



Guide to Activism & Lobbying: 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. It's a critical step in educating them about the issues that affect our lives, which may ultimately bring them to our side and help us make the changes needed to protect our independent farmers and food producers.

Here are a few tips for having an effective personal meeting with your state and federal legislators:

SCHEDULING A MEETING

Legislators, both State and Federal, 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. For state legislators, you can meet in their district office in your area or at the State Capitol. For Congressional officials, you can meet in D.C. (which is not an option for most people) or, again, in the local district office.



When you call the office, introduce yourself and mention the fact that you're a constituent. Tell the staffer that you would like to meet in person with your legislator to discuss an issue relating to agriculture and food. Be willing to meet with a staffer if the legislator is not available – staffers often have a significant impact.

If you can't arrange an in-person meeting with either the legislator or staff 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. You may get transferred to a scheduler or asked to put the request in writing.

Example introduction: "Hi, I'm Jane Doe from [CITY/STATE]. I'm going to be in [D.C. / STATE CAPITOL] on [DATE]*, and I would like to make an appointment to meet with Representative (or Senator) [NAME OF ELECTED OFFICIAL] to discuss our food system and supporting local farmers. If Representative (or Senator) [NAME OF ELECTED OFFICIAL] is unavailable, I'm happy to meet with the staff person who works on this issue. Is someone available on [DATE]?"

****Omit first part of this sentence if you are calling the legislator's local district office.***

Find out who represents you at the federal level by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121, or going online to www.House.gov and www.Senate.gov. At the state level, there is a directory of State Legislatures at www.ncsl.org/about-us/ncslservice/state-legislative-websites-directory.aspx.

BEFORE THE MEETING – PREPARE

1. **Let us know that you've set up a meeting with your legislator** by emailing Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org. We'll help you prepare.

2. **Plan who will go to the meeting.** It's fine if you go alone, but having others with you can provide moral support and demonstrate to your legislator (or staffer) that other constituents are concerned about this issue as well. A group of 3 or 4 people is great.



3. **Organize your thoughts.** Often, you'll only have 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 concisely and clearly.

- Make notes for yourself; list the key points you want to make. **Be brief!** Include the following:
 - ✓ Personalize the issue; explain how it affects you, your family, and others in the community.
 - ✓ Avoid excessive background – get to the point quickly.
 - ✓ Ask for action: explain what you want them to do and how your proposal will improve things.
- Familiarize yourself with various sides of the issue. Be aware of who might oppose your proposal and why, and be prepared to explain why your side is right.
- If you're going with several people, plan what points each of you will cover to use your time most effectively. If possible, rehearse ahead of time with others who are familiar with the issue. You don't have to memorize a speech; you want to sound genuine and natural. You simply want to get to the point that you feel confident explaining your case.

DURING THE MEETING



1. **Dress professionally.**

2. **Arrive early.** Your legislators are very busy. If you know you're going to be late, call ahead and let them know when you expect to arrive. Also be prepared to be flexible. Even though you have an appointment, you may be kept waiting or your meeting may be interrupted.

3. **Introduce yourself**, remind the legislator or staffer that you are constituents, and mention that you are members of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance.

4. **Be concise and clear about the issue.** Asking the person “Are you familiar with (___ issue)?” is a wonderful way to open the conversation. Have your prepared comments ready, but let the conversation evolve – make it a dialogue rather than a lecture. Focus on the aspects you know best and are most comfortable with.

5. **Be prepared to educate him or her about the issue.** We can provide you with materials to help explain complex issues. Ultimately, don't be afraid to say “I don't know” and offer to follow up with more information after the meeting.

6. Be clear that **this meeting is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue.** If you're meeting with staff rather than the legislator, 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. Get a business card from them, for follow-up.

AFTER THE MEETING



1. **Write a thank you note** to your legislator and/or staffer. Email or fax is fine.

2. **Send us your impressions of the meeting**, so that we know where your legislators stand and we can follow-up.

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

For more information, visit www.FarmAndRanchFreedom.org

Questions? Contact info@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org or (254) 697-2661