, so they build their factory here and not in another state. I want an agricultural economy where producers have the opportunity to succeed, grow their operations and pass them on to the next generation.

If elected, what is your vision and action plan to support and grow agricultural markets and value-added agriculture for South Dakota producers?

My approach is simple: invest in South Dakota first. We should be doing more to help South Dakota entrepreneurs and producers add value to the commodities we already produce rather than relying primarily on incentives to recruit businesses from outside the state. I would review existing economic development programs to make sure they are working for South Dakota producers and small businesses. We should expand opportunities for local processing, food production, livestock and dairy operations, and other value-added enterprises. I also want the state to help producers identify new markets, navigate regulations and access financing. Our producers should have a seat at the table when agricultural economic-development priorities are established.

Young farmers and ranchers face significant barriers to entering and establishing themselves within the industry including access to capital, acquiring land or livestock and achieving profitability. What specific policies or initiatives would your administration pursue to support the next generation of agriculture producers?

If we want agriculture to remain strong, we have to make it possible for young people to enter the industry. I would expand access to low-interest financing and strengthen programs that help beginning farmers acquire land, livestock and equipment. I would also support programs that connect retiring producers with young farmers who want to take over an operation, along with mentorship and business-planning opportunities. We should explore ways to reduce the burden of student debt for young people entering agriculture and expand partnerships with SDSU, FFA, 4-H and other agricultural organizations. Most importantly, young producers need a path to profitability, not simply a loan to get started.

Property taxes are a top concern for farmers and ranchers. What is your property tax plan and how would your administration protect agricultural landowners from property tax increases or tax shifts while ensuring a fair and stable tax system?

Property-tax reform would be my Day One priority. Farmers and ranchers should not be forced to absorb tax increases because the state shifts more of the burden onto agricultural landowners. We need a fair, predictable system that recognizes the productivity of agricultural land and does not tax land based on speculative value. I would bring farmers, ranchers, counties, schools and municipalities together to develop a bipartisan solution that provides meaningful property-tax relief while protecting the services our communities depend on. Any proposal must be transparent about who pays, who benefits and how the system will work over the long term. I would not support a tax shift that simply moves the burden from one group of South Dakotans to another.

South Dakota has seen proposals come and go for livestock zoning, rural development, energy transmission, processing expansion or other major infrastructure projects. How would you balance economic development, private property rights, and the interests of agricultural landowners, and how will you ensure farmers and ranchers have a seat at the table for the conversation?

Economic development and property rights should not be treated as competing values. We can grow our economy while respecting the rights of landowners. My administration would make meaningful public input a part of the process from the beginning, not something that happens after decisions have effectively been made. Farmers and ranchers who will be directly affected by a project should have a meaningful seat at the table. I would also expect state agencies to provide clear, timely information and to listen to local communities. Whether the issue is livestock, energy, processing, water or infrastructure, development should be done responsibly, transparently and with respect for private property rights.

If elected, what is one action you would take in your first 100 days that would have the greatest positive impact on South Dakota farmers and ranchers?

If elected, one of my first priorities would be to bring farmers and ranchers to the table and make sure we are addressing the rising cost of doing business. We need to listen to the people who are actually farming and ranching and develop practical solutions that help them stay profitable and keep their operations in South Dakota.

One area I would focus on is the high cost of agricultural inputs. If fertilizer prices remain high, I would propose a sales tax holiday on fertilizer to provide some immediate relief. I would also work to establish grants to help farmers invest in precision agriculture technology that can reduce the amount of fertilizer and pesticides they need while improving efficiency and protecting our soil and water.

We also need to make sure the next generation has an opportunity to get into agriculture. I would expand programs that connect young farmers with retiring farmers who are looking for someone to take over their operation. That can help young people enter farming while keeping land, knowledge, and agricultural operations in South Dakota.

Agriculture is the foundation of our state's economy and our rural communities. In my first 100 days, I would make sure farmers and ranchers have a seat at the table and that state government is looking for ways to lower costs, improve efficiency, and help the next generation succeed.