

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 19, 2026

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Nichols, Vice Chairman Zito, Senators Merrell (Lakey), VanOrden, Blaylock, Kohl, Semmelroth, and Taylor

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Lent

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.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Vice Chairman Zito** moved to approve the Minutes of February 5, 2026. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

INTRODUCTION: **Leadership Idaho Agriculture (LIA) Class 46. Mr. Rick Waitley**, Director Emeritus, introduced the members of Class 46. Each student introduced themselves, stated where they were from, and their occupation (Attachment 1).

PRESENTATION: **Senate Page Farewell - Thanking Charles "Charlie" Butler for his service to the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee. Mr. Butler** was astounded at how kind the legislators were. He expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to work with the Legislature.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Nichols** asked Charlie what his future plans were. **Mr. Butler** explained he planned to serve a two year mission upon graduating from high school. Afterwards, he planned to attend Brigham Young University - Idaho where he would obtain his undergraduate degree, followed by enrolling in chiropractic school. **Senator Blaylock** noted she has known Charlie since he was a kid, as she was his Cub Scout leader. She shared positive feedback she had received from other senators regarding Charlie's performance.

PRESENTATION: **Idaho Potato Commission (IPC). Mr. Jamey Higham**, President, IPC, stated that the commission was established in 1937 to promote and protect the "Grown in Idaho" seal and to ensure consumer confidence in Idaho potatoes. The commission represented growers, shippers, and processors. He reported annual revenues of over \$15 million and financial reserves of over \$800,000. Trade was a key issue as there was increased competition with India and China on frozen potato products. Input costs were high and non-contracted product prices were low due to surplus potato supply. He noted that recent federal dietary guidelines prominently featured potatoes in contrast to past efforts that had sought to remove potatoes from school meals and vegetable classifications. **Mr. Higham** reported a recent agreement with the American Diabetes Association recognizing Idaho potatoes as a healthy carbohydrate option for individuals with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. He reported that approximately 8% of American adults were currently using GLP-1 inhibitors, which led to an overall decrease in food consumption. Additional challenges included labor shortages, farm succession, weather variability, water supply, crop disease, and urban encroachment on farmland. The IPC's commercials aired over 1,400 times on national television in 2025. He stated that the commission launched its 14th Big Idaho Potato Truck tour at Micron Technology, highlighting the

theme "potato chips and microchips" to connect Idaho's agricultural heritage with technological innovation (Attachment 2).

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Nichols** inquired about the classification of potatoes. **Mr. Higham** said potatoes were currently classified as a vegetable. **Senator VanOrden** requested labor succession be further explained. **Mr. Higham** explained next generations were sometimes hesitant to take over family farms, and IPC aimed to support multi-generational farms, advocating for making the legal and financial transition process easier. **Senator Van Orden** asked if there were farming concerns beyond labor, financial, and environment factors. **Mr. Higham** observed that technological advancements, including artificial intelligence, might both challenge and attract future generations to agriculture. He emphasized that rapid technological change, shifting trade policies, and tariffs had made long-term business planning more difficult, requiring future farmers to be flexible and possess quick problem-solving skills. He expressed optimism about the future of agriculture.

Acting Senator Merrell queried about the ratio of potatoes sold fresh versus processed. **Mr. Higham** responded about 40% of potatoes were sold fresh and 60% percent were sold processed. **Acting Senator Merrell** pondered about export trends. **Mr. Higham** said Idaho was a net importer of potato products. He explained that high domestic freight costs and competition with other countries caused challenges for national potato producers. **Chairman Nichols** asked about the future of the potato industry, particularly concerning a decrease in overall food consumption. **Mr. Higham** explained their marketing structure varied at the local, state, and national level and their focus was on the nutrition facts of potatoes. He noted it was easier to increase consumption among existing potato consumers than those who didn't consume them to begin with. In addition, consumption trends fluctuated. **Senator VanOrden** added that Idahoan Foods Company focused on protein marketing with their mashed potatoes as an example of addressing the current consumer trend.

INTRODUCTION: **Ms. Amaya Aguirre-Landa**, Executive Director, Idaho Grain Producers Association, introduced the board of directors and explained they were participating in various legislative events at the State Capitol.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Nichols** adjourned the meeting at 8:36 a.m.

Senator Nichols
Chair

Rachel Verrette
Secretary