



Legislative Update

October 25, 2024

Interim Update

We hope everyone has enjoyed the unseasonably warm weather, and the welcomed rain that is falling in some areas as we send this out. The Utah Farm Bureau Federation (UFBF) policy team is crisscrossing the state attending annual business meetings and preparing for the annual convention in November. As we continue annual business meetings, we encourage everyone to review our [UFBF Policy Book](#) and the annual business meeting packet, which can be found by clicking [here](#).

The Utah Legislature met for Interim Meetings in August and September, focusing on several topics of importance to farmers and ranchers.

During the August meetings, the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee received a comprehensive update on the Utah Soil Health Program. Tony Richards, the Soil Health Program Manager at the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), presented insights into the Soil Health Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from various Conservation Districts across Utah, including UFBF Board Member, Trevor Barnson. The Soil Health Program has been proactive in community engagement through workshops and field days, successfully completing 84 in-field soil health assessments. Notably, it has secured nearly \$4 million in grant funding for 12 projects aimed at enhancing soil health. Richards also highlighted the Soil Health Equipment Grant, which received \$1 million from the legislature for FY 2024. Out of 45 applications submitted, 35 were funded, totaling approximately \$1.7 million, with no-till drills being the most sought-after equipment type. You can view slides from the presentation [here](#).

At the same meeting, the Subcommittee listened to a presentation and discussed dam safety. The presentation from Teresa Wilhelmsen, State Engineer and Director of the Utah Division of Water Rights, and Candice Hasenyager, Director of the Utah Division of Water Resources, highlighted the critical importance of dam safety and the pressing need for increased funding to address aging infrastructure. The Utah Dam Safety Program, overseen by the State Engineer, is responsible for ensuring the safety of 227 high-hazard dams across the state. Alarming, nearly half of these dams — 107 in total — require rehabilitation to meet current safety standards. While the Division of Water Resources and the Board of Water Resources have been diligent in their efforts to provide loans and grants for dam upgrades, the scale of the problem far outpaces current funding levels. The estimated cost to upgrade the remaining 101 high-hazard dams in need of rehabilitation stands at a staggering \$444.4 million. The state has made efforts to secure additional funding, including a recent \$7.2 million allocation from FEMA's High Hazard Potential Dam Grant program. However, Candice and Teresa stressed that more consistent and

substantial funding is crucial to addressing the backlog of dam safety issues in a timely manner. You can view slides from the presentation [here](#).

The following day, the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee met to discuss a variety of topics. One topic of interest to UFBF was draft legislation related to the regulation of raw milk. Representative Cheryl Acton (HD-38) of West Jordan presented a draft bill to refine the rules governing raw milk production and sales. Key provisions include a new definition for the term “foodborne illness outbreak,” and requirements for UDAF to establish rules for the use of a third-party laboratory for testing of raw milk. The bill also outlines specific procedures for suspending and reissuing permits, issuing cease-and-desist orders, and handling foodborne illness outbreaks. It introduces more stringent testing protocols, including genome sequencing, and mandates quicker turnaround times for test results. Additionally, the legislation proposes to enhance transparency by requiring the department to provide certain information to producers upon request, such as test results and evidence used in regulatory decisions. The bill also clarifies the conditions under which a suspended permit can be reissued, and a cease-and-desist order can be lifted.

At the same hearing, UDAF Commissioner Craig Buttars presented on Representative Acton’s draft bill and raw milk regulation. Commissioner Buttars expressed concerns with the bill including the requirement for genome sequencing testing, timelines for testing, and requiring a second lab to test samples. UDAF is also concerned that some raw milk facilities advertise their milk as “Tested by UDAF.” They believe this can mislead the public into believing that raw milk is safe for all consumers.

September Meetings

During the September meetings, the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee listened to presentations on SITLA lands, Great Salt Lake, groundwater levels, and a draft bill titled “State Water Policy Amendments.” This proposed legislation aims to modernize Utah’s water policy by expanding water quality considerations to include groundwater, promoting monitoring in critical watershed areas, and encouraging state-wide water planning. The bill also introduces support for region-appropriate water reuse initiatives.

Later in the meeting, Teresa Wilhelmsen, State Engineer and Director of the Division of Water Rights, and Bill Keach, State Geologist and Director of the Utah Geological Survey, gave a presentation on groundwater levels. The presentation highlighted ongoing cooperative studies with the USGS, including groundwater investigations dating back to 1935 and current projects focused on areas like Cache Valley and the Great Salt Lake basin. The presenters noted that groundwater management plans are in place or are being developed for several regions across Utah.

The Utah Geological Survey discussed its new Utah Groundwater Data Hub, which was introduced as a resource for accessing groundwater information. The new Data Hub can be found by clicking [here](#). Of note, the presenters discussed concerning trends in groundwater levels across the state, with 137 wells showing moderate declines and 18 wells experiencing severe declines over a 30-year period. Only 22 of the wells used for monitoring groundwater levels were reported as stable or increasing. These trends suggest pumping above safe yield is occurring in many areas, raising concerns about land subsidence, and ground cracking, and loss

of aquifer water storage capacity. The Utah Geological Survey is conducting a new statewide study of land subsidence rates.

Finally, we wanted to highlight a few recent events involving the policy team. On September 23, UFBB held another meeting of its Water Academy. At the meeting, President ValJay Rigby encouraged members to engage in water-related topics and highlighted UFBB's commitment to innovative solutions amid water scarcity. Michael Drake from the Utah Division of Water Rights discussed the history and complexities of water rights change applications, and explained change applications filed to benefit from "saved water" made available by agricultural optimization projects. Dr. Matt Yost and Dr. Burdette Barker from Utah State University presented new irrigation system water savings calculators and the Ag-DRIP program to help farmers optimize water use. Tim Davis, Great Salt Lake Deputy Commissioner, outlined efforts related to the Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan, while Bart Leeftang from the Central Utah Water Conservancy District provided updates on Colorado River negotiations and introduced an Agricultural Water Resiliency Study. Hannah Freeze from UDAF announced the upcoming application period for the Agricultural Water Optimization Program, and Warren Peterson and Terry Camp discussed ongoing efforts in water law and policy, focusing on water programs already underway in state agencies. We plan to host a legislative preview Zoom call on water in December and another Water Academy event following the 2025 General Session of the Utah Legislature next spring.

On a related note, in a meeting held on October 17, legislative leadership announced a "pause" on new water legislation. Speaker Mike Schultz asked that resources be focused on implementing programs and statutes already in place, such as Agricultural Water Optimization. The programs and discussion of ag's role will be one topic of the upcoming spring meeting. Water companies will also be on the agenda.

On September 28, the policy team traveled to Iron County to participate in the Iron County Farm Bureau's "Pivot Party." On the tour, the group met with farmers and ranchers in the Beryl area to gain a better understanding of the diverse agricultural operations in the area. Representative Celeste Maloy joined the tour, and the group was honored to present her with the American Farm Bureau's "Friend of Farm Bureau" award for the 118th Congress. The award is based on voting records on priority Farm Bureau issues. Following the tour, the group enjoyed a delicious dinner.



On October 3, the North and South Box Elder County Farm Bureaus hosted a special Legislator Appreciation Dinner in Bear River City. The event featured a tasty lamb gyro dinner generously provided by the Utah Woolgrowers Association. After dinner, guests listened to updates from Sakia White, UFBF Regional Manager, Troy Forrest, Program Manager, Utah Grazing Improvement Program, and others.



On October 4, ValJay Rigby, President, UFBF, and Terry Camp, VP for Public Policy, UFBF, participated on a panel at Representative John Curtis' Conservative Climate Summit on the theme of "How to Protect our Food Supply – Food Security is National Security". ValJay moderated the panel, with Terry Camp being joined by Representative Celeste Maloy and Joel Ferry, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Natural Resources. Warren Peterson also presented on water economics, focusing on agriculture's need for water as a national security issue. The 3rd annual summit held at Utah Valley University explores conservative solutions to improve the economy, increase energy production, and improve agricultural resiliency. The day prior to the summit, ValJay and Terry, as part of a tour and lunch meeting, also had the opportunity to present Representative Curtis with his "Friend of Farm Bureau" award for the 118th Congress.





On October 8, Terry Camp presented Senator Mitt Romney with his “Friend of Farm Bureau” award for the 118th Congress at an event at the University of Utah. The “Friend of Farm Bureau” award is given each Congress (every two years) to those elected officials whose voting record is supportive of issues important to Farm Bureau.



As always, we encourage you to actively send our policy team questions or comments on topics of concern. We will provide a summary of the October Interim session as it concludes. You can view the upcoming schedule by visiting le.utah.gov. We hope you will attend your county Farm Bureau annual business meeting. You can find the dates and times of annual business meetings by clicking [here](#).

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