

Nevada Board of Agriculture

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.



Nevada
Department
of Agriculture

Meeting Location: Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA)
405 S. 21st Street
Sparks, NV 89431
775-353-3601

Video Conference: NDA
4780 E. Idaho Street
Elko, NV 89801
775-753-1360

NDA
2300 E. St. Louis Avenue
Las Vegas, NV 89104
702-668-4590

Agenda

1. Open meeting-Chair Snyder called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

- A. Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Moment of Silent Reflection
- C. Virtual Attendee Reminders
- D. Roll call – Total Attendees (40)
 - Board of Agriculture (12):
 - Jim Snyder
 - Tom Baker
 - Mackenzie Campbell
 - Hank (James) Combs
 - Dave Coon
 - Debbie Gilmore
 - Varlin Higbee
 - Brooke Neubauer
 - Pete Paris
 - David Ruf
 - Craig Schank
 - Jimmy Stephensen
 - Deputy Attorney General (1):
 - Aaron Cuellar
 - Department of Agriculture (19):
 - J.J. Goicoechea
 - Doug Farris
 - Cathy Balcon
 - Monica Barbosa

- Meghan Brown
- Scott Clifford
- Heather Countryman
- Jake Dawley
- Julieanna Hendrix
- Patricia Hoppe
- Brittany Mally
- Blane Merkley
- Jennifer Mutz
- Bob Ragar
- Ciara Ressel
- Pete Rolfe
- Ray Saliga
- Chad Sestanovich
- Bill Striejewske
- Public Attendees (8):
 - Aiden Borghese
 - Doug Busselman
 - Heather Lackey
 - Justin Luna
 - Simon Solaegui
 - Lisa Voigtlaender
 - Ryan Voigtlaender
 - Morgan L. Wadsworth

2. Public Comment

- The Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) received no public comments in advance of the meeting, and no public comment was provided during the meeting.

3. Minutes

- A. *Approve December 4, 2025, meeting minutes (*for possible action*)
 - Board Member Schank moved to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2025, meeting.
 - The motion was seconded by Member Higbee and passed 12-0 (1 absent).

4. Board Management

- A. Discussion and possible action to approve regular meeting dates for the remainder of calendar year 2026 (*for possible action*)
 - Member Higbee moved to approve the following meeting dates for calendar year 2026: June 11 in Reno, September 10 in Elko and December 3 in Las Vegas.
 - Director Goicoechea stated that the June 11 meeting will be tentatively held inside the Doc Bar in the Main Arena at the Nevada State Fairgrounds on the first day of the official State Fair of Nevada.
 - Member Campbell seconded the motion. The motion passed 12-0 (1 absent).

5. Director's Report

A. Honor former board member Heather Lackey – J.J. Goicoechea, Director (*for information only*)

- Director Goicoechea recognized former board member Heather Lackey for her years of service to the NDA and the Board. He noted that Lackey was first appointed to represent the Pest Control industry in December 2016 and served under three Governors. He expressed appreciation for her many contributions, dedication and service.

B. Director's Report – J.J. Goicoechea, Director (*for information only*)

- Director Goicoechea introduced Aaron Cuellar as the NDA's Deputy Attorney General. Mr. Cuellar succeeds Richard Yien and now serves as the department's legal representative through the Office of the Attorney General.
- The Director stated that weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings continue across the department, including those focused on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and New World screwworm. Coordination is ongoing with the National Governors Association and the Western Governors' Association on shared policy interests, including the Farm Bill. The department also continues participating in multi-state discussions related to federal land management with partners in Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Montana and other states.
- Construction coordination meetings are held weekly at the Nevada State Fairgrounds. The Nevada Western Heritage Center Alliance received a \$6 million grant to fund infrastructure work at the Fairgrounds, including water, sewer, and stormwater improvements. Work on the sewer lines, fire-flow systems, and other infrastructure is in progress while events continue onsite.
- As Chair of the Intergovernmental Executive Committee, the Director continues to engage in discussions regarding the Navy's expansion of the Fallon Range Training Complex, including efforts to protect agriculture and address multigenerational compensation for affected ranchers.
- The Director provided opening remarks at the American Sheep Industry Association's annual meeting, followed by a producer dinner. He noted that concerns voiced by sheep producers at the event are being thoughtfully considered by the department.
- The Director attended the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Winter Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. He also met with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Nevada's congressional delegation to discuss appropriations and program needs, including APHIS Wildlife Services and Veterinary Services.
- The Director raised concern that Nevada currently lacks a federal Veterinary Medical Officer, and several regional federal retirements or temporary reassignments have reduced APHIS Veterinary Services capacity. The Director is coordinating at the federal level to request restored staffing.

- Coordination with western states continues on funding needs for follow-up treatments within the Mormon cricket and grasshopper suppression program.
- Engagement continues with federal partners on wildfire response planning as a new federal wildfire department is rolled out. The Director noted that early season drying conditions have heightened concern about the potential for wildfire.
- The Director continues engaging in the Governor's Sub-cabinet meetings and Fuel Resiliency Committee meetings. The Fuel Resiliency Committee is evaluating options to diversify Nevada's fuel infrastructure.
- The Director noted leadership changes at the Governor's Office of Energy and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.
- The NDA is working with the Governor's Office to request a bill draft to create a sixth division. The proposed Division of Food Safety will consolidate dairy safety, food safety, the State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program, cottage food oversight and related operations to improve efficiency. The proposal includes one new position and the transfer of existing food safety staff.
- The new agriculture/FFA specialty license plate is now available through the Department of Motor Vehicles. Proceeds support agricultural promotion efforts and FFA, as established by statute.
 - Member Higbee expressed concern about inadequate compensation for ranchers affected by the Navy's expansion. He noted that grazing is a right under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, not merely a privilege or lease, and emphasized the need for federal agencies to recognize that. He stated that those points should be raised during Intergovernmental Executive Committee meetings.
 - Director Goicoechea clarified that valuation and compensation negotiations between the Navy and affected permittees are handled privately and are not discussed in meetings, as permittees do not wish to disclose private financial information publicly. He noted that current offers from the Navy exceed today's market value of Animal Unit Months (AUMs); however, challenges remain regarding multigenerational valuation. The Navy and Congress are applying a 100-year benchmark to define "multigenerational," which significantly increases the long-term value of lost AUMs. The Director provided the Navy and permittees with inflation-adjusted figures based on a 2001 study commissioned by the Nevada Board of Agriculture and the NDA to help inform negotiations. He emphasized that these discussions are sensitive and remain confidential, but the study is available for anyone interested in reviewing it.
 - Member Paris thanked the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and the NDA for attending the American Sheep Industry Association's annual meeting and reception and helping facilitate a productive discussion.

B. Board Member Updates on Represented Industries *(for information only)*

- David Ruf, representing Nursery Stock, reported recent challenges in the nursery industry following Oregon's decision to defund its Japanese beetle quarantine program. He noted that nursery shipments bound for Nevada were temporarily quarantined after February 15. He acknowledged significant coordination by NDA's

Division of Plant Health and Compliance in reaching an agreement with the Oregon Department of Agriculture to allow qualifying nursery stock to enter Nevada year-round. He expressed concern about limited timely communication to northern Nevada nursery owners as the situation unfolded and requested improved outreach in the future. He also expressed interest in working with the NDA after the season to review and update existing statutes affecting the nursery industry. He concluded by stating that, despite recent challenges, conditions remain favorable for the nursery sector.

- Mackenzie Campbell, representing Petroleum, reported that Nevada is entering a bullish fuel market, with prices rising due to supply constraints that predate recent conflict escalation in the Middle East. She explained that Nevada is at the end of the California pipeline, and refinery closures are reducing supply to Nevada and neighboring states. She noted that the Governor's Fuel Resiliency Committee is evaluating long-term solutions. Increased supply from Salt Lake City, Utah, is helping meet current demand, but price increases are expected until broader supply issues are resolved.
- Varlin Higbee, representing Semi-Range Cattle Production, raised concerns about the long-term loss of livestock grazing opportunities due to the retirement of federal grazing allotments. He noted that many allotments have been eliminated over time, despite federal directives encouraging domestic livestock production. He emphasized that, under the Taylor Grazing Act, grazing is intended as a protected use and expressed concern that federal agencies are not upholding that intent. He urged the state to examine the status of retired allotments, particularly in southern Nevada, where the number of active grazers has declined significantly. He also provided an update on range conditions, noting that some areas have improved following recent storms while others, especially in central Nevada, remain dry.
- Debbie Gilmore, representing Specialty Crops, reported that the Mason Valley Beekeepers recently held its 16th Annual Beekeepers Conference and expressed appreciation to Director Goicoechea and State Entomologist Bryant McDowell for their participation. She noted that beekeepers are currently securing replacement bees from neighboring states, underscoring the need to monitor for pests and diseases. She announced that the American Honey Producers Association and the California State Beekeepers Association are hosting their convention jointly in Reno. Member Gilmore also discussed concerns regarding the expansion of data centers and solar fields, which are increasing pressure on water and power resources. She stated that *Varroa* mites continue to cause significant colony losses and that researchers are monitoring the potential introduction of the *Tropilaelaps* mite from Asia, which may be entering the U.S. from Canada.
- Craig Schank, representing Veterinary Medicine, said he attended a Nevada Veterinary Medical Association board meeting, where much of the discussion focused on emerging veterinary school programs. He said that Director Goicoechea's father, former State Senator Pete Goicoechea, played a significant role in establishing the partnership between the State of Nevada and Utah State University, which provides \$8 million over ten years to support 70 Nevada students in attending the veterinary program. The program's inaugural class enrolled 42 students, including 2 from Nevada. For the veterinary class starting in the fall of

2026, 80 students will be admitted; of 39 Nevada applicants, 27 passed the initial screening and 17 were offered positions, though funding remains available for only 7. Additional students may receive support through the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. Member Schank noted that multiple institutions are moving to establish veterinary schools, including Roseman University, a private institution planning to launch a class of 100 students in 2028. He added that UNR is also proposing a veterinary school, which could potentially be up and running by 2028 or 2029. He identified a significant challenge facing all veterinary programs: the nationwide shortage of qualified instructors. Additionally, beginning July 1, tuition for veterinary programs will be capped at \$50,000, which may further impose budget constraints on institutions. He concluded by acknowledging the complexity of the current landscape as multiple entities pursue new veterinary programs. Additionally, Member Schank, who serves on the Predatory Animal and Rodent Control (PARC) Committee, asked for clarification regarding the PARC program and investments in starling abatement activities. He encouraged improved coordination to ensure timely treatment and suggested allowing producers—particularly dairymen who often hold pesticide and herbicide applicator permits—to play a more active role in applying treatment products. He emphasized that dairies already have staff on site who understand local conditions and can apply treatments effectively and expressed hope that producers could be integrated into the process.

- Chair Snyder thanked Director Goicoechea for his work in addressing the H-2A wage issue involving the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and UNR. He noted that the matter had presented challenges but that a favorable resolution was ultimately reached.
 - Director Goicoechea explained that DETR commissioned UNR to conduct a prevailing wage study for H-2A contracts, but unclear instructions caused the University to produce a broad, non-specific survey. The DOL then approved the flawed survey, creating serious complications and disparities for both employers and workers. The Director engaged with University leadership and Nevada’s congressional delegation to resolve the issue, and the DOL rescinded the survey as of March 18, restoring the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.
 - Chair Snyder also raised concern about the decline in onion exports. He observed that the latest export numbers represent only a small portion of the overall crop and that the onion market is highly volatile from year to year, making trends difficult to interpret. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that the numbers are concerning for onion producers.
 - Blane Merkley, Industry and Global Trade Coordinator, reported ongoing discussions with Peri and Sons, Representative Horsford’s office and other federal officials about challenges posed by low-cost onion imports from Mexico. He noted that options such as a tariff-rate quota are being explored and that sanitary requirements and trade rules under the United States – Mexico-Canada Agreement complicate potential actions. However, federal partners continue to review solutions to support domestic onion production.
- Dave Coon, representing Dairy Production, reported that the dairy industry is performing well. For example, cottage cheese sales increased 20 percent nationally

last year. He stated that while demand has created some temporary shortages, the market is expected to adjust. He added that plant-based milk substitutes appear to be leveling off or declining, and that fluid milk represents approximately 90 percent of the market. He highlighted that the 2025-2030 federal dietary guidelines strongly affirm dairy as an essential part of a healthy diet and that the National School Lunch Program now permits schools to offer whole milk. Member Coon emphasized the importance of continued growth, quality assurance, and oversight in the industry and expressed appreciation for the NDA's commitment to maintaining these standards.

- Brooke Neubauer, representing Supplemental Nutrition, reported that eligibility changes for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, originally scheduled for March 1, have been postponed to May 1, temporarily easing pressure on the food distribution system. She noted that a surge in need is still expected in May and that new populations, including Transportation Security Administration employees affected by the partial federal government shutdown, are increasingly seeking food assistance. She emphasized that this trend reflects a widening of food insecurity and places additional strain on the system, which cannot easily absorb sudden increases in demand. She stated that partners such as Three Square Food Bank are relying more on retail rescue, though that supply is inconsistent, underscoring the need for coordinated community efforts and efficient use of The Emergency Food Assistance Program resources. She concluded by thanking the NDA and community partners for their collaboration.
- Jimmy Stephensen, representing Pest Control, thanked former Board member Heather Lackey for her long-standing representation of the industry. He noted that mosquito activity is increasing in southern Nevada due to the mild winter, with the *Aedes* genus presenting challenges. He stated he is looking forward to working with Ray Saliga, Deputy Administrator of the Division of Plant Health and Compliance, on new software for termite inspections, which are currently being conducted using paper forms. He added that the industry overall is doing well, though rising fuel and operational costs remain concerns.
- Pete Paris, representing Semi-Range Sheep Production, reported that the Nevada Wool Growers Association was fortunate to have the American Sheep Industry Association Convention held in Nevada this year. He highlighted that national attendance has decreased compared to past decades. He thanked Director Goicoechea for delivering welcoming remarks at that event. Member Paris noted that western ranges received very little mountain snow, creating concerns for the upcoming season. Current heat conditions may further impact forage. He concluded by stating lamb and wool markets have improved somewhat, and producers are hoping for spring rain and a wetter, cooler summer.
- Tom Baker, representing Semi-Range Cattle Production, reported that the region has experienced one of its driest winters on record, leading to declining hay stocks and rising prices for feeder hay. Producers are concerned about poor spring growth and limited pasture if the dry conditions persist, though strong cattle prices are helping offset some impacts. He noted a significant increase in elk pressure on private pastures and crop fields compared to a decade ago, with consistent impacts now occurring across multiple valleys. He stated that landowners may need to explore options to address this growing issue. Member Baker concluded by thanking

Director Goicoechea for his efforts on the H-2A wage matter.

- Hank (James) Combs, representing General Agriculture, reported that producers throughout the state continue to raise concerns about increasing elk pressure on private agricultural lands and noted that feedback has been provided to the Board of Wildlife Commissioners. He stated that UNR Extension recently hosted the Roots-2-Results: Cultivating Farm and Food Systems conference. He noted ongoing dry and hot conditions across central Nevada that may contribute to wildfire risk and expressed concern regarding regulations implementing Senate Bill 260 of the 2025 Session. He added that hay growers continue to face market challenges and also expressed concern about rising fuel costs. Member Combs stated he is looking forward to the state fair and was pleased to see rodeo champions welcomed at the White House. He shared that due to an increase in swine populations, his own farm will be adding two new barns. He concluded by inviting the Board to a Las Vegas Livestock open house on March 28.

6. Division of Administrative Services

A. Board Update – Cathy Balcon, Administrator (*for information only*)

- The official State Fair of Nevada will return June 11-13.
- The fifth edition of the Nevada Craft Beverage Passport was released on January 30.
- The Communications team has received 20 public records requests this year, and 10 have been processed.
- Staff supported three events promoting agricultural literacy efforts in Washoe, Lander and Humboldt Counties.
- Fiscal staff officially kicked off the budget build process for the 2028-2029 biennium.
- Administrator Balcon provided a brief overview of Budget Account (BA) 4557, which supports the Livestock Enforcement program in the Division of Animal Industry. She noted that the account is funded through a combination of General Fund appropriations and cost allocations. One agricultural police officer (APO) position is funded 50 percent by BA 4545, within the Division of Plant Health and Compliance, while the remaining four APO positions are funded 50 percent by BA 4546, within Animal Industry. All positions receive the other 50 percent from the State General Fund.

7. Division of Animal Industry

A. Board Update – Chad Sestanovich, Administrator (*for information only*)

- Updates to Chapter 571 of the Nevada Administration Code (NAC), regarding trichomoniasis testing, became effective in February. Concerns about trichomoniasis have begun to decline, due in part to the effectiveness of these updated regulations. The division is now reviewing Chapters 446 and 587 of NAC to identify needed updates before hosting public workshops.
- Regarding the PARC program, Administrator Sestanovich explained that Wildlife Services matches the amount of product purchased by the NDA; however, because the product was on backorder, the NDA was unable to purchase additional quantities this year. He noted that treating a dairy operation requires substantially larger quantities than egg treatments and emphasized that all applications must be

conducted under the direct supervision of Wildlife Services. Although supplies were limited, Administrator Sestanovich confirmed that there was sufficient product available to treat eggs. Additionally, he noted that staffing shortages persist within Wildlife Services, and NDA field assistants are helping to fill critical roles where possible to ensure producers are supported as much as possible.

- Administrator Sestanovich thanked division staff for processing a significant increase in equine entry permits following an Equine Herpesvirus (EHV-1) outbreak in neighboring states and emphasized the importance of traceability.
 - Dr. Schank asked for clarification regarding the cost of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Electronic Identification (EID) tags. Administrator Sestanovich explained that the state has exhausted most of its current supply and is awaiting its next allocation from the USDA. Dr. Rolfe noted that the state secured additional tags this year, which have since been depleted, but confirmed that an accurate count of available tags will be available in May. Director Goicoechea clarified that, while orange brucellosis tags are preferable, Nevada is not required to use them, and he does not anticipate any disruption to vaccination efforts even if the supply of orange brucellosis EID tags runs low.
 - Dr. Schank asked for additional information regarding the confirmed case of Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) in Nevada. Dr. Rolfe stated that EIA and piroplasmiasis cases in this region are often concentrated within a specific demographic of non-sanctioned racing horses, where unregulated practices and limited testing contribute to disease spread and make tracing difficult. He said that while the risk to the broader equine population remains low, veterinarians are increasingly requiring testing before accepting horses from this demographic.
 - Dr. Schank asked for clarification regarding NDA's inspections for illegal dairy products. Director Goicoechea explained that illegal dairy products—including raw milk, unregulated camel milk and noncompliant cheese—continue to appear in retail settings and present public health concerns, and NDA staff actively inspect for these products to protect consumers.

Chair Snyder called for a break at 10:36 a.m.

Chair Snyder called the meeting back to order at 10:49 a.m.

8. Division of Food and Nutrition

A. Board Update – Patricia Hoppe, Administrator (*for information only*)

- The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program will begin next month and remains one of the NDA's most impactful programs for seniors.
- The Home Feeds Nevada program is anticipated to begin operations after July 1, at the start of State Fiscal Year 27.
- The NDA's new Las Vegas food distribution warehouse is fully operational. The department received positive media coverage following the ribbon-cutting celebration in December. Administrator Hoppe noted that consolidating all food under one roof has improved efficiency of food distribution activities.

9. Division of Measurement Standards

A. Board Update – Bill Striejewski, Administrator *(for information only)*

- Schedules for the upcoming season of livestock scale inspections for both the Sparks and Elko offices have been finalized, and current conditions indicate that weather will not affect the schedule. Monthly schedules will be distributed on social media as the season approaches, and full schedules are available by contacting the division.
- The division is reviewing NDA-specific sections of the State Energy Security Plan. The goal is to ensure that the document is updated on a regular basis.
- Administrator Striejewski emphasized that Measurement Standards staff stand ready to support Director Goicoechea and the Governor’s fuel resiliency team as well as the Energy and Convenience Association of Nevada.
- While fuel quality complaints have decreased, the division has seen an increase in complaints regarding discrepancies between fuel prices posted on signage and the higher prices displayed at pumps, which constitute violations of Chapter 590 of the Nevada Revised Statutes. Recent statutory changes have strengthened the NDA’s authority to address these issues, and staff have been acting promptly on such complaints.

10. Division of Plant Health and Compliance

A. Board Update – Meghan Brown, Administrator *(for information only)*

- One participant attended a recent workshop for NAC 557 to update federal definitions related to hemp. A hearing is scheduled for April 14, with participation available in Sparks, Elko, Las Vegas and remotely.
- The NDA has provided comments on several Bureau of Land Management actions related to grazing, recreation and mine expansion to ensure the department’s interests in noxious weeds and livestock grazing are represented. Comments were also submitted on the Naval Air Station Fallon Wildland Fire Management Plan concerning the evaluation of fuel loads.
- Regarding the data in the Plant Health and Compliance board report showing decreased onion exports, Administrator Brown clarified that the NDA does not inspect domestic onion shipments. The decrease primarily reflects reduced shipments to Canada due to market conditions, tariffs and other factors.
- The applicator trainee program implemented following the passage of Senate Bill 159 of the 2023 Session has continued to see success, with 24 trainees and a significant increase in testing volumes, particularly in Sparks and Las Vegas.
- Staff from the Noxious Weeds program continue to address the ventenata infestation in Washoe Valley, including coordination with private landowners.
- State Entomologist Bryant McDowell is modernizing the division’s approach to outreach and education related to Africanized honeybees in southern Nevada. The NDA distributed information related to that and the quarantine zone movement permit process.
- The 2026 Mormon cricket and grasshopper season is underway. Three reports of crickets have been received so far, including two in Eureka County and one in Lander County. All environmental assessments and treatment requests have been completed, allowing immediate implementation once the treatment window opens.

- There has been an increase in garlic acreage for the garlic seed certification program. The Native Seed program logged an increase as well, including 65 acres of Great Basin wildrye planted in central Nevada.
- The Sagebrush Ecosystem Program has seen seven new ranch enrollments in the Conservation Credit System. Administrator Brown commended Skyler Monaghan for his work, including with ensuring coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's new Conservation Benefit Agreement structure.
- The department is preparing to launch electronic wood-destroying pest inspection reports and is coordinating with the Oregon Department of Agriculture to ensure nursery shipments into Nevada remain free of Japanese beetles.

11. Public Comment

The NDA received no public comments in advance of the meeting, and no public comment was made during the meeting.

12. Final Roll Call

13. Adjournment

Chair Snyder adjourned the meeting at 11:03 a.m.