

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 17, 2022

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Burtenshaw, Vice Chairman Bayer, Senators Patrick, Blair (Johnson), Zito, Ricks, Nelson, and Semmelroth

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Den Hartog

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

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Semmelroth** moved to approve the Minutes of February 8, 2022. **Vice Chairman Bayer** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

Senator Patrick moved to approve the Minutes of February 10, 2022. **Senator Ricks** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

Vice Chairman Bayer moved to approve the Minutes of February 14, 2022. **Senator Blair** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: Page Recognition. **Chairman Burtenshaw** recognized Lyndsey Lewis and praised her efforts as the Committee's Senate Page. **Ms. Lewis** reviewed her future education and career goals. She thanked Committee members for the opportunity to work with them.

PRESENTATION: Idaho Wine Commission Annual Report. **Maya Shatz Dolsby**, Executive Director, Idaho Wine Commission (IWC), introduced herself to the Committee. **Ms. Dolsby** reviewed the IWC's mission, current year budget and funding, 2021 accomplishments, and planned projects for 2022 (see Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION: In response to questions from **Senator Patrick** about yield statistics and the effect of hot weather on grapes, **Ms. Dolsby** responded that the yield per acre fluctuates based on the weather and differences in management practices. She added that hot weather could cause the grapes to shrivel, resulting in lower yields but higher sugar content. **Ms. Dolsby** said the quality of wine had remained consistent as winemakers learn new techniques.

Senator Blair asked if Ms. Dolsby had more up-to-date economic impact data. **Ms. Dolsby** replied that the last economic impact study was done in 2018 using 2017 statistics. She stated the IWC conducts a study every five years. **Ms. Dolsby** observed the cost is \$30-40,000 per study, making it too expensive for IWC to conduct more frequently. She reported she is presently writing a grant request for funds to commission a new study.

Senator Blair inquired if forest fires hurt grape quality. **Ms. Dolsby** answered that a fire can cause smoke taint and affect the taste of wine. She observed that a fire would have to be very close to a vineyard to impact the grapes. Recent large fires in California and Oregon did not have an effect, she added.

PRESENTATION: Real-Time Water Management Pilot Project. **Mike Meyers**, Watermaster, District 63 (District), introduced himself to the Committee. **Mr. Meyers** explained the District's jurisdiction and role in managing irrigation water. He described the District's pilot project to automate canal headgates using broadband technology (see Attachment 2). **Mr. Meyers** explained why water flows fluctuate and how automation saves water in the reservoirs by smoothing out the fluctuations. He noted that any water not allocated to a water right was an operational loss that must be shared by all District users. **Mr. Meyers** gave examples of water savings achieved through automation in other irrigation districts. He predicted District 63 could achieve a savings of 9,000 to 15,000 acre feet per water season.

Mr. Meyers advised it would cost \$5 million to fully implement the automation project throughout the District. He compared the project's cost of \$300 per acre foot to the \$3,000 per acre foot cost to raise the Anderson Ranch dam. **Mr. Meyers** noted the additional benefit of providing rural broadband connectivity along the Boise River corridor without having to bury fiberoptic cable.

DISCUSSION: In response to Committee questions about cost savings, other uses of the technology, and funding sources, **Mr. Meyers** replied the District would save some fuel costs, but the project would primarily save water for users. He estimated 50,000 acre feet of water savings if the entire District was automated. Saving 15,000 acre feet per year would allow for an extension of the irrigation season by a week or two, he said. **Mr. Meyers** mentioned that education is key to overcoming challenges in persuading irrigation districts to implement new technology. He reported the District's broadband technology could also be used in homes and schools and for precision agriculture.

Mr. Meyers advised that he had not identified a funding source at this time. He listed American Rescue Plan Act money, grants, or a Legislative appropriation as possibilities. **Mr. Meyers** observed that the irrigation districts and canal companies were unlikely to contribute because they would have to raise assessments. He noted the project could start immediately and be completed by the end of 2022 if funding was obtained. **Mr. Meyers** promised to obtain additional information on system backup procedures and the possibility of obtaining predictive data. He reported the system under consideration was one of the most secure available for this type of project.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 8:56 a.m.

Senator Burtenshaw
Chair

Jeanne Jackson-Heim
Secretary