

Nevada Board of Agriculture

Meeting Minutes – Draft

Wednesday, June 4, 2025, 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 2300 East St. Louis Avenue Las Vegas, NV 89104 702-668-4590	NDA 4780 East Idaho Street Elko, NV 89801 775-778-0270
--------------------------	--	---

Agenda

1. Open meeting-Chairman Snyder called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

- A. Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Moment of Silent Reflection
- C. Virtual Attendee Reminders
- D. Roll call – Total Attendees (42)
 - Board of Agriculture (12):
 - Jim Snyder
 - Tom Baker
 - Mackenzie Campbell
 - Hank (James) Combs
 - David Coon
 - Debbie Gilmore
 - Varlin Higbee
 - Heather Lackey
 - Brooke Neubauer
 - Pete Paris
 - David Ruf
 - Craig Schank
 - Deputy Attorney General Richard Yien (1):
 - Department of Agriculture (18):
 - J.J. Goicoechea
 - Doug Farris
 - Cathy Balcon
 - Meghan Brown
 - Scott Clifford
 - Jeff Ganuza

- Julieanna Hendrix
- Patricia Hoppe
- Ian Knight
- Blane Merkley
- Ciara Ressel
- Pete Rolfe
- Ray Saliga
- Chad Sestanovich
- Bill Striejewski
- Aaron Tuttle
- Scottie Vega
- Jessica Whitfield
- Public Attendees (11):
 - Bill Chan
 - Jim DeChambeau
 - Pablo Delaney
 - Mimi Diebold
 - Susan Feeser
 - Nicole Hayes
 - Robert Hooper
 - Bonnie Little
 - William Payne
 - Tracy Wilson
 - 12083582487

2. Public Comment

The Nevada Department of Agriculture received no public comments in advance of the meeting.

- **Public Comment (Sparks)**
 - Jim DeChambeau of Mason Valley urged the creation of a flag for the Nevada Department of Agriculture, particularly for display at the Nevada State Fairgrounds.

3. Minutes

- A. *Approve March 19, 2025, meeting minutes (*for possible action*)
 - Board Member Combs moved to approve the minutes of the March 19, 2025, meeting.
 - The motion was seconded by Member Schank and passed 12-0 (1 absent).

4. Board Management

- A. Board Member Updates on Represented Industries (*for information only*)
 - Pete Paris, representing Semi-Range Sheep Production, stated that conditions have been dry in the southern part of the state. While conditions have been better in the north, sheep producers statewide are reporting decreased percentages. He highlighted unstable markets, including the wool market, which he said is nonexistent. He concluded by stating that predators seem to be the only thing currently doing well.
 - Dave Coon, representing Dairy Production, highlighted the importance of

communication and expressed appreciation to the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) for its outreach around school nutrition programming. He stated that children will benefit from learning facts related to the consumption of milk and that the industry, the state, and the consumers will benefit from this and similar initiatives.

- Brooke Neubauer, representing Supplemental Nutrition, spoke about her work with the Just One Project in Las Vegas. She reported a significant decrease in residents seeking services through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. She cited an estimated 21,000 inbound calls associated with these programs in January, with call volumes decreasing in subsequent months as follows: approximately 16,000 in February; 13,000 in March; 12,000 in April; and 11,000 in May. She stated that clients fear seeking services due to the current Administration. She also reported a decrease in participation in the Pop Up and Give program, which distributes food monthly through TEFAP. The program served a monthly average of 6,500 to 8,500 residents at the end of 2024 but now serves an average of 4,600 residents monthly. Of the 4,600 residents surveyed in May, 86 percent of households indicated dependence on TEFAP, while 66.5 percent reported they would skip meals without the program. Forty-three percent of those households reported receiving public assistance, and 90 percent of those clients reported dependence on TEFAP. Additionally, 69 percent of those clients indicated they would skip meals if TEFAP were not available. The Just One Project will continue following updates from the NDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and advocating for these programs through Nevada's congressional delegation.
- David Ruf, representing Nursery Stock, reported receiving a number of calls regarding the new fee associated with the sale of seeds. The primary concerns pertained to the \$75 fee, why the fee was not tied to nursery license fees, and the lack of outreach communicating the change. He asked for clarification on enforcement measures for the fee and seed certification and whether the fee applies to sellers who collect native seeds to sell to residents seeking to increase native habitat. Additionally, Member Ruf raised concern about professional landscapers bringing in out-of-state materials without nursery licenses and inquired about enforcement actions.
 - Meghan Brown, Administrator of the Division of Plant Health and Compliance, clarified that separate fees apply for wholesale and retail seed sales and that staff inspect both large retail stores and private nurseries. She noted that the NDA can distribute additional communication regarding the fee. Originally, seed retail and nursery licensing fees were combined on the same form, but after feedback from industry stating that structure was confusing, the form was revised to separate them. Regarding native seed sales, Administrator Brown offered to follow up with additional information but emphasized that the division does not intend to inhibit such activity. She affirmed the division's commitment to increasing enforcement efforts targeted at landscapers who lack valid nursery licenses.
- Heather Lackey, representing Pest Control, expressed concern about rodent

management and expressed gratitude to Administrator Brown for providing resources regarding Mormon cricket and grasshopper management. She said that these resources empower the public to become involved and educated about pest management. Additionally, Member Lackey raised concern about hantavirus and discussed recent cases, some of which have been fatal. She emphasized the importance of communication to raise public awareness and prevent future cases.

- Tom Baker, representing Semi-Range Cattle Production, reported a strong cattle market and healthy pastures and crops. However, he expressed concern over water scarcity, noting the mountain near his residence recorded the sixth-lowest snowpack since records began in 1940. He said the industry is hoping for more precipitation.
- Hank (James) Combs, representing General Agriculture, also cited drought as an industry concern. He said that the statewide ban on dairy and poultry exhibitions will be lifted due to declining detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). He stated that he has been watching the Legislature as the 83rd Session concluded.
- Craig Schank, representing Veterinary Medicine, said that Utah State University will launch its veterinary science class of 2029 and is accepting students for fall 2025. The State of Nevada allocated \$8 million over 10 years to secure 7 spots per year for Nevada students. Seeing as the total class size is 40 students, Member Schank noted that 7 students from Nevada is significant. The challenge is that Nevada students who graduate may not provide veterinary services in an agricultural setting; rather, they may choose to focus their practice on treating house pets. He concluded by stating in Churchill County, water has been good with adequate snowpack.
- Varlin Higbee, representing Semi-Range Cattle Production, noted that recent weeks have been dry, with occasional storms bringing adequate rain to some areas. He mentioned flash floods in southern Nye County and said that grazing on federal lands may be a challenge without supplemental hay. Otherwise, markets remain strong.
- Mackenzie Campbell, representing Petroleum, reported that the Energy and Convenience Association of Nevada held its inaugural legislative day in April. Nationally, the industry is monitoring electric vehicle rollbacks in some states, though Nevada is not currently affected. Locally, a voter-approved industry tax increase will take effect in both Washoe and Clark counties on July 1. Lastly, Member Campbell highlighted that convenience stores are increasingly utilizing “tap to pay,” an effective fraud-prevention measure that she urged consumers to utilize whenever possible.
- Debbie Gilmore, representing Specialty Crops, stated that the USDA has deployed researchers to investigate bee losses. A preliminary report from USDA identified high levels of three viruses, carried by parasitic mites, in tested samples. Nearly all tested mites exhibited genetic resistance to amitraz, a miticide commonly used by commercial beekeepers. The severe bee losses are linked to this resistance, though researchers are also exploring other environmental and nutritional factors. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced plans to expedite approval of three additional miticides to support beekeepers. In

Nevada, the outlook is improving, with 130 beekeepers statewide reporting healthier bees, fewer losses, and increased honey production this year.

- Chairman Snyder, representing Row Crops, reported that hay production in Lyon County is good. Water levels are currently sufficient but are projected to decrease by the season's end. He observed that multiple row crop fields remain fallow, possibly due to market conditions or feelings of uncertainty.

5. Director's Report

A. Report – J.J. Goicoechea, Director (*for information only*)

- The Director reported that he and Nevada State Veterinarian Dr. Pete Rolfe remain active in responding to HPAI. He credited Dr. Rolfe with controlling the outbreak in Churchill County and reiterated that the statewide ban on dairy and poultry exhibitions will be lifted this week.
- The temporary suspension of the cage-free egg law will terminate on June 20 and will not be extended at this time. Suppliers can sell existing inventories of non-cage-free eggs after June 20, but all eggs sourced on and after that date must be cage-free.
- Rashel Clark, Agricultural Literacy Coordinator at the NDA, has been named the Nevada State Coordinator to the Beef Quality Assurance program.
- The Director continues to engage in the Western Governors Association Greater Sage Grouse Task Force. A key goal is to continue working toward a signed Record of Decision from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), rather than starting the process over.
- The Director and two counterparts, James Settelmeyer (Director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) and Alan Jenne (Director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife) meet at least monthly with the BLM to discuss permitting of potential energy projects. He will continue monitoring these projects for potential impacts to industry and natural resources.
- The Director partnered with Churchill County to provide an economic analysis of the estimated costs to producers resulting from the Navy's expansion of the Fallon Range Training Complex. The analysis, reflecting 25 years of data, was provided to the Navy as a framework for determining compensation to ranchers affected by the project.
- Amid the shortage of the brucellosis vaccine, the NDA and the Idaho Department of Agriculture entered into a temporary agreement to permit the movement of cattle unable to be vaccinated for brucellosis between the two states for grazing purposes.
- The Director met with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins to discuss several issues, including expediting treatment of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers; finalizing the USDA cooperative agreement for the meat and poultry inspection program; confirming the onboarding of two employees as collaborators with USDA so they can provide predator management services to Nevada ranchers; enhancing Nevada's disease response; and securing stable funding for the Home Feeds Nevada program.

B. Legislative Update – Director Goicoechea (*for information only*)

Director Goicoechea provided an update on the following budget accounts and policy bills considered in the 83rd Legislative Session:

- Merger of Budget Accounts 4552 and 4545
- **Assembly Bill 29**—Revises provisions relating to motor vehicle fuel. (BDR 51-271)
- **Senate Bill 466**—Revises provisions governing the authority of the State Department of Agriculture relating to food and water. (51-1121)
- **Assembly Bill 352**—Revises provisions relating to businesses. (BDR 51-890)
- **Assembly Bill 333**—Revises provisions relating to governmental administration. (BDR 49-833)
- **Assembly Bill 251**—Revises provisions relating to the inspection of meat and poultry. (BDR 51-154)
- **Senate Bill 233**—Revises provisions relating to agriculture. (BDR 51-704)
- **Assembly Bill 268**—Makes an appropriation to the State Department of Agriculture for universal free breakfast and lunch for Nevada pupils. (BDR S-340)
- **Senate Bill 282**—Revises provisions relating to food security. (BDR 18-75)
- **Assembly Bill 405**—Revises provisions relating to agriculture. (BDR 50-911)
- **Senate Bill 31**—Revises provisions relating to the adjudication of vested water rights. (BDR 48-260)
- **Senate Bill 36**—Establishes provisions relating to the conservation of groundwater. (BDR 48-384)
- **Senate Bill 204**—Establishes provisions relating to employment. (BDR 53-724)
- **Senate Bill 172**—Prescribes certain rights for agricultural workers. (BDR 53-959)
- **Senate Bill 260**—Revises provisions relating to air quality. (BDR 53-961)
- **Assembly Bill 414**—Revises provisions relating to occupational safety and health. (BDR 53-666)
- **Assembly Bill 80**—Revises provisions relating to soil health. (BDR 49-387)
- **Assembly Bill 85**—Authorizes the management of designated invertebrates. (BDR 45-229)
- **Assembly Bill 44**—Prohibits manipulating the price of an essential good or service in this State. (52-503)

6. Division of Administrative Services

A. *Review and potential adoption of a proposed Media Policy at the Nevada Department of Agriculture (*for possible action*)

- Public Information Officer Ciara Ressel reviewed the proposed policy and explained its purpose: to ensure transparency and accuracy in the information the NDA provides to the public and promote consistent messaging across the department.
- Member Combs moved to adopt the policy. Member Lackey seconded the motion.
- The motion passed 12-0 (1 absent).

B. *Review and potential adoption of a proposed Language Access Policy at the Nevada Department of Agriculture (*for possible action*)

- Ressel reviewed the proposed policy and explained that Senate Bill 318 of the

81st Legislative Session required state agencies to develop a Language Access Plan. The proposed policy aligns with the bill's mandate, ensuring NDA staff deliver information to industry and the public in an appropriate and accessible manner.

- Director Goicoechea thanked Ressel for her work in developing the NDA's Language Access Plan and stated that legislators on the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means and Senate Committee on Finance, Subcommittees on General Government commended Ressel's work in creating the NDA's Language Access Plan.
- Member Gilmore inquired about the financial impact. Ressel explained that the state granted funds to the NDA to implement the Language Access Plan.
- Member Gilmore asked whether the policy is already implemented since the agency has hired a Language Access Coordinator. Ressel explained that the NDA does not yet have an official policy, and the Language Access Coordinator was hired to implement the program mandated by Senate Bill 318 of the 81st Legislative Session. The policy under consideration by the Board, along with procedures to be developed after its adoption, is necessary to provide clear guidance to NDA staff utilizing the program.
- Member Gilmore asked whether the NDA must provide information in Russian for someone whose primary language is Russian. Ressel confirmed yes, and clarified that NDA staff will have access to interpretation services. Additionally, staff will receive guidance as to when and how to access such services.
- Member Ruf stated his belief that a bill was passed a number of years ago establishing English as the official language of the United States. He also inquired about whether online translation tools can be utilized in place of this program as a potential cost-saving measure. Ressel noted that online translation tools frequently produce substantial errors. She stated that the professional translators available through the Language Access Program are knowledgeable about the NDA and can accurately convey information critical to public health and safety without the risk of mistranslation.
- Member Ruf inquired about the number of languages to be accommodated by the program. Ressel stated that, according to the most recent census, Spanish is the most common second language in Nevada; therefore, the NDA will initially prioritize translating published materials into Spanish. However, live interpretation services will be offered in a variety of languages.
- Director Goicoechea reiterated that the Language Access Program is mandated by the Legislature through Senate Bill 318 of the 81st Legislative Session. He noted that, in addition to providing language access services, the individuals supported by the program also include those who are deaf, blind, or have speech impediments. He clarified that the NDA has received funding to implement the mandated program and emphasized that funds must be expended to prevent their reversion, thus saving the agency money in the long term.
- Member Lackey moved to adopt the proposed Media Policy. Member Combs seconded the motion.
- The motion passed 12-0 (1 absent).
- Member Gilmore asked Director Goicoechea for clarification as to why the Board was tasked with considering the Language Access Policy, given that the program is

required by statute and is already in place. Director Goicoechea explained that pursuant to Chapter 561 of the Nevada Revised Statutes, the Board of Agriculture must consider all proposed policies of the NDA, and the Language Access Policy had not previously existed at the agency.

- Deputy Attorney General Yien emphasized that the state law mandating the Language Access Program applies to all agencies in the Executive Branch. He explained, as background, that during the COVID-19 crisis, some Nevadans reported they were unable to access critical health and safety information due to language barriers, an issue that Senate Bill 318 of the 81st Legislative Session sought to address.

Chairman Snyder called for a break at 10:33 a.m.

Chairman Snyder called the meeting back to order at 10:46 a.m.

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

- The NDA continues to work with the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles to finalize the newly designed agriculture license plate.
- Fiscal staff advanced budget matters during the 83rd Legislative Session, including appropriations for upgraded software and equipment.
- The Brush and Brews Throwdown event was held at Parlay 6 Brewing Company in Reno to promote the 2025 Nevada Craft Beverage Passport Program.
- The 2024 Women’s Farm 2 Food Accelerator Program concluded with a graduation of nine participants.
- Food Taipei is planned for June 25-28, with one Nevada company currently registered.
- Communications staff reported 10 news releases and stories over the previous quarter and 11 public records requests in 2025, 10 of which have been processed.
- Agricultural Literacy staff attended five events in Churchill, Douglas, and Washoe counties, reaching approximately 1,420 people.
- The fiscal team successfully finalized, rebalanced, and closed all agency budget accounts for the upcoming fiscal year.
- Director Goicoechea introduced Blane Merkley, NDA’s Industry and Global Trade Coordinator. Merkley said that he is from Fallon and formerly served as a State Officer for the Future Farmers of America. He is a University of Nevada, Reno, graduate. Before joining the NDA, he served in Washington, D.C., as a Trade Policy Officer with the USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service.
- Administrator Balcon delivered an overview of two budget accounts that support the Division of Food and Nutrition. Both accounts are primarily funded by federal funds and allow the division to administer programs such as the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TFAP), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.
- Fiscal Year 2025 revenue includes more than \$176,000 in appropriations; \$1.4 million in TFAP funds; \$1.1 million from Service and Handling Charge; \$26 million from Direct Sales-Processing; and \$17 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

- Fiscal Year 2025 expenditures include \$1.3 million for personnel services; more than \$23,000 for operating expenses; more than \$1 million for emergency food assistance; and more than \$26 million for the food processing program.
- The division further utilized ARPA funds by purchasing a new food distribution warehouse in Las Vegas for \$10 million and providing sub-grants to food banks.

7. Division of Animal Industry

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

- The division will send head tax letters on July 1 with a focus on compliance. Historically, 30 to 40 percent of livestock producers are not compliant with the head tax. Staff are diligently working on inspections and educating the industry on how these funds are used. Last year, 4,100 letters were mailed to active contacts. This year, more than 5,000 letters will be mailed.
- One Predatory Animal and Rodent Control position has been filled in Ely, and another will soon be filled in Elko.
- Last year, 55,000 Animal Disease Traceability tags were issued. The division recently received 25,000 tags from the USDA, with additional tags being purchased through grants.
- Administrator Sestanovich reviewed trichomoniasis trends from previous years, noting that high positivity rates often correlate with increased testing. He stated that several herds in Nevada are under quarantine. While the current positivity rate is high, it is expected to decline soon.
- Dr. Rolfe provided an update on HPAI, stating that 11 out of 13 dairies in Churchill County were infected by HPAI but have been released from quarantine after three consecutive weeks of negative test results. He noted that the D1.1 variant spread rapidly in Churchill County but also subsided quickly. The NDA will continue bulk tank testing and closely monitor for HPAI into the fall, understanding that some herd immunity exists. Testing of wildlife samples for HPAI also continues, with low positive results.
- Dr. Rolfe reported that the brucellosis vaccine shortage has ended, resolving faster than expected. A temporary agreement with the Idaho Department of Agriculture to allow the movement of unvaccinated cattle across state lines due to the shortage was established but not used.

8. Division of Food and Nutrition

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

- The division is closely monitoring federal funding for the Senior Nutrition and Wellness Program.
- Although the NDA does not administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the division is tracking potential changes to SNAP to ensure recipients can access support from other food assistance programs, including the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, if necessary.
- Final purchases have been made this month for the Home Feeds Nevada (HFN) program. Although federal funding for HFN is expiring, a \$800,000 legislative appropriation will sustain the program for several additional months.
- The division's new food distribution warehouse in Las Vegas will be ready for

occupancy by the end of summer. Additionally, a new tractor trailer has also been secured by the division.

9. Division of Measurement Standards

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

- Assembly Bill 29, sponsored by the NDA, was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor. Administrator Striejewski thanked the industry for its support of the bill.
- The division has entered livestock scale inspection season. Unlike previous years, the division is fully staffed and can efficiently complete inspections without depleting the energy and morale of staff.
- Communication with producers has improved, and ranchers have been willing partners in getting their scales inspected. The division welcomes feedback from the Board and/or industry to continue improving processes.
- Last month, the EPA approved the year-round use of E15 fuel. The NDA will continue supporting stations that sell E15 fuel but will not promote any specific product.
- Weights and Measures inspectors are visiting farmers markets, protecting consumers by ensuring scales are compliant.
- Looking ahead, the division will send device invoices for Fiscal Year 2026 on July 1.

10. Division of Plant Health and Compliance

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

- Nevada State Entomologist Jeff Knight will be retiring after more than 38 years of service. Knight has been a fixture at the NDA and has positively affected countless staff with his leadership.
- The division is updating regulations in the Nevada Administrative Code. The permanent adoption for revising the pesticide registration fee will be scheduled for this summer. Other NAC revisions are planned relating to pest control and hemp.
- Administrator Brown was appointed to the Invasive Species Advisory Council, which advises the National Invasive Species Council. Currently, the Invasive Species Advisory Council is working on a variety of topics, including the impacts of invasive species on food security.
- The division continues working with nurseries in its Plant Pathology and Seed programs. The Native Seed Program has seen an increase in seed sourcing and applications in the Foundation Seed Program.
- The division has recorded a decrease in crop exports compared to this time last year. The hemp program has seen a slight uptick, not only in the number of growers but in acres of indoor and outdoor production across the state.
- The Food Safety program continues to provide virtual training to producers.
- The division has increased enforcement in the Noxious Weeds program, sending more than 900 enforcement letters to property and nursery owners related to infestation issues. In southern Nevada, the division has communicated with southern Nevada nurseries about green fountaingrass and northern Nevada

nurseries about Scotch thistle and yellow thistle.

- The division continues working with the Nevada Department of Transportation to implement thistle treatments along Interstate 80.
- There has been an uptick in Weed Free certifications for producers of gravel, forage, and mulch.
- The division continues to work with the USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to implement the Mormon cricket and grasshopper suppression program. The Finding of No Significant Impact has been signed, and treatment on private and public lands will begin next week.
- Two new credit projects were enrolled in the Nevada Conservation Credit System. The NDA representative on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team has been actively implementing the adaptive management program.
- Director Goicoechea highlighted the importance of adaptive management and said that Nevada, along with five other Western states, are developing language to promote adaptive management for the flexibility it affords. The Director also stated that public land credits are being contemplated for the Conservation Credit System.

11. Public Comment

- There was no public comment.

12. Final Roll Call

13. Adjournment

Chairman Snyder adjourned the meeting at 11:39 a.m.