



# Legislative Update

February 3, 2025

We are excited to share our first update of the 2025 General Session of the Utah State Legislature. Since the Session began on January 21, legislators have introduced over 600 bills and resolutions. The first two weeks have been a whirlwind and there is a lot to cover in this update, so let's jump right in.

On January 22, the Utah Farm Bureau kicked off the Session supporting the appointments of Bob J. Stevenson to serve on the Weber Basin Water Conservancy Board of Trustees, Timothy Hawkes to serve on the Board of Water Resources, and William Merkley to serve on the Board of Water Resources. In a fun moment of levity, [Sen. Kathleen Riebe](#) (SD-15 Salt Lake) asked the prospective appointees if they were members of the Utah Farm Bureau. You can re-watch the hearing [here](#).

Later in the day on January 22, Utah Farm Bureau spoke before the House Revenue and Taxation Committee in favor of [H.B. 237, Rollback Tax Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Casey Snider](#) (HD-5 Cache) and [Sen. Scott Sandall](#) (SD-1 Box Elder, Cache, & Tooele). This bill modifies how rollback taxes are handled when land no longer qualifies under the Farmland Assessment Act and the Urban Farming Assessment Act. It authorizes counties to retain and use 100% of the rollback tax revenue for preserving open space and farmland, a substantial increase from the current 20%. Any unused funds after five years will be directed to the LeRay McAllister Working Farm and Ranch Fund. This change creates a powerful mechanism to protect open space and farmland by providing a dedicated funding source at the county level. The bill's impact is amplified by the potential to use these funds as matching contributions for state, federal, and private conservation easement efforts. You can watch our testimony on the bill [here](#).

Just as we were hitting our stride at the Capitol, we left Utah to attend the 106<sup>th</sup> American Farm Bureau Convention in San Antonio, Texas. We enjoyed seeing so many of you in San Antonio. At the convention we interacted with other state Farm Bureau policy and advocacy professionals and enjoyed many unique networking opportunities.



Utah Farm Bureau group at the American Farm Bureau Convention in San Antonio, Texas



*House Committee on Agriculture Chairman GT Thompson with VP of Public Policy Terry Camp*

At the meeting of the delegates on January 28, we were successful in securing two important changes to the American Farm Bureau's policy book. These changes included language to clarify the need for renewable energy projects to perform rangeland conservation planning, addressing concerns about AUM loss, erosion prevention, and air quality maintenance. Additionally, delegates added language supporting requiring federal agencies to have a bonded reclamation plan in place before project approval, which must cover permanent material disposal. Delegates also added language supporting requirements that projects on federal lands meet the same environmental requirements as agricultural producers, such as HEL determinations and protections for threatened and endangered species and cultural resources. Lastly, delegates changed language about requirements for grazing preference transfers, specifying the need to purchase base property or livestock, ensuring adequate property ownership for qualification, and mandating stocking in the first year after transfer.

Although we attended the convention in San Antonio, we still actively took part in committee hearings remotely while we were traveling. On January 24, we testified on several bills before the House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee. One of the bills we supported was [H.B. 47, Public Lands Watering Rights Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Carl Albrecht](#) (HD-70 Sevier, Piute, Beaver, and Iron). This bill enhances safeguards for ranchers by establishing strict criteria for federal agencies' claims based on Public Water Reserve No. 107, an executive order signed by President Calvin Coolidge in 1926, and requiring federal agencies to obtain written consent from beneficial users (the grazing allotment holder) before filing change applications. By removing processes from the 2014 statute that were misused by federal agencies and other changes in the bill, this bill provides grazers greater control over changes to their livestock watering rights. You can re-watch the hearing [here](#).

On January 27, we testified in support of [H.B. 208, Urban Farming Assessment Modifications](#), sponsored by [Rep. Jason Kyle](#) (HD-8 Morgan, Weber). This bill aims to simplify the application process for the Urban Farming Assessment Act by eliminating the requirement for annual renewal applications. Under the proposed changes, once an initial application is approved, urban farmers would no longer need to submit yearly renewals unless specifically requested by the county assessor. This bill reduces administrative burdens on urban farmers while maintaining the integrity of the assessment program. You can re-watch this hearing [here](#).

On January 28, we were on hand at the House Health and Human Services Committee meeting to testify in support of [H.B. 253, Agriculture and Food Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Carl Albrecht](#) (HD-70 Sevier, Piute, Beaver, and Iron). This bill makes several key changes of interest to the Utah Farm Bureau. The bill expands the Veterinarian Loan Repayment Program by broadening the definition of a qualified veterinarian and allowing for more flexible practice requirements. This change could help address veterinary shortages in rural areas. Of significant importance to agricultural water users, the bill modifies the Water Optimization Program to allow for a 75% cost-share for water optimization measurement, telemetry, or reporting projects. Additionally, the bill updates predator control fee timelines and allows for ten-year brand registrations. You can re-watch the hearing [here](#).

The next day we were present at the House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee to testify in support of three bills. First, we testified in support of [H.B. 89, Water Transfer Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Gay Lynn Bennion](#) (HD-41 Salt Lake) and [Sen. Scott Sandall](#) (SD-1 Box Elder, Cache, & Tooele). This bill amends Utah's probate code to address issues surrounding the transfer of water company shares through the small estate affidavit procedure. The bill explicitly prohibits the transfer of water shares via this simplified process, which was previously available for the transfer of shares in estates with a total value of less than \$100,000. This change comes in response to complications arising from valuation discrepancies, appraisal challenges, legal threats to companies, and potential abuse of the system. By mandating that all estates involving water shares either go through the formal probate process, regardless of total estate value, or through transfers by the trustee of an estate trust, the legislation aims to ensure proper legal oversight for these valuable assets, protect companies from legal challenges, and provide a more comprehensive framework for resolving any ownership disputes.

Second, we supported [H.B.94, Exemptions from Dangerous Weapons Provisions](#) sponsored by [Rep. Calvin Roberts](#) (HD-46 Salt Lake). This bill clarifies laws on firearm use for harvesting livestock by UDAF-licensed and inspected custom slaughter businesses. This bill addresses challenges to the use of firearms arising from urban encroachment into agricultural areas. Custom slaughterhouses support local agriculture, reduce transportation costs for livestock, and provide consumers with access to locally raised meat.

Finally, we supported [H.B. 138, Food Labeling Amendments](#), sponsored by [Rep. Neil Walter](#) (HD-74 Washington). This bill addresses the labeling of cultivated meat products and plant or insect-based meat substitutes. The bill defines these terms and requires clear labeling of foods containing such products to ensure consumers are notified of their presence. This bill aligns closely with our newly adopted Utah Farm Bureau policy on labeling lab-grown meat products. You can re-watch the hearing [here](#).

In addition to attending hearings, our policy team has met with Chairman Albrecht, Governor Cox, Speaker Schultz, and President Adams to discuss our priorities for the session. The conversations were

productive, and we are optimistic that this session will produce many positive outcomes for our farmers and ranchers. Team members also met individually with many other legislators and legislative staff.



*VP of Public Policy Terry Camp, Beaver County Commissioners  
Brandon Yardley & Tammy Pearson, & Rep. Carl Albrecht*



*Policy team photo with Gov. Spencer Cox*



*Policy team photo with Utah House Speaker Mike Schultz*



*Policy team photo with Utah Senate President Stuart Adams*

As always, we encourage you to actively send our policy team questions or comments on topics of concern. Our 2025 Utah Farm Bureau Federation Policy Book is now online and can be found [here](#). Printed copies of the policy book will be distributed to county Farm Bureau leaders in the next few weeks. We also encourage you to visit our website where you can view our [bill tracker](#). We also hope you will join us for our annual Day on the Hill on Friday, February 21, 2025. More information on our Day on the Hill can be found [here](#). Have a great week!

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