

Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation President Keith Olsen announced Feb. 10 that he will not seek re-election as president of Farm Bureau when his current term expires in December.

“When I became Farm Bureau president in 2002, my wife Doris and I discussed how long I would want to serve, assuming the delegates would want to re-elect me,” Olsen said. “We decided on six to nine years—two or three three-year terms— and now it’s nine years later. Time goes fast when you are enjoying what you are doing.”

Olsen, 66, succeeded to the Farm Bureau presidency on Aug. 1, 2002, when former President Bryce Neidig resigned. Olsen completed Neidig’s unexpired term and was elected as president in December 2002.

He was re-elected in 2005 and 2008. He was elected to the American Farm Bureau Board of Directors in 2004 and was most recently re-elected to the national board last month.

Olsen served as first vice president from 1997 to 2002, and was a State Board member representing the southwest Nebraska area since 1992.

He had previously held leadership roles in Perkins County Farm Bureau and served on state Farm Bureau committees.

Olsen made advocating for opportunities for young people to have a future in agriculture a hallmark of his presidency, speaking frequently on that theme and discussing how proposed legislation would help or hinder them in testimony before the Nebraska Legislature and to Congressional committees.

“Agriculture has expanded far beyond the production of food that goes on on our farms and ranches to include careers in ag business, research, and government,” said Olsen. “We need to show talented young people that they are wanted and needed in agriculture and that it’s a great career field.” During his presidency, Olsen played a lead role in advocating for Farm Bureau’s policy positions in support of alternative fuels, property tax relief, funding for water conservation projects in Nebraska from both state and federal sources, and support for allocating state lottery funds to the Nebraska State Fair.

He participated in several State of Nebraska and American Farm Bureau trade missions, and led Nebraska Farm Bureau’s campaign to end the federal estate tax and prevent “cap and trade” legislation that would have added new costs for farmers and consumers without significant environmental benefits.

During his tenure, Farm Bureau added a federal political action committee and made its “Friend of Agriculture” political endorsements in both state and Congressional races.

Olsen said he looks forward to accompanying his wife, a retired registered nurse, on mission trips; spoiling the couple’s seven grandchildren; being more involved in Grant’s United Methodist Church; and filling a pulpit occasionally in his role as a certified lay speaker in the Methodist Church.

The Olsens have three sons. Son Jeff runs the family farm near Grant where the Olsens grow wheat, certified seed wheat and ecofallow corn. Jeff has some plans to keep him busy on the farm, Olsen said.

“There comes a time for change, and for us that time will start Dec. 7, 2011,” he said.