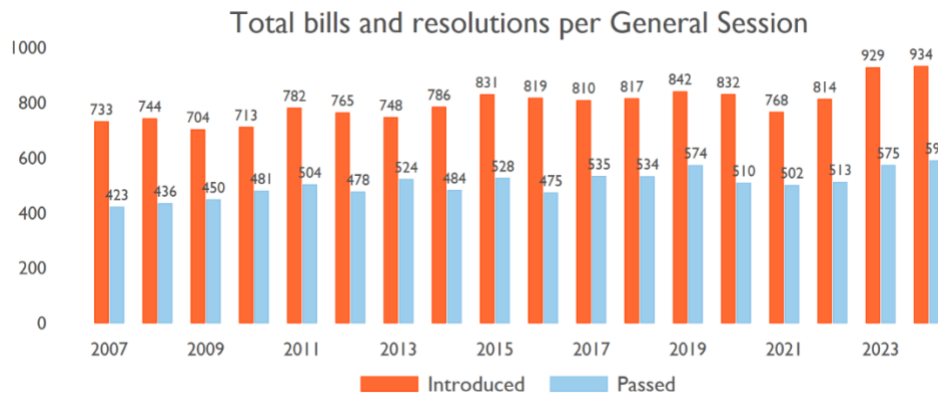




Legislative Update

March 8, 2024

Last Friday marked the conclusion of the 2024 General Session of the Utah Legislature. The legislature once again set a record for bills and resolutions introduced with 934, up five from last year, as well as bills and resolutions passed with 591, up 16 from last year. Utah Farm Bureau’s policy team was extremely active on Capitol Hill and was successful in advancing many policy goals, detailed below, that will support Utah farms and ranches.



(Credit: Adam Brown X Account @poliARB)

First, we would like to start with the funding highlights. Each year the Legislature must pass a balanced state budget. The Fiscal Year 2025 budget was approximately \$29.4 billion. Agriculture fared very well, and received funding for programs including:

Funding Item	One-Time Funding	Ongoing Funding
Diagnostician for Spanish Fork Utah Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (UVDL) UDAF & USU		\$175,000
Endangered Species Listing Prevention & Recovery	\$2 million	
Great Salt Lake Watershed Measurement Infrastructure	\$1 million	\$1 million
UDAF Agricultural Voluntary Incentive Program (AgVIP)	\$1 million	
UDAF Grazing Improvement Program	\$1 million	

UDAF Grazing Improvement Projects	\$175,000	
UDAF LeRay McAllister Working Farm and Ranch Funding		\$1 million
UDAF Utah Food Security Processing Grants	\$1 million	
Utah Future Farmers of America (FFA)	\$500,000	
Utah State Fairpark Security & Maintenance		\$1 million
Water Rights Data Management Improvements	\$3 million	

We supported many bills that will help Utah agriculture and influenced changes to many others. Here are some highlights:

[H.B. 31, Agritourism Amendments](#) (Rep. Albrecht / Sen. Sandall). This bill, which originated from recommendations made by our Utah Farm Bureau Agritourism PIRC, makes important improvements to Utah’s existing agritourism statute. Specifically, the bill adds agritourism to Utah’s ‘Right to Farm’ statute, clarifies that an agricultural tourism operation may be included in an agricultural protection area, strengthens liability protections for inherent risks, standardizes warning sign requirements, and sets up a voluntary registry kept by the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF).

[H.B. 280, Water Related Changes](#) (Rep. Snider / Sen. Sandall). This bill addresses the long-term stability of water resources by investigating ways to provide a reliable funding system for water infrastructure and ways to prioritize state funds to address the most critical needs. Specifically, the bill requires the Division of Water Resources to publish a state water plan that identifies available water resources, recommends strategies for water resource optimization, and guides efforts to manage available water supplies. In conducting the study, the division must seek input from a wide range of stakeholders, including agriculture. Additionally, the bill creates a Water Infrastructure Fund and requires the division to undertake a study related to the financing of water infrastructure, and a separate study on whether changes to the membership of the Water Development Coordinating Council are needed. The bill also modifies the membership of the Water Development Coordinating Council and requires the Council to adopt a unified water infrastructure plan no later than March 1, 2026. Utah Farm Bureau provided significant input on this bill and the bill was changed substantially based on our input. As originally introduced, the bill proposed an undefined fee for water users. We encourage our members to watch this issue closely. Farm Bureau will be actively involved in the studies required by this bill.

[H.B. 297, Utah Bee Inspection Act Amendments](#) (Rep. Shipp / Sen. Winterton). This bill restricts the ability of a governmental entity to regulate beekeeping on private property while providing for certain exceptions. The bill also requires UDAF to convene a working group to develop recommendations for standards that governmental entities must follow when

restricting beekeeping and authorizes UDAF to adopt rules based on the working group's recommendations.

[H.B. 363, Livestock Grazing Amendments](#) (Rep. Albrecht / Sen. Sandall). This bill deems federal grazing allotments as valid existing property rights in range management if the person granted an allotment possesses a valid permit or lease issued by a federal agency authorizing them to graze domestic livestock. For the statute enacted by this bill to apply to a given grazing allotment, the owner must graze the land in a manner consistent with sustained yield, demonstrate the land is primarily valuable for grazing, obtain the grazing preference, and begin grazing before a federal agency decides to withdraw the land from use. Rep. Albrecht introduced this bill in response to the Bureau of Land Management's draft Resource Management Plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, which includes alternatives that propose reductions in grazing within the monument. This bill provides the state of Utah with another tool to negotiate with federal agencies looking to limit grazing.

[H.B. 496, Public Land Use Amendments](#) (Rep. Albrecht / Sen. Balderree). This bill requires the Utah Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO) to recognize and promote principles of multiple-use and sustained-yield on federal public lands in Utah. The bill also prohibits Natural Asset Companies (NACs) from purchasing or leasing state public lands. Utah Farm Bureau is worried about NACs. An NAC is defined as "a corporation whose primary purpose is to actively manage, maintain, restore (as applicable), and grow the value of natural assets and their production of ecosystem services." As proposed, NACs would obtain licenses from private or public landowners for a 10-year or longer term and hold the rights to the ecological performance produced by natural or working areas, such as national reserves or large-scale farmlands, and have the authority to manage the areas for conservation, restoration, or sustainable management. We are concerned about a potential link between NACs and the Bureau of Land Management's proposal of April 3, 2023, to allow for "conservation leases." Recently, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) withdrew a proposal submitted to the Securities and Exchange Commission to list NACs on the exchange. Although NYSE withdrew the proposal, we remain concerned about NACs and will continue to watch the issue closely.

[H.B. 520, Fallow Land Amendments](#) (Rep. Kyle / Sen. Dan McCay). This bill protects private property rights by clarifying that landowners with land in agricultural use assessed under the Farmland Assessment Act or Urban Farming Assessment Act may fallow during periods of limited water supply, as part of prudent farm management practice, or to participate in voluntary water management or agricultural water optimization programs. The bill allows a landowner who fallows land to create a voluntary safe harbor against the loss of "Greenbelt" status and imposition of a rollback tax that might otherwise be imposed due to the fallowing.

[H.B. 522, Veterinarian Education Loan Repayment Program Amendments](#) (Rep. Albrecht / Sen. Winterton). This bill modifies the Veterinarian Education Loan Repayment Program that passed during the 2023 General Session. The bill allows for annual payments to be made, up to \$20,000, rather than a lump sum at the end of five years. The bill also expands the program to a veterinarian whose practice includes at least 30% livestock medicine. The hope is that this bill will increase participation in the loan repayment program.

[S.B. 18, Water Modifications](#) (Sen. Sandall / Rep. Snider). This bill is a follow-up to [S.B. 277, Water Conservation and Augmentation Amendments](#), which passed in the 2023 General Session. Among other things, S.B. 277 set up a process for water users who install agricultural water optimization projects to file applications with the Division of Water Rights to put the “saved water” to another beneficial use. S.B. 18 revises those provisions, moving them into the State Engineer’s section of the code, and adds language clarifying the definition of saved water and the administrative procedures to secure its separate use and protect it from forfeiture.

[S.B. 20, Agricultural and Wildlife Damage Prevention Board Amendments](#) (Sen. Sandall / Rep. Brooks). This bill extends the sunset date for the Agricultural and Wildlife Damage Prevention Board. This board is responsible for the formulation of the agricultural and wildlife damage prevention policy of the state. The board deliberations specify programs designed to prevent damage to livestock, poultry, and agricultural crops and the methods for the prevention of damage for selective control of predators, depredating birds, and other animals.

[S.B. 125, Secondary Water Amendments](#) (Sen. Hinkins / Rep. Albrecht). This bill increases the number of suppliers exempted from metering. Currently, only secondary water suppliers with less than 1,000 users are exempt from requirements, but this bill would expand to suppliers with less than 2,500 users. The exemption does not include any tributary to the Great Salt Lake.

[S.B. 222, Egg Production Amendments](#) (Sen. McKell / Rep. Burton). This bill extends by five years the deadline for a farm owner or operator to have a cage-free housing system for an egg-laying hen kept in an enclosure. In recent years, many large retailers made commitments to only sell cage-free eggs and were planning to impose those same restrictions on producers. Several large retailers, however, are now delaying those commitments. Utah egg producers requested this bill to allow them to get more useful life out of equipment and facilities and to allow for continued production of caged eggs until retailers are ready to follow through on cage-free egg commitments.

Our county spring issue surfacing meetings will soon be happening throughout the state. The Utah Farm Bureau has long been respected for our grassroots policy development and the sound, well-vetted, policies that it produces. We encourage the participation of our members to help make our policy development the best it can be. In preparation, we encourage you to review the [2024 Utah Farm Bureau Policy Book](#).

As always, we encourage you to actively communicate with our policy team with questions or comments on topics of concern.

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