

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, January 22, 2026

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Nichols, Vice Chairman Zito, Senators Lakey, Lent, VanOrden, Blaylock, Kohl, 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 Nichols** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:01 a.m.

WELCOME: **Chairman Nichols** welcomed all Committee members to the first Committee meeting of the session. Each Senator stated what district they represented, how long they had been a part of the Legislature, and their personal relevance to agriculture. She welcomed the new Senate Pages, Charles Butler and Cooper Smith to the podium to introduce themselves to the Committee and to answer questions.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW PAGE: **Mr. Butler** stated he lived in Massachusetts until he was seven, then moved and resided in Caldwell. He currently attended Caldwell High School as a senior.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Blaylock** vouched for Mr. Butler and stated she was his sponsor. In addition, she asked what his future plans were. **Mr. Butler** shared that he planned to serve a two year mission for his church then attend Brigham Young University to become a chiropractor. **Chairman Nichols** asked why he participated in the Senate Page program. **Mr. Butler** explained his history teacher had mentioned the program, in addition to interesting conversations he had with his father, who was involved in politics.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW PAGE: **Mr. Smith** said he recently moved to Nampa from Spain. He was participating in the Page program because he wanted to accompany a friend who was attending. He planned to attend college in Paris, France to study international business.

DISCUSSION: **Senator VanOrden** inquired about his background. **Mr. Smith** stated his parents wanted him to have an American high school experience. **Senator Semmelroth** asked if he planned to bring European snacks to Committee. **Mr. Smith** answered affirmatively.

PASSED THE GAVEL: Chairman Nichols passed the gavel to Vice Chairman Zito.

RULES REVIEW: **Vice Chairman Zito** explained that each Senator received a Rules Review binder with a spreadsheet that detailed the assignment of the rules.

PASSED THE GAVEL: Vice Chairman Zito passed the gavel back to Chairman Nichols.

PRESENTATION: Sugar Industry Update; Economic Condition of Farming. **Mr. Zach Patterson**, a sugarbeet farmer from Paul, Idaho, introduced a few Idahoan sugarbeet growers. He described the current economic conditions of sugarbeet farming as bleak. **Mr. Patterson** emphasized that his main concern was with small farms who would take the biggest financial hit. Sugarbeets were a political crop which required federal-level intervention to prosper in the market.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Lakey** asked if the hurdles that sugarbeet growers experienced could be improved through the State or if improvements needed to be made at the federal level. **Mr. Patterson** stated the issue resided at the federal level. **Senator Blaylock** asked how volatile the sugarbeet market was historically. **Mr. Patterson** explained that historically, sugarbeets were a steady and consistent crop. **Senator Blaylock** then asked what the decline was attributed to. **Mr. Patterson** deferred to Mr. Jake Hancock, who discussed the topic in his presentation.

PRESENTATION: Regenerative Agriculture. **Mr. Nathan Garner**, a sugarbeet farmer from Declo, Idaho, defined regenerative agriculture as a farming approach that focused on restoration and enhancement of soil. **Mr. Garner** illustrated the five methods of regenerative agriculture. He provided soil sample data which demonstrated the improvements in soil health achieved through these practices. He explained drawbacks, such as increased water use for cover crops and the use of roundup technologies to mitigate weeds in untilled soil. (See Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION: **Senator Kohl** inquired about the reason and type of cover crops that were used. **Mr. Garner** explained that cover crops helped to develop the soil and the type of cover crop used depended on the farmers' goals. **Chairman Nichols** asked if regenerative farming was a global practice. **Mr. Garner** believed it was mainly utilized in the United States.

PRESENTATION: Marketing Idaho Sugar. **Mr. Jake Hancock**, Vice President of Commercial Strategy with Amalgamated Sugar Company (Company), explained the Company was a grower-owned cooperative of over seven-hundred sugarbeet farmers in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The majority of their customer base included large consumer product companies. **Mr. Hancock** stated the Company made up about nine percent of the domestic sugar market. The Federal Sugar Program protected the domestic sugar industry from subsidized imports and ensured sustainable prices for domestic growers. The domestic sugar market declined sharply in 2025 due to overestimated demand and excessive imports. Consequently, domestic farmers were forced to trade at inviable prices, known as the forfeiture level. The industry was working with President Donald Trump's administration and the United States Department of Agriculture to manage supply appropriately and to update an outdated program. **Mr. Hancock** emphasized that if the United States became dependent on foreign imports for sugar, consumer prices would increase and food security would decline. (See Attachment 2).

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Nichols** inquired where most imports were from and wanted the outlook on federal-level price changes. **Mr. Hancock** explained that Brazil was the top sugar producer globally. He stated the Company's top priority was to change federal prices to a sustainable level. He requested the Committee's advocacy and awareness on the matter.

Senator Kohl asked why this matter was such a big issue currently. **Mr. Hancock** replied that inflation and poor supply and demand management lead to farmers to sell at forfeiture levels. **Senator Kohl** asked if the culture and health effects surrounding sugar created a dramatic effect on the industry and if so, how the industry should adapt. **Mr. Hancock** explained that as the population grew, so would sugar consumption. He emphasized that industry efforts focused on improving efficiency and productivity to lower costs.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Nichols** adjourned the meeting at 8:53 a.m.

Senator Nichols
Chair

Rachel Verrette
Secretary