

MINUTES  
**SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 20, 2024

**TIME:** 8:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW53

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Hartgen, Vice Chairman Nichols, Senators Foreman, Hart, Schroeder, Carlson, Zuiderveld, Semmelroth, and Taylor

**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** None

**NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

**CONVENED:** **Chairman Hartgen** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:00 a.m.

**INTRODUCTION: Introduction of New Page - Benjamin Price.** **Chairman Hartgen** introduced Mr. Price. **Mr. Price** stated he was from Garden City and a Senior at Centennial High School. He expressed his excitement for the page opportunity. He remarked his siblings had been involved in the page program and he was the youngest to follow in their footsteps. He described his education, interests, and future goals.

**PRESENTATION: Idaho FFA Officers Introductions - National FFA Week.** Delainee Ellsworth, President, thanked the Committee for the opportunity to introduce the Future Farmers of America (FFA) Officers. Each member gave a brief overview of the FFA program and what it meant to them. She mentioned with nearly 1 million members across the nation and 6,240 members across 100 chapters in Idaho there were many opportunities for members to advance in agriculture related careers.

**Clayton Moore**, State Treasurer, Idaho FFA, stated FFA students were able to invest in their futures through their blue jackets, through competitions, conferences, and meeting other FFA members across the State and nation.

**Josiah Knapp**, State Reporter, Idaho FFA, expressed the best opportunity with the FFA program was to take students straight from the classroom and expose them to agriculture at the personal level.

**Kamille Mirkin**, State Sentinel, Idaho FFA, reviewed different opportunities that FFA offered, such as competing in contests, serving in leadership positions as an officer, as well as serving the community.

**Carson Suchan**, Vice President, Idaho FFA, acknowledged that the FFA was concerned for the success of their members. Students had a wide range of subjects to explore and participate in after high school. There were many career opportunities in the agricultural field.

**Hallye Duckett**, State Secretary, Idaho FFA, stated the officers were elected in April 2023 at the Idaho FFA state convention to serve for the 2024 year. She said it was a great honor to wear the association jacket. She mentioned her and her teammates were part of the 2024 Idaho FFA State Convention being held in Twin Falls on April 3 - 6, 2024 at the College of Southern Idaho and insisted that the

Committee come celebrate with the team as they shared in the success of the Idaho members and their accomplishments.

**PRESENTATION: FFA - Agricultural Issues Team - American Falls, Marc Beitia**, 2019 Teacher of the Year, American Falls High School, presented the 2024 FFA Agricultural Issues Team and their topic on "Farm Workforce Modernization Act".

**Samantha Diaz** began the presentation with an overview of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. This established a program for non-citizen agricultural workers in the United States to get right with the law and earn legal status through continued agricultural employment and contribution to the U.S. agricultural economy. The FFA Agricultural Issues team of (Abbie Morgan, Arianna Chiapa, Ashley Christie, Joaquin Morales, Samantha Diaz, Shaylee Taylor and Stephanie Rosales) divided into two groups, one in support and one against the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. The students debated the issues on initial eligibility, options for permanent resident status, improving the H-2A Program, and increased access to green cards.

In summary, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which was first introduced and passed in the House of Representatives with strong bipartisan support in 2019, made reforms to the H-2A agricultural guest-worker program and created a first of its kind, merit-based visa program specifically designed for the nation's agricultural sector. The bill passed the House of Representatives again in 2021 with bipartisan support and awaited further action by the U.S. Senate (Attachment 1).

**PRESENTATION: Idaho Wine Commission Legislative Day, Roger Batt**, Legislative Educator expressed his excitement to introduce the new economic impact study. He reviewed the Idaho Grape and Wine Commission's purpose was to serve as the education and marketing arm for Idaho's grape and wine industry. He communicated in the last 20 years Idaho's grape and wine industry was the fastest growing agricultural industry and it continued to thrive today. **Mr. Batt** stated the first grapes planted were in Lewiston, Idaho in 1864. In 1984 the Idaho Wine Commission was formed. By 2007 the Snake River Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA) was approved. In 2015 the Eagle Foothills AVA was approved and in 2016 the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA was approved. He reaffirmed in 1975 the Ste. Chapelle Winery began as the first winery in Idaho. The Idaho Wine Commission was formed to market Idaho wines.

**Mr. Batt** commented on the challenges of the wine industry, such as the high land prices to expand and the development of land into subdivisions. The costs associated with getting into the wine industry were high, coupled with extremely high land prices. Other problems with expansion were zoning issues and ordinances.

**Senator Schroeder** asked if any steps had been taken to amend the ordinance issues on a local level without going through a legislative process.

**Mr. Batt** answered he had a meeting with the Ada County Commissioners on the zoning ordinances. The Commissioners did not approve the requests at the local level. The next step in the process was the legislature for a resolution.

**Moya Dolsby**, Executive Director, Idaho Wine Commission (IWC) introduced her staff and thanked her board of directors. She stated the IWC's mission was to "Be the united voice to market, promote, and champion all Idaho's winegrowers and winemakers." **Ms. Dolsby** spoke about funding, the budget, donations, and how the IWC was able to market and fund educational programs with these dollars. She mentioned 1,300 acres were planted, 64 wineries were in operation, and in 2022, \$314.1 million was the financial impact the IWC had on Idaho. She explained the importance of the Economic Impact Study, how every dollar of excise tax-based investment was associated with \$274 in business revenues related to

wine production across Idaho. The winery workforce increased to 540 up from 290 in 2017. She mentioned that visitors didn't come to tour Idaho vineyards or buy the wine. They were visiting family or on business trips and discovered Idaho wine. Approximately 890,000 visitors that traveled to Idaho incorporated a winery or tasting room tour into their trip in 2022 (Attachment 2).

**Martin Fujishin**, Commissioner, IWC Board of Directors, Fujishin Family Cellars, gave an overview of the wine making process. Grapes were grown, sorted, crushed, and juice fermented on the skins to extract the color. The wine was aged in barrels, then bottled. He stated it was hard to compete with the big wineries out of California. The efforts made to keep wine tasting open was an important aspect of his business to sell directly to the customer when they toured the winery.

**Senator Foreman** inquired if wine had to go through a distributor to be sold.

**Mr. Fjuishin** answered he could sell directly to Idaho customers, retailers and restaurants. To get a further reach out of State, he would use a distributor.

**Jay Hawkins**, Owner, Lanae Ridge Vineyard stated he planted his vineyard in 2016 in the Sunnyslope area of Caldwell. In 2021 he purchased the neighbors' 45 year old vineyard, this spring, 2024, he will have 62 acres of red wine grapes. He reaffirmed the investment required to start a winery was costly, with land prices skyrocketing in the valley, the costs of irrigation, plants, labor, and the financial challenges if a harvest did not grow. The first harvest of a vineyard occurred at year three. The overall investment was time, to reap a good grape harvest.

**Senator Hart** asked if the wine industry reached out to the University of Idaho Extension program to see if they had expertise growing grapes in Idaho climate.

**Mr. Hawkins** answered the University of Idaho opened a new extension program in Parma, Idaho. They had expertise in grape nutrition and had done studies on the different varieties. The Parma Extension Program knew the different challenges that faced the grape industry and were a great resource.

**Senator Semmelroth** inquired about the grapes that grew during the beginning stages of harvest, what specifically happened to them.

**Mr. Hawkins** explained during the first year the grape vines produced no fruit. The second year, the vines were cut to the ground to increase the energy to the plant, any grapes on the vine were cut off to the ground. It was all about the root structures the first two years. By year three, the first crop would grow.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Hartgen** adjourned the meeting at 9:07 a.m.

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Senator Hartgen  
Chair

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Melissa Price  
Secretary