



Legislative Update

February 18, 2026

Week Four (February 9-13, 2026)

As we head into Week 5 of the 2026 General Session, the Legislature is officially entering the third quarter of its 45-day marathon. More than 875 bills have now been introduced, and committee agendas are packed as lawmakers race to keep their bills moving.

Appropriations Update

This week, appropriations subcommittees finalized their rankings, and Utah Farm Bureau was pleased to see several key agricultural priorities receive strong consideration. In the February 11 meeting of the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality Appropriations Subcommittee, the Utah FFA Association's request was ranked number one, demonstrating the subcommittee's recognition of the value of agricultural education and workforce development needs. In addition, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food's priorities received attention, including a recommendation for an additional \$1 million in funding for the Agriculture Voluntary Incentive Program (AGVIP), which was placed in the mid-tier of the final rankings. You can view the final voting packet results by clicking [here](#).

Another appropriation request we are closely monitoring is [Rep. Carl Albrecht's](#) request for additional funding for the [Utah State University Extension Rural E-Commerce Accelerator](#). This request was prioritized at number 46 by the Economic and Community Development Appropriations Subcommittee. If you have participated in the program and benefited, or if you are in line to participate, we encourage you to contact your legislators and ask them to support funding for the program. You can find contact information for your legislators by typing in your address on this [page](#). You can view the full list of priorities from the Economic and Community Development Appropriations Subcommittee by clicking [here](#).



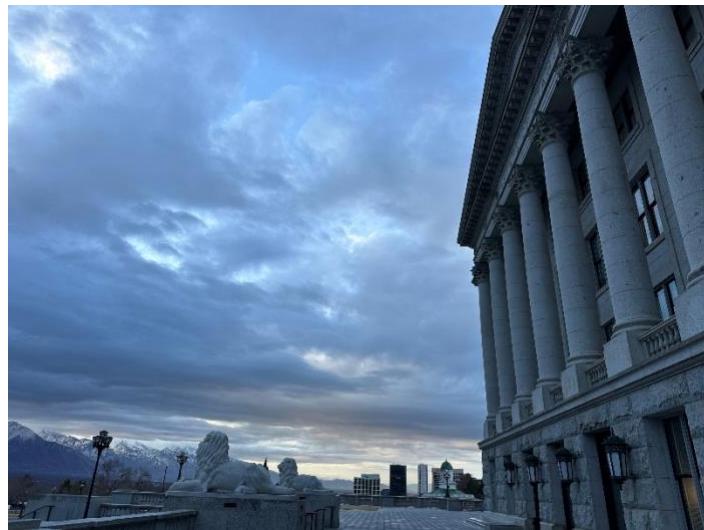
Photo Credit: Terry Camp

H.B. 490 Water Optimization Reporting Amendments

On February 11, Utah Farm Bureau testified on bills before the House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee. One priority bill was [H.B. 490, Water Optimization Reporting Amendments](#) sponsored by [Rep. Doug Owens](#). This bill was requested by Utah Farm Bureau to highlight the need for the state to better account for water that has historically been categorized as agricultural. The goal is to ensure that water counted as agricultural is actually still being used in agriculture. This is important so policymakers understand where water is truly being used and can focus conservation efforts in the places that will have the greatest impact. H.B. 490 does have a substantial fiscal note, which may make it difficult for the bill to move forward this session. Regardless of the bill's outcome, Utah Farm Bureau will continue working with the Utah Division of Water Resources and the Utah Division of Water Rights to ensure the state is appropriately accounting for agricultural water use and optimization efforts.

H.B. 431 Wildlife Crossing Amendments

That same afternoon, Utah Farm Bureau testified in support of [H.B. 431, Wildlife Crossing Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Scott Chew](#). This legislation proposes to reallocate \$2 million annually from the Transportation Investment Fund into a newly created “Wildlife Crossing Account” and establishes a voluntary contribution mechanism for Utahns applying for vehicle registrations, hunting licenses, or other state permits. Moving forward, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) will work in consultation with the Division of Wildlife Resources and key stakeholders to recommend and prioritize these much-needed crossing projects to the Transportation Commission. Of the \$2 million set aside, 10 percent must be spent on livestock-related safety projects. This bill could be helpful to ranchers in areas where livestock and vehicle collisions on highways may occur.



H.B. 185 Carbon Credit Amendments

On February 12, the Utah Farm Bureau testified in opposition to [H.B. 185, Carbon Credit Amendments](#) sponsored by [Rep. Troy Shelley](#). This bill seeks to regulate carbon credit transactions within the state by imposing a new tiered assessment, a 5% tax on carbon credit sales lasting less than 10 years, and a 10% tax on sales lasting 10 years or more. The legislation also establishes strict broker licensing requirements and grants the state a right of first refusal to purchase in-state credits. The Utah Farm Bureau believes this bill is unnecessary and introduces heavy-handed bureaucracy into a market that is currently functioning well on its own. By imposing unnecessary taxes and restrictive regulations, H.B. 185 will likely have a chilling effect on these transactions. For many farmers and ranchers, voluntary carbon credits could serve as an alternative revenue stream that rewards different conservation practices and helps their operations remain economically viable. Participating in carbon markets is an important tool in the agricultural toolbox, and we oppose state efforts that would discourage their use or penalize farms and ranches for utilizing them.

[H.B. 60, Water Rights Amendments & H.B. 63, Livestock Watering Amendments](#)

In the afternoon of the 12th, Utah Farm Bureau was present at the Senate Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee hearing to once again testify in support of [H.B. 60, Water Rights Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. David Shallenberger](#). This bill, which passed easily in the [House](#), modernizes Utah's water code to improve consistency, clarity, and efficiency in water rights administration. It removes outdated language conflicting with Utah's prior appropriation doctrine - "first in time, first in right" - and refines the protest process so the State Engineer focuses on technical water-rights issues rather than broader policy questions. H.B. 60 also cleans up redundant provisions, clarifies publication requirements for temporary change applications, and allows applicants denied a temporary change to seek permanent or fixed-time approvals. Its most significant reform clarifies the "public welfare" standard by tying it to beneficial use and impacts on other waters of the state, while acknowledging that other agencies often have responsibilities to address broader public welfare concerns. The bill also narrows judicial review to parties who suffer a particularized injury, focusing appeals on truly affected individuals. Altogether, H.B. 60 strengthens Utah's water management framework by keeping the State Engineer's role to the technical capabilities of its office, streamlining processes, and providing greater certainty for water users statewide.

Utah Farm Bureau again supported [H.B. 63, Livestock Watering Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Scott Chew](#), which also passed easily in the [House](#). The bill creates a process for formally recognizing sub-basin livestock watering claims to document historic livestock watering uses within defined sub-drainage areas and simplifies water rights management for grazers who opt into a program of sub-basin water rights management. It defines key terms, including "livestock," "small pond" (up to 2 acre-feet), and "large pond" (over 2 acre-feet). Water right holders may file sub-basin livestock watering claims with the State Engineer as diligence claims, water user claims in a general adjudication, or change applications. Claims must identify the sub-drainage area, are subject to forfeiture for nonuse, and must be based on historic use on private land or public land with a valid grazing permit. The bill restricts the expansion of beneficial use, limits water depletion to historic levels, and prohibits moving water between sub-basins if doing so impairs existing rights. It also gives guidance on pond construction. Small ponds may be built without a change application, while large ponds require approval and must meet dam safety standards.

[H.B. 326 Animal Depredation Amendments](#)

We finished the week on Friday the 13th (fortunately with no bad luck), by testifying before the House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee in support of [H.B. 326 Animal Depredation Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Rex Shipp](#). The bill protects livestock, crops, and rangeland by improving predator-control tools, strengthening enforcement against illegal introductions of feral swine, and providing clearer rules for producers and agencies working to prevent agricultural damage.

Specifically, the bill updates the Agriculture and Wildlife Damage Prevention Act by aligning definitions with the wildlife code and clarifying how the state manages depredating animals. It establishes a landowner aerial hunting permit and separate pilot license for taking coyotes from aircraft, clarifies rulemaking authority, allows permit or license suspension or revocation for violations, and establishes that the Agricultural and Wildlife Damage Prevention Board set predator control fees annually through the fee schedule with legislative approval instead of through periodic statutory changes.

The legislation also strengthens enforcement related to holding raccoons or coyotes in captivity and updates stray and feral swine laws. It defines feral swine, creates third-degree felony penalties for releasing, transporting, importing, or attempting to hunt or capture feral swine, authorizes UDAF, DWR, and peace officers to seize or destroy feral swine, and allows law enforcement to seize and potentially forfeit vehicles used in feral swine crimes (three words I never thought I would type).

Policy Resources

As the session continues, please remember that you can follow priority legislation through the Utah Farm Bureau Legislative Tracker, available under the "[**Policy & Action**](#)" tab on our website. The 2026 Policy Book is also now online, and you can read it by clicking [here](#). You can find your state representative and senator by typing your address in the search bar on this [page](#).

As always, we encourage you to submit questions or comments to our policy team regarding topics of concern.

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