

MINUTES  
**SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, March 19, 2026

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

**PLACE:** Room WW53

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Nichols, Vice Chairman Zito, Senators Lakey, Lent, Blaylock, Kohl, Semmelroth, and Taylor

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator VanOrden

**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 8:00 a.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Lakey** moved to approve the minutes of February 26, 2026. **Senator Taylor** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Vice Chairman Zito** moved to approve the minutes of March 3, 2026. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

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

**H 630** **AIRBORNE CONTROL OF PREDATORY ANIMALS - Amends existing law to provide for shooting of coyotes, wolves, and red foxes from aircraft.** **Chairman Nichols** stated this legislation added language to the current authorizing statute to allow for the repeal of the current administrative rule. The legislation moved language related to the process of requesting and issuing permits from an administrative rule to the existing authorizing statute. **Chairman Nichols** outlined permit details.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Taylor** asked about permit expiration. **Chairman Nichols** explained the expiration date was included with the permit rather than it being defined in statute.

**MOTION:** **Senator Lakey** moved to send **H 630** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**H 631** **AGRICULTURAL CERTIFICATES OF FREE SALE - Amends existing law to integrate IDAPA 02.01.05 into Idaho Code.** **Chairman Nichols** stated this legislation added language to the current authorizing statute to allow for the repeal of the current administrative rule. She detailed the current use of certificates of free sale and how the legislation moved language from the administrative rule to the existing authorizing statute.

**MOTION:** **Senator Blaylock** moved to send **H 631** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Taylor** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

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

**H 826**

**HONEY INDUSTRY - Amends, repeals, and adds to existing law to revise provisions regarding the Idaho Honey Commission (Commission).** **Representative Ehlers** explained most Idaho Commissions did not have regulatory authority, however, the Idaho Honey Commission was an exception. **H 826** would move regulatory authority from the Commission to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA). Additional code cleanup was included in the legislation.

**TESTIMONY:**

**Mr. Travis Jones**, Executive Director, Idaho Honey Industry Association (Association), testified in support of **H 826**. He stated the Commission had been around since 1970. This legislation would modernize the Commission with Idaho Code and the ISDA.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Vice Chairman Zito** asked if there was a threshold before a bee hobbyist had to register as a beekeeper. **Mr. Jones** stated the legislation did not impact hobbyists. **Vice Chairman Zito** asked what determined a commercial beekeeper versus a bee hobbyist. **Representative Ehlers** answered bee hobbyists were not to exceed 50 bee colonies. **Senator Taylor** asked about quality and identity discussed in the legislation. **Representative Ehlers** explained the ISDA would now regulate honey quality instead of the Commission. **Senator Taylor** asked if a list would still be available for producers for pesticide applicators. **Representative Ehlers** deferred to Mr. Knight. **Mr. Lloyd Knight**, Deputy Director, ISDA, explained bee registration was conducted under a different regulatory structure and that beekeepers may share their location to avoid pesticides. **Senator Taylor** asked if penalties were recently added or if they were already in existing statute. **Representative Ehlers** affirmed penalties were in existing statute, however misdemeanor penalties were removed.

**MOTION:**

**Senator Blaylock** moved to send **H 826** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Taylor** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**PRESENTATION:**

**Dairy West Legislative Update.** **Mr. Steve Seppi**, Chief Executive Officer, briefed the history of Dairy West and its representation of Idaho, Utah, Oregon, and Washington. He explained their dairy promotion assessment, in which 15 cents were collected per hundredweight of milk produced, which was split between state and national programs. These funds were utilized for promotional, educational, and research purposes. Dairy West collaborated with Dairy Management, Inc. and other national entities, while emphasizing regional consolidation to strengthen producer voice, improve efficiency, and expand market reach. **Mr. Seppi** delved into Dairy West's industry and their national and global economic impact. Idaho remained the largest dairy producing state in the region with about 350 dairy operations and 700,000 milk cows; 18.3 billion pounds of milk were produced in 2025. **Mr. Seppi** overviewed various boards, their members, and Dairy West's leadership.

**Ms. Heidi Martin**, Chief Operating Officer, described program implementation, including school nutrition support, athletic sponsorships, retail promotions, and farmer engagement initiatives. They promoted a balanced diet, increased dairy consumption, and increased consumer connection to local agriculture. **Ms. Martin** highlighted the importance of being a good steward for dairy farmers and discussed their four collective impact measures.

Dairy West spent \$20.4 million in 2025 and their 2026 budget was projected to be approximately \$30 million. **Mr. Seppi** discussed their financial stewardship process, as well as their 3 year strategic plan and budgeting calendar (Attachment 1).

**DISCUSSION:** **Chairman Nichols** asked who they primarily exported to. **Mr. Seppi** explained it varied annually, however, Mexico was currently their largest export destination. **Chairman Nichols** further asked what type of products were exported. **Mr. Seppi** responded milk powders, cheddar cheese products, butter, and whey protein products were their main export products.

**Senator Blaylock** asked about their workforce and their take on bills regarding E-Verify that were making their way through the Legislature. **Mr. Seppi** stated Dairy West was not a lobbying organization and deferred policy advocacy to the Idaho Dairymen's Association. He noted immigrant labor was critical to agricultural operations, with a significant Hispanic workforce supporting dairy farms.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Nichols** adjourned the meeting at 8:49 a.m.

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Senator Nichols  
Chair

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Rachel Verrette  
Secretary