

Tips for Successful Meetings with Your Legislators

Face-to-face meetings with your elected officials and their staff are a powerful way to get to know them and communicate your views on important issues. Here are a few tips for having an effective personal meeting with your state and federal legislators.

Scheduling a meeting

Legislators have many commitments, and their schedules fill up quickly. You should call ahead to schedule an appointment and be as flexible as possible about the timing. When you call the office, introduce yourself, including the fact that you're a constituent. Tell the staffer that you would like to meet in person with the official to discuss an issue relating to agriculture and food.

Example for when you have a specific date to travel to the Capitol: "Hi, I'm Jane Doe from _____. I'm going to be in DC on ____ (the date)____, and would like an appointment to meet with Representative (or Senator) _____ to discuss our food system and supporting local farmers. If (the elected official) is unavailable, I'm happy to meet with the staffperson who works on this issue. Is someone available on _____?"

Example for meeting at the local district office: "Hi, I'm Jane Doe from _____. I'd like to meet with Representative (or Senator) _____ to discuss our food system and supporting local farmers. If (the elected official) is unavailable, I'm happy to meet with the staffperson who works on this issue. Is there a good day and time that we can schedule a meeting in the district?"

You may get transferred to a scheduler or asked to put the request in writing.

If you can't arrange an in-person meeting for logistical reasons, ask to speak to the staffer who handles agriculture and food issues. Talk with the staffer about the issues over the phone, and follow up with a letter or email.

Congressional Switchboard: 202-224-3121

Find out who represents you at www.Congress.org

Before the meeting

1. Let us know that you have a meeting set up by emailing Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org. We'll provide you with materials ahead of time and help you prepare.
2. Plan who will come to the meeting. Keep the group small, no more than 3 or 4 people. It's fine if you go by yourself, but having others with you can provide moral support and demonstrate that other constituents are concerned about this issue as well.
3. **Be prepared, be informative, be thorough, and be concise.** You'll often have only 10-15 minutes to state your case. So it's very important for you to be well prepared, and to be able to express your views succinctly and clearly. Here are some ideas to help you get to the point quickly and be understood.

- Make yourself some written notes listing the key points you want to make.
- Personalize the issue by explaining very briefly how it affects you, your family, and others in the community. However, avoid excessive background — get to the point quickly.
- Ask for action — tell what you want them to do and explain briefly how your proposal will make things better.
- Be aware of who might oppose your proposal and why. Be prepared to defend your position with facts.
- If the issue is complicated, say so, and leave behind additional material or offer to provide something in writing that explains the problem and solutions more completely.
- If you're going with several people, plan what points each of you will cover to use your time most effectively.

4. Dress professionally and arrive early.

During the meeting

1. Be on time. Your legislators are very busy and may be forced to skip your meeting if you're late. If you know you're going to be late, call ahead and let them know when you expect to arrive. They'll try their best to accommodate you if you give them a little warning. Also be prepared to be flexible, even though you have an appointment. You may be kept waiting or your meeting may be interrupted.
2. Introduce yourself, remind the legislator or staffer that you are constituents, and mention that you are members of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance.
3. Be succinct and clear about the issue. Start by explaining briefly why local foods are important to you. Plan a few sentences ahead of time – but keep your initial comments to a couple of minutes to try to open up a dialogue. Focus on the aspects that you know best and are most comfortable with.
4. Be prepared to educate him or her about the issue. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" and offer to follow up with more information after the meeting.
5. Be clear that this meeting is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with your legislators. If you're meeting with staff, rather than the elected official, ask them to call you once they've had a chance to talk with the Representative or Senator, so that you can find out where they stand on the issue. Also, get a business card from them, so that you can contact the staffers again directly.

After the meeting

1. Write a thank you note. Email or fax is fine.
2. Send us your impressions of the meeting, so that we know where your legislators stand and can follow-up.

The follow-up, by both you and FARFA, is very important. The more you build a relationship with your legislators, the more of an impact you can have when there are specific bills or votes.

For more information, go to www.FarmAndRanchFreedom.org