

Wyoming Agriculture

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Members gather at Capitol for 2026 Legislative Meeting

BY CALLIE HANSON

Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation members traveled to Cheyenne Feb. 19–20 for the annual WyFB Legislative Meeting, connecting farmers and ranchers with state leaders during the 2026 budget session.

The two-day event gave attendees the opportunity to hear policy updates, attend committee meetings, tour the Wyoming Capitol and visit directly with legislators and agency directors.

Sweetwater County Farm Bureau Federation Board Member Dixie Suddreth said stepping away from daily ranch work to engage in the legislative process was valuable.

“Normally we’re just out raising kids and cows,” she said. “To take a step back and look at the policies that shape American agriculture — and to see how it’s all run — that’s been a really fun day for us. Getting to watch the senators vote on the floor was quite interesting. It’s something we don’t always get to see.”

The meeting opened with a welcome from WyFB President Todd Fornstrom. WyFB Executive Vice President Kerin Clark provided an overview of the legislative priorities and a legislative update was presented by WyFB Policy Advocacy Directors Kelly Carpenter and Brett Moline.

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Legislative meeting attendees had the opportunity to tour the Capitol and learn about the storied history of the building. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*



Young farmers and ranchers from across Wyoming and Colorado had the opportunity to learn and network at the 2026 YF&R Conference held with Colorado Farm Bureau Federation. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*

Beyond Borders: Young Farmers and Ranchers Conference 2026

BY CALLIE HANSON

The Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation (WyFB) Young Farmer and Rancher (YF&R) program joined forces with the Colorado Farm Bureau Federation (CFB) to host a joint YF&R conference Feb. 6–7 in Cheyenne. The two-day event welcomed more than 125 participants from across the two states for learning, leadership development and collaboration.

“Beyond Borders isn’t just a theme, it’s a mindset. Our livelihoods may be rooted in different states, but we share the same sky, the same land, and the

same steadfast commitment to agriculture,” said state chairs Hannah Guild of Wyoming and Kole Kelley of Colorado in their

They continued, “The challenges we face, from unpredictable weather to evolving markets, don’t stop at the border, and neither should our cooperation. By coming together, we strengthen the bonds between our farming and ranching communities. We are neighbors in spirit and in practice, working side by side to feed our people and steward our natural resources.”

YF&R CONFERENCE ... Page 7



Gov. Gordon recently proclaimed February 23–28 as Wyoming Ag Literacy Week. This week is held in conjunction with the YF&R committee’s Ag Books for Kids program. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*

Wyoming Governor Gordon proclaims Wyoming Agricultural Literacy Week

BY CALLIE HANSON

The importance of reading and agriculture was highlighted statewide after Gov. Mark Gordon proclaimed Feb. 23–28, 2026, as Wyoming Agricultural Literacy Week.

While the designated week provided an opportunity to spotlight both literacy and agriculture, leaders said both remain essential year-round. In the proclamation, Gordon recognized agriculture’s economic and cultural importance to the state.

“Wyoming is rich in agricultural history, and farming and ranching are an

important part of Wyoming’s economy, contributing nearly two billion dollars annually,” the proclamation read in part. “Many aspects of our daily lives, including the food we eat, clothes we wear, and medicine we depend on, are made possible because of agriculture.”

The proclamation also connected literacy and learning.

“Literacy is a top priority for school children and non-fiction books are an important tool in teaching children about the world around them,” it stated.

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www.wyfb.org



CALENDAR
OF EVENTS

March	
1	WyFB State Scholarship Deadline
13-16	American Farm Bureau YF&R Leadership Conference - Portland, Ore.
20	Ag Books for Kids County Deadline
April	
6	Ag Books for Kids District Deadline
June	
1	Membership Meeting - Casper
November	
12-14	Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting - Casper

Visit wyfb.org
for event updates



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A Tough Farm Economy Demands Action from Congress

Zippy Duvall

American Farm Bureau Federation President



As a farmer, I don't need a spreadsheet to tell me when times are hard. I see it every day and hear it in conversations with farmers across the country. The farm economy remains under real pressure, and for many farm families, the stress isn't letting up.

USDA's latest outlook confirms what farmers are experiencing firsthand, and it retells the story released just a few months ago. USDA has now sharply lowered its 2025 farm income outlook by \$25 billion, reinforcing that this downturn is deeper and more persistent than many anticipated. And in 2026, farm income is projected \$48 billion below the highs we saw just a few years ago. That reality weighs heavily on the people who grow our food, fuel, and fiber.

High Costs and Low Prices Are Squeezing the Farm Economy

What makes this period especially challenging is the squeeze farmers are facing from both sides. Commodity prices remain low, while production costs continue to climb. Inputs like fuel, fertilizer, equipment, and labor are still expensive, leaving margins razor-thin, or nonexistent, for many farm families.

The beef market may be strong, but it is masking weakness across the rest of agriculture. Outside of cattle, many farmers continue to face declining receipts, weak prices, and little room to recover rising costs. Even when cash flow improves on paper, that can

be a reflection of relief from temporary assistance, not improved margins.

When margins disappear, so does flexibility. It becomes harder to plan, harder to invest, and harder to weather unexpected setbacks like droughts, floods, or market disruptions. For farm families, that uncertainty affects day-to-day decisions and long-term sustainability.

Record-high debt levels and strained credit lines are forcing tough choices on farm families who already operate in one of the most unpredictable businesses there is. Farm bankruptcies have increased for the second year in a row, and we continue to see farms closing at an alarming rate, with more than 160,000 lost since 2017.

Farmers are resilient, but resilience alone can't carry the weight of this prolonged economic strain. A strong farm economy isn't just about individual farms. It's about the stability of rural communities, local businesses, and the entire food supply chain Americans rely on.

A New Farm Bill Is Critical for the Farm Economy

This is exactly the moment when federal farm policy matters most—and why we urgently need a new, modernized farm bill. Outdated loan limits and underinvestment in research, conservation, and rural development leave farmers with fewer options when prices are low and expenses remain high. A new farm bill is an opportunity to modernize these programs, so they actual-

ly work in today's farm economy, not the economy of nearly a decade ago.

At the same time, farmers can't afford to wait. While longer-term reforms are debated, farmers are facing immediate financial strain that threatens their ability to secure operating loans and plant another crop. Short-term economic assistance is needed now to help farmers bridge the gap and keep operations afloat until lasting solutions are in place. Recent investments and programs like the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program are a welcome first step, but they fall short of addressing the full scope of losses farmers are facing

Farmers' Voices Matter in Today's Farm Economy

One thing I've learned over the years is that we can see real change when farmers speak up. Policymakers need to hear directly from the people living this reality. That starts with grassroots engagement. And that's where this Farm Bureau family comes through for our farms and our communities.

If you're feeling the strain of this farm economy, I encourage you to visit our Action Center to send a message to your members of Congress and share your story. When farmers engage, it strengthens our collective voice and helps move policy in the right direction.

The American Farm Bureau will keep working for solutions in Washington, but we're strongest when we do this work together. ■

Dedication

Kerin Clark

Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation Executive Vice President



Dedication. This is one of Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation's six core values and it is a great way to describe our members and the conversations they brought to the Capitol Building during the WyFB Legislative Meeting mid-February. The value reads: Dedication. We believe our dedication to agriculture is the foundation that inspires us to sacrifice time and energy to secure its values, lifestyle, and legacy. We are rooted in our heritage to guide our future.

We appreciate those members who gave their time and energy to leave their farms and ranches for a couple of days and be a part of the legislative process. WyFB ad-

vocates daily on behalf of our members to implement WyFB member policy. Having our members at the Capitol provided the opportunity for great conversations with legislators, elected officials and agency directors. Those conversations matter. Those conversations are inspiring. Those conversations work to secure the values, lifestyle and legacy of Wyoming agriculture.

As members toured the Capitol building, we were reminded of the heritage of this great state. The agricultural conversations at the Capitol reminded me of remaining rooted in our heritage while guiding the future of this great state.

We had a great turnout at our final event

which was the legislative luncheon. We appreciate the legislators making the time to stop in, have a meal and visit with our members. From our youngest farmers and ranchers to our collegiate members to our regular members, the dedication to this organization and agriculture is unmatched.

Dedication. It is a core value of the organization and we are thankful for our dedicated members that give of their time to attend meetings and make a difference. You, the member, are why we do what we do each and every day to implement the member-driven policy that begins at the grassroots level in your local county Farm Bureau. ■

Sheridan College student tops WyFB Collegiate Discussion Meet

BY CALLIE HANSON

Tagg Mickelsen, a Sheridan College student and native of Wheatland, Wyo. was crowned the champion of the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation (WyFB) Collegiate Discussion meet during the recent Young Farmer and Rancher Conference held in Cheyenne. Seven competitors represented the University of Wyoming, Central Wyoming College and Sheridan College.

“The discussion meet gives students the opportunity to learn about agricultural issues and bring those ideas to the table with their peers,” according to YF&R Committee Chair Hannah Guild. “The goal is to share knowledge, work together respectfully, and come to a thoughtful conclusion on how to move an issue forward. These experiences build confidence and practical skills students can take back to meetings in their counties and workplaces, helping strengthen their communities and the future of agriculture.”

“This is my second year competing, and I’ve been impressed by the quality of the panels, the strong contestants, and the discussions throughout the contest, Mickelsen said following the contest. “The solutions presented to the challenges were thoughtful and well-developed, and I’m excited to represent Wyoming at the next level.”

Sheridan College Collegiate Farm Bureau Advisor Angel Sparkman noted Mickelsen was confident and well-prepared for the contest. “Having the experience of competing last year made a huge difference. Coming back with that knowledge and confidence allowed him to step up his game in a big way,” she said.

Mickelsen was joined by two of his fellow Sheridan College students in the final four, Brook Greenwalt and Gary Brenneman. Central Wyoming student Maylee Nordstrom rounded out the final four.

Sparkman emphasized how much work her students put in to prepare for this contest each year and the impact Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation has on them.

“Having three of the four finalists is a testament to the students and the work they put in. They truly take ownership of the process and keep pushing themselves forward,” Sparkman said. “It’s so exciting to watch students step into a professional role and confidently talk about today’s agricultural issues. You really get to see a different side of them.”

She continued, “Farm Bureau has given students opportunities to network in ways they never thought were possible, and that impact will stay with them long after college. The real value isn’t just what students learn in the classroom—it’s the experiences that help them grow as people. These competitions build networking skills, confidence, and the ability to speak about complex issues.”

Following this victory, Mickelsen will move on to represent Wyoming at the 2026 Farm Bureau YF&R Leadership Conference held in Portland, Ore. in March. ■



Collegiate Discussion Meet finalists and chairs (L-R): Quade Palm (Discussion Meet Chair), Tagg Mickelsen, Brook Greenwalt, Maylee Nordstrom, Gary Brenneman, and Hannah Guild (YF&R Chair). CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Sheridan College's Tagg Mickelsen was crowned the champion of the Collegiate Discussion Meet. Pictured with Sheridan College Collegiate Farm Bureau Advisor Angel Sparkman. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Competitors Maylee Nordstrom and Brook Greenwalt represented Central Wyoming College and Sheridan College during the 2026 Collegiate Discussion Meet. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Discussion Meet Chair Quade Palm congratulates winner Tagg Mickelsen. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Sheridan College student Gary Brenneman was a final four competitor. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Sheridan College Student Tagg Mickelsen will represent Wyoming at the American young farmer and rancher conference held in Portland, Ore. In March. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



RANCH SUCCESSION Navigate The Transition

Succession coordinators work with families

and operations to navigate the transition of the ag operation to the next generation. The coordinators work in tandem with attorneys and accountants to make sure that the succession plan is feasible.

Succession coordinators are available as a service of the Wyoming Agriculture & Natural Resource Mediation Program.

For more information, contact Lucy Pauley at 307-777-8788 or email lucy.pauley@wyo.gov.

Succession coordinators work with the family to identify:

- Where is the operation now?
- Where do you want it to be?
- How do you get there?



A look back at the 2026 YF&R Conference



Hannah Guild



YF&R Chair Hannah Guild interviewed with Wyoming News Now to discuss the 2026 YF&R Conference. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

**BY HANNAH GUILD,
YF&R COMMITTEE CHAIR**

The time, effort, and planning put in by the Wyoming Farm Bureau and Colorado Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers committees came to life as we hosted our first joint conference with Colorado Farm Bureau Federation. The theme of the conference was “Beyond Borders”, showcasing the strength that we gain as we reach across the line, whatever line that may be, and putting our knowledge and efforts together.

As many attendees were able to see during the conference, coming together to discuss pressing issues we face in agriculture, we are able to view those problems from another perspective as well as generate new solutions for them with our peers. One of the great strengths that we have in Farm Bureau is our variety of situations, experiences, and capabilities, and yet the core desire for agriculture to continue to thrive.

During the conference, we listened to many presenters educate us on topics like succession planning, working with family, federal policy updates, mental health, and more. These YF&R conferences are an amazing opportunity to learn and keep up to date on some of the old, new, and potentially future issues that affect agriculture. The unique opportunity of this conference was the fact that we had shared opinions from across that state line, and we were able to hear some of the differences and similarities in experiences from those Farm Bureau members in Colorado. I believe that we can all become more when we reach across those borders whether they be state lines, political lines, or religious lines, and learn from the experiences of those around us.

A great focus of the conference was planned for networking and breakout sessions. This allowed all in attendance to



L-R: YF&R Collegiate Discussion Meet Committee Chair Quade Palm, Collegiate Discussion Meet Champion Tagg Mickelsen, Hannah Guild. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

rub shoulders with new people from different areas. The conference in Cheyenne provided a tour of the Wyoming State Capital, and time to spend at the famous Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo facilities.

This time was used by many to step out of your comfort zone and build those

new relationships, and the breakout sessions gave the opportunity to work together with these new friends to improve the future of agriculture. Overall, it was a wonderful way to spend the weekend and you leave feeling empowered and hopeful for the future of agriculture.

Hannah Guild and her husband Zack are ranchers in Uinta County and have been involved with the YF&R committee for several years. Hannah is currently serving her first term as the YF&R Committee Chair, which holds a seat on the WyFB Board of Directors. ■

Lincoln County leads 2025 membership honors

BY CALLIE HANSON

Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation recognized outstanding membership achievements during the 2026 WyFB Legislative Meeting in Cheyenne, honoring counties and individuals for their dedication to strengthening the organization at the grassroots level.

Lincoln County Earns Gold and Silver Quota Awards

Lincoln County Farm Bureau Federation claimed both the 2025 Gold Quota Award and the 2025 Silver Quota Award, marking an exceptional year of membership growth.

The Gold Quota Award recognizes the county achieving the greatest percentage of total membership quota, including at least one new young regular member. Lincoln County reached 163% of its 2025 total quota, earning top honors.

In addition, Lincoln County earned the Silver Quota Award, presented to the county with the highest percentage of regular member quota. The county reached 156% of its 2025 regular member quota.

Both awards reflect strong recruitment efforts, meaningful member engagement and a continued commitment to sustaining Farm Bureau's grassroots strength across the county.

Recognizing Outstanding Membership Secretaries

WyFB also recognized three individuals with the Outstanding Membership Secretary Award. This honor is presented based on performance, quality of transmittals, neatness, accuracy, membership acquisition and exceptional effort toward reaching quota goals.

Each recipient will receive a \$100 award in recognition of their work.

This year's honorees include: Mary Whaley, Big Horn County; Cassie Pickrel, Crook County; and Nina Nield, Lincoln County.

Membership secretaries play a critical role in maintaining accurate records, supporting county leaders and ensuring the smooth processing of memberships. Their behind-the-scenes efforts are essential to the success of the organization statewide.

As Wyoming Farm Bureau continues its mission of strengthening Wyoming agriculture and enhancing Wyoming communities, strong membership growth remains a cornerstone of that effort. Counties like Lincoln — along with dedicated volunteers across the state — demonstrate that Farm Bureau's grassroots foundation remains strong. ■



Lincoln County Vice President Trent Peterson accepted both the Gold and Silver quota awards on behalf of Lincoln County Farm Bureau Federation presented by Membership Chair Kevin Baars (Left) and Membership Vice Chair Matt Stroh (Right). CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Trent Peterson (Lincoln County), Tim Beck (Big Horn County), and Keith Haiar (Crook County) accepted Outstanding Membership Secretary Award on behalf of the winners from their respective counties. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



2026 Ag Books for Kids Contests

Kindergarten-1st Grade | Coloring Contest

2nd-3rd Grade | Poster Contest

4th-5th Grade | Short Story Contest

Entry Deadline: March 20

2025 Contest Winners



For questions, contact your local county Farm Bureau Federation volunteer. If you can't reach your local volunteer, contact WyFB at alake@wyfb.org or 307-721-7716.



Cooking With the Modern Ranch Wife

Deviled Eggs

Recipe by Connie Werner

Ingredients:

- 14 eggs, boiled and shells peeled
- ½ cup + 2 tbsp Miracle Whip
- 1 ½ tsp yellow mustard
- 1 heaping tsp sugar
- ½ tsp salt, pepper, and celery salt
- Paprika, if desired

Directions:

- Set the peeled eggs onto a paper towel to dry
- Once dry, cut the eggs in half and place yolks in a bowl.
- Using a fork, break up the egg yolks until crumbly.
- Add the Miracle whip, mustard, and spices. Stir to combine. Taste the filling and adjust sugar, salt, and pepper to your liking.
- Put the filling into a sandwich bag. At this point, using scissor cut one tip of the bag and fill the egg whites with the yellow filling.
- Once all eggs are filled, you can sprinkle with Paprika if desired.
- Store in the fridge. Enjoy

For more recipes visit: www.modernranchwife.com

Brown discusses Colorado River compacts and their impacts on Wyoming

BY CALLIE HANSON

Wyoming's share of the Colorado River may seem small on the map, but the legal and hydrologic pressure tied to the system is increasing, and the stakes for water users in the Green River and Little Snake basins are significant, according to Chris Brown, Senior Assistant Attorney General in the Attorney General Office's Water and Natural Resources Division.

Brown spoke February 19 during the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation Legislative Meeting about worsening shortages in the Colorado River Basin, the deadlock between upper and lower basin states and a Wyoming bill intended to create a voluntary conservation framework tailored specifically to the Colorado River.

"This is really kind of a unique program," Brown said. "Something like this has never been tried before in Wyoming."

River governance

Brown described the Colorado River as Wyoming's most complex interstate river system. While Wyoming participates in seven interstate compacts and three interstate decrees, he said the Colorado is unique because it is governed by multiple major legal instruments and involves seven states plus Mexico.

At a high level, Brown explained the 1922 Colorado River Compact divided the river into two geographic regions — the upper basin and lower basin — and allocated 7.5 million acre-feet to each. An additional 1 million acre-feet was generally attributed to tributary use in the lower basin. A 1944 treaty guarantees Mexico 1.5 million acre-feet annually.

The 1948 Upper Colorado River Basin Compact then divided the upper basin share among Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah by percentage. Wyoming's share, Brown said, is 14 percent of the upper basin allocation.

Even by 1948, Brown noted, states recognized the 1922 compact relied on a wetter period of record and overestimated the long-term supply.

The core dispute

Brown said the central disagreement is how to interpret the upper basin's compact obligation at Lee Ferry, the compact accounting point. Lower basin states argue the com-

pact requires a fixed annual delivery. Upper basin states disagree.

"We think it's a qualified obligation," Brown said. "It depends on the conditions."

As flows have declined, Brown said the dispute has sharpened. He summarized the math driving the conflict: if the lower basin insists it is entitled to roughly 8.25 million acre-feet per year and Lee Ferry flows are around 11 million acre-feet, only about 3 million acre-feet remains for the entire upper basin. But the upper basin's average annual use is about 4.5 million acre-feet.

The consequences for Wyoming under the lower basin's interpretation would be severe, Brown said.

"As soon as you get to about a million acre-feet, Wyoming would lose all of the development that it has made since 1922," he said.

What is at risk in Wyoming

Brown said the risk is not limited to one sector. Post-1922 use includes junior irrigation components, storage developed after 1922, industrial rights and most municipal supplies tied to the basin.

For irrigators, Brown pointed to a common vulnerability: even those with early priority rights often rely on "seconds" water, which carries a 1945 priority date and could be exposed under curtailment scenarios. He also referenced "free river" diversions used to meet irrigation needs in sandy or loamy soils where primary direct-flow allocations may not be enough in practice. Those uses, he emphasized, are not protected like a perfected right.

Municipal and industrial uses are also largely post-compact. Brown cited municipal reliance across the basin — from Pinedale to Rock Springs and Green River — alongside industrial uses such as trona operations and power generation.

"Every single one of our industrial rights... almost all of our municipal use in the basin... all of those are junior," Brown said.

A voluntary conservation framework to keep options in Wyoming's hands

Brown said Wyoming's proposed legislation is designed to show "skin in the game" as the states negotiate new operating rules, while creating tools that fit Wyoming water law and reduce the likelihood of a court-driven outcome.

"The reason we're doing it is to bring something to the table," Brown said. "We're willing to be part of the solution so that we can avoid litigation."

A central obstacle, he said, is Wyoming's "use it or lose it" structure. Beneficial use is "the basis, the measure and the limit of the right," meaning extended non-use can trigger abandonment concerns. The bill would create a pathway for temporary, compensated conservation without risking abandonment, while requiring conserved water to return to its underlying long-term use.

"These are... short-term voluntary projects that require that water ultimately go back to the underlying use, irrigation primarily," Brown said, noting irrigated agriculture accounts for about 84 percent of consumptive use in Wyoming's portion of the basin.

How the program would work

Brown said the bill is Colorado River-specific because the compact apportions consumptive use rather than simply dividing river flows, controlling how conservation must be measured and managed.

Applications could be submitted by water right owners or, in some cases, lessees. A typical proposal might involve temporarily not irrigating a field to reduce consumptive use, with satellite-based remote sensing used to help quantify water savings.

The bill includes an injury analysis requirement consistent with Wyoming water law. It also allows consideration of broader local impacts that may not qualify as a legal injury to other water rights but matter to communities, including potential effects on shallow groundwater, riparian areas and recreation.

To reduce prolonged, concentrated impacts, Brown said the bill includes participation limits. A participant could enroll for up to five years, then must return the water to its original use for a period of time before becoming eligible again.

The proposal includes abandonment protections, notice requirements and an appeal pathway through the Board of Control and the courts.

Storage and "banking" conserved consumptive use

Brown highlighted the ability to store conserved water in Fontenelle Reservoir

as a key feature. Fontenelle is a federal facility with a post-compact priority date. The concept functions like a water bank, Brown said, and it could provide water supply certainty for year-round users who struggle with timing under existing tools such as temporary water use agreements and exchanges.

"Allowing this water to be stored... gives them the water certainty they're looking for," Brown said, adding it could reduce pressure for junior users to purchase irrigated land and permanently dry it up as a compliance strategy.

Brown said the program anticipates compensated conservation, but not funded by the State of Wyoming. Instead, compensation could come through federal grants or negotiated arrangements among water users as part of broader basin solutions.

Preparing for what comes next

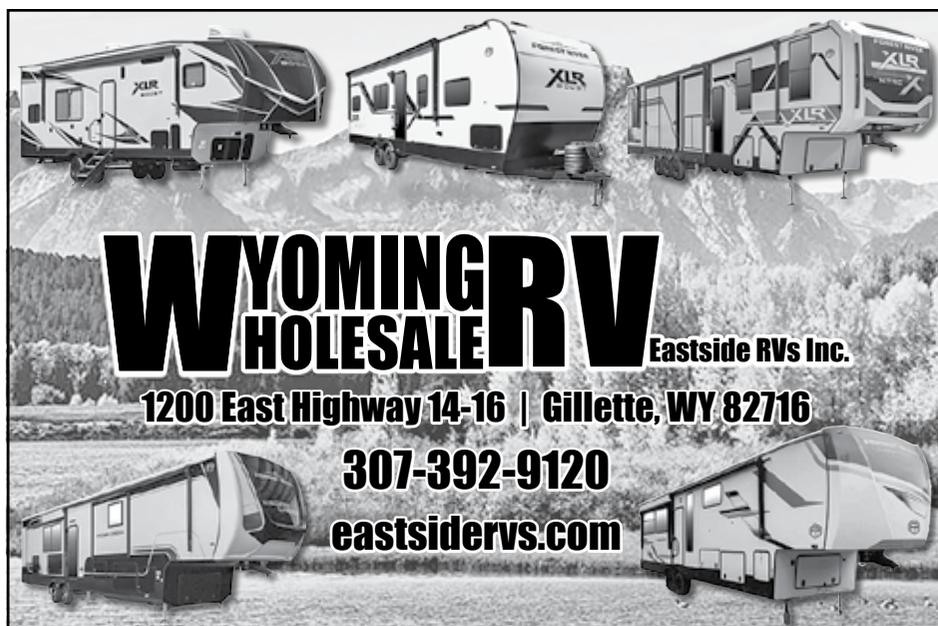
Brown noted that at the outset of the budget session, his office was tracking several additional water-related measures, including House Bill 90, a consumptive use study; House Bill 116, addressing whether destruction of water constitutes beneficial use; and Senate File 50, focused on a groundwater study in the Laramie County control area. He also said the state is seeking funding to prepare for potential litigation, "primarily in the Colorado River Basin," while monitoring pressure from downstream states in other basins.

The takeaway, Brown said, is Wyoming cannot afford to wait for a courtroom to dictate outcomes in a system already defined by shrinking supply.

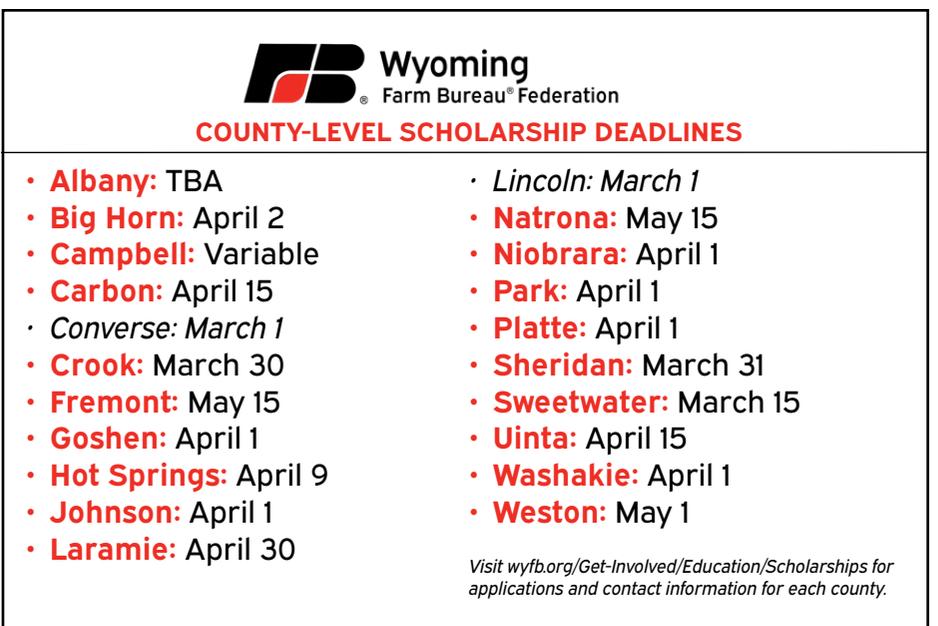
"We need to have rules in place that deal with the hydrology that we're actually seeing," Brown said.

For farmers and ranchers and communities in the Green River and Little Snake basins, Brown said the intent of the voluntary conservation bill is not to concede Wyoming's position, but to build workable tools that protect long-term agriculture, reduce the likelihood of permanent dry-up and keep Wyoming engaged as decisions are made for the West's most contested river.

"This is a starting point," Brown said. "We fully anticipate to learn things and make it better as it moves forward." ■



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Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
COUNTY-LEVEL SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINES

- **Albany:** TBA
- **Big Horn:** April 2
- **Campbell:** Variable
- **Carbon:** April 15
- **Converse:** March 1
- **Crook:** March 30
- **Fremont:** May 15
- **Goshen:** April 1
- **Hot Springs:** April 9
- **Johnson:** April 1
- **Laramie:** April 30
- **Lincoln:** March 1
- **Natrona:** May 15
- **Niobrara:** April 1
- **Park:** April 1
- **Platte:** April 1
- **Sheridan:** March 31
- **Sweetwater:** March 15
- **Uinta:** April 15
- **Washakie:** April 1
- **Weston:** May 1

Visit wyfb.org/Get-Involved/Education/Scholarships for applications and contact information for each county.

YF&R CONFERENCE... From Page 1

The conference began with a tour of the Wyoming State Capitol, where participants explored the historic building and learned about its unique role in state government. From there, the agenda shifted into a series of educational sessions and networking opportunities designed to equip young farmers and ranchers with practical tools and leadership skills.

Held in conjunction with the conference was the WyFB YF&R Collegiate Discussion Meet, featuring competitors from the University of Wyoming, Central Wyoming College and Sheridan College. The event highlighted the next generation of agricultural leaders and their ability to thoughtfully discuss issues impacting the industry.

“These conferences are a great way for members to engage with other likeminded leaders, become better informed on both agriculture issues and efficient agriculture practices, and to develop strong skills that are essential for success,” said WyFB YF&R Coordinator Alexis Lake.

“Joining with Colorado was incredibly impactful for our members. The two groups came together seamlessly, absorbed a lot of information and made connections that will last a lifetime.”

Programming officially kicked off with American Farm Bureau Federation Director of Leadership and Organizational Training Maegan Meredith, who led a session titled “Calm, Cool, and Conflict,” focusing on practical conflict resolution strategies. Mercedes Roesch, Luther Seminary philanthropic advisor, followed with “Leaders Lead,” encouraging attendees to step outside their comfort zones to ensure the long-term success of agriculture.

Storytelling also took center stage during a presentation from Leah Petersen, known widely as Clear Creek Ranch Mom. Petersen emphasized the importance of sharing authentic agricultural stories — both the triumphs and the challenges — and encouraged participants to confidently communicate their experiences.

Colorado rancher Cassidy Johnson addressed attendees during dinner, weaving her own journey into tangible guidance for



YF&R Conference participants visited the Cheyenne Frontier Days park and learned about the storied history of the event. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

those seeking to establish themselves in ranching.

Saturday’s programming began with Dr. Martín Carcasson of the CSU Center for Public Deliberation, who explored how diverse groups can come together for meaningful conversations and collaborative solutions. Following his session, attendees divided into focused discussions. Collegiate attendees participated in a collegiate chapters workshop with Alexis Lake, while others attended a grassroots development session led by CFB member Emily Baylie.

Additional sessions throughout the day addressed practical tools for rural communities. Tori Graves, electric general field representative at USDA Rural Development, outlined programs available to assist with infrastructure, energy and broadband access. A multi-generational Colorado farm and ranch family panel discussed succession planning, offering firsthand insights into preparing operations for the future.

YF&R CONFERENCE ... Page 8



The conference kicked off with a tour of the Wyoming Capitol. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Member-CENTS

The Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation believes constitutional government, the competitive enterprise system, property rights and individual freedom are necessary components for a strong agriculture, a strong Wyoming and a strong America. We are a centennial grassroots organization that cares about your future. Whether you are a farmer, rancher or a consumer of food...membership is a good investment to secure stability of agriculture here in Wyoming. As a member, WyFB provides you with exclusive benefits as a way to say thank you. These benefits may pay your annual membership fee many times over.

Visit wyfb.org and click on the “Membership/Benefits” tab for a complete listing of value-added benefits.

Current members may access member benefits at www.wyfb.org and click on the “Membership/Benefits” tab.

You may also utilize the Farm Bureau Member Benefits app on your phone to access your benefits.

Questions: email bsettlemeyer@wyfb.org or call 307-721-7723.



FEATURED BENEFIT: CHOICE HOTELS





Colorado rancher Cassidy Johnson discussed breaking into the ranching industry. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



AFBF Director of Leadership and Organizational Training Maegan Meredith discussed conflict resolution. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Mercedes Roesch encouraged attendees to step out of their comfort zone. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

YF&R CONFERENCE.. From Page 7

CFB YF&R Chair Kole Kelley added energy to the afternoon by facilitating a speed-dating-style activity, challenging participants to work through hypothetical agricultural scenarios and refine problem-solving skills.

Breakout sessions followed with two rounds of programming, giving attendees the opportunity to select from four different presentations. WyFB Policy Advocacy Director Kelly Carpenter and Colorado Farm Bureau's Ashley House provided a national policy update, highlighting key issues affecting farmers and ranchers across the region.

In concurrent sessions, Baylie shared strategies for successful grant writing, while Colorado AgrAbility Project Behavioral Health Specialist Chad Reznicek provided resources focused on rural mental health. Robbie Alexander of Farm Credit Services of America also presented, discussing the Starting Gate program and its

support for young and beginning agricultural producers across Wyoming.

The conference concluded at Cheyenne Frontier Days Park, where CEO Tom Hirsig shared the storied history of the iconic event along with plans for future growth and facility improvements.

Texas FFA Foundation Executive Director Aaron Alejandro delivered the closing keynote during dinner, sharing his personal journey and underscoring the importance of building relationships and investing in others.

Attendees wrapped up the weekend with dinner and dancing, featuring live music from Colorado-based musician Caitlyn Oschner — a fitting end to a conference centered on connection, collaboration and going beyond borders.

The Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) agriculture program includes both men and women between the ages of 18-35. The objective of the YF&R agriculture program is to pro-



Attendees had the opportunity to participate in several breakout sessions based on their interests. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

vide leadership in building a more effective Farm Bureau Federation to preserve our individual freedoms and expand our opportunities in agriculture. ■

For more information or to get involved with YF&R, contact Alexis Lake at alake@wyfb.org or visit <https://www.wyfb.org/Get-Involved/YFR>.

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Supporting students, strengthening Carbon County

BY CALLIE HANSON

Planned with the natural lull between Christmas and calving in mind, the Carbon County Ranch & Farm Bureau Federation Cowboy Ball combines much needed social time amongst ranchers and friends with fundraising for the scholarship fund in the county.

In its fourth year, the event drew more than 250 attendees for an evening of dinner, live music, dancing and auctions, raising over \$6,000 for the scholarship fund.

“The first reason we do the event is we want to get the guys off the ranch in kind of a difficult time of year for some,” Berger said. “It’s a long winter. We kind of picked a time between Christmas and calving when they’re not so busy and guys might need a reason to come to town and catch up and visit with some of their friends.”

For Berger, the value of the evening goes beyond the fundraiser itself.

“You know those guys need that,” he said. “It’s really great to see all the ranch guys here, and we see a few guys that you just don’t see hardly any time of year.”

In addition to providing fellowship during a long winter, the event supports scholarships for Carbon County students.

“As most of us know, there’s not a lot of people going back into agriculture fields,” Berger said. “We give preference to people who are, number one, Farm Bureau members, but also if they’re going into a field of study in agriculture, they’ve got a preference.”

The goal is to encourage young people pursuing agriculture and agriculture-supporting careers.

“We’re just trying to encourage people in some of those fields and give them a little help going into those areas of study,” Berger said.

Scholarships are not limited to four-year colleges.

“We’re not limiting this to just college,” he said. “Trade schools and things like that — we even gave a scholarship to somebody who’s getting an AI certificate to start their business.”

For Berger, keeping scholarship dollars in Carbon County is especially meaningful. He views the scholarships as an investment in the future of the county.

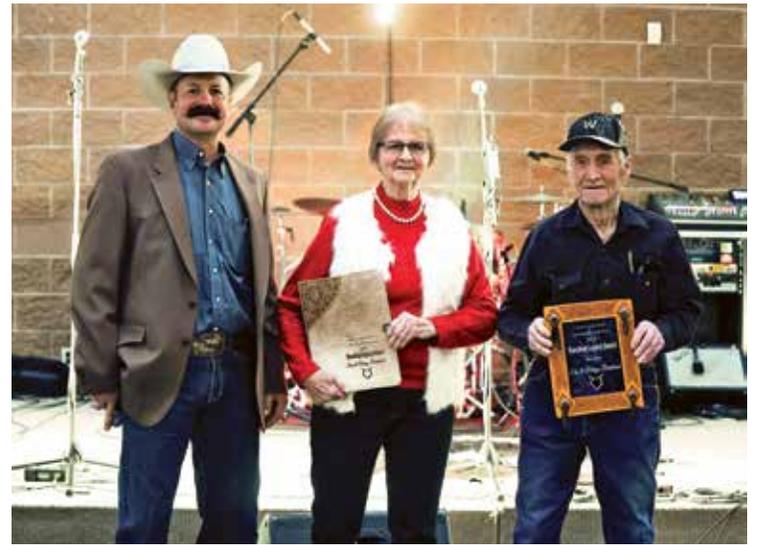
“I think this county is a good county as far as just a lot of support,” he said. “People want to pour money back into the community.”

“Some of those agriculture jobs and agriculture support jobs — we know that a lot of them aren’t going to stay here, but a lot of them do end up coming back here,” Berger said. “So I think it’s sort of an investment for those people who grew up here and hopefully come back and do something to help our industry in the valley.”

In previous years, the county provided approximately \$2,500 in scholarships. By rolling those funds into the annual event, the county has been able to significantly increase the amount awarded. ■



Carbon County president Kyle Berger. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Tim and Margy Barkhurst were the first annual winners of the Ranching Legacy Award. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Cowboy Ball aims to get ranchers out to socialize before the busy calving season. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



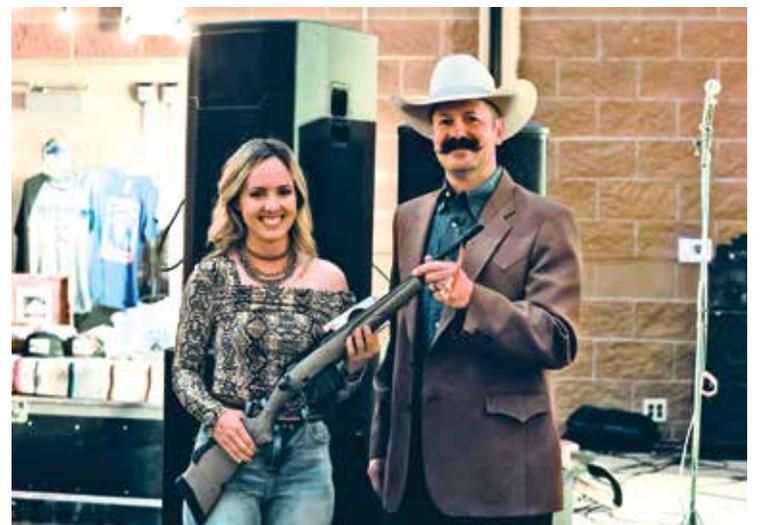
Cowboy ball featured dinner and dancing for attendees. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Wyoming native Tris Munsick performed. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Raffle prizes as well as silent and live auction items were up for grabs. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Attendees were entered in drawings for prizes while supporting Carbon County youth. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

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NEW MEMBERS... From Page 10

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Gov. Mark Gordon signed the Wyoming Agriculture Literacy Week proclamation. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



YF&R committee members gathered at the Capitol for the proclamation signing. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO



Gov. Gordon handed out keepsakes to our youngest members in attendance. CALLIE HANSON PHOTO

AG LITERACY WEEK... From Page 1

The week centered around the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation's Ag Books for Kids program, an initiative launched in 2005 by the organization's Young Farmer and Rancher Committee. The first Agricultural Literacy Week proclamation was signed in 2008, marking nearly two decades of statewide emphasis on agricultural education.

The program aimed to build collections of accurate, agriculture-focused reading materials in Wyoming elementary schools. Each year featured

a book of the year, with the 2026 selection being *The Kindergarten Cowman* by Rachel Gabel.

Volunteer leaders from across the state purchased and donated books to local elementary schools to ensure students had access to agriculture-based materials.

In addition to classroom reading, contests are held in conjunction with the featured book to further engage students. This year's contests include a coloring contest for kindergarten and first grade; a poster contest for second and third grades; and a marketing ad contest for fourth and fifth grades.

Hannah Guild, chair of the Wyoming Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee, said the program plays a key role in strengthening agriculture's future.

"I believe that teaching the youth directly strengthens agriculture through knowledge and understanding," Guild said. "Ag Books for Kids is an important program because of how it helps to educate the youth of our state on agriculture."

She continued, "So many people grow up never understanding where their food comes from or what a large role agriculture plays in their lives. When people don't understand things they can have misconcep-

tions and misunderstandings when they get older."

Spencer Axtell, vice chair of the committee, said witnessing the proclamation signing at the Capitol continued a long-standing tradition.

"This is just continuing the tradition that we've held for so long here at the Capitol," Axtell said.

Wyoming students and teachers are encouraged to visit their elementary school libraries to check out the featured Ag Books for Kids selection and participate in the associated contests. Additional information and contest rules are available at wyfb.org. ■

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State Lands outlines trust land mission, grazing lease rules and loan programs

BY CALLIE HANSON

The Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI) joined attendees during the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation Legislative Meeting, where agency leaders walked Farm Bureau members through trust land management, grazing lease structure, field services support and loan programs.

Director Stacia Berry said she wanted attendees to leave with a clearer understanding of what the office does and how it intersects with agriculture.

“We can spend a little bit of time talking about what state lands are, what they do,” Berry said, adding her team would also cover grazing administration, field services and available funding opportunities.

Berry explained OSLI serves as the administrative arm of the State Board of Land Commissioners and the State Loan and Investment Board. The boards are comprised of the governor, secretary of state, auditor, treasurer and superintendent of public instruction.

“We have a really great mission, and this is to effectively manage natural resources and funds for current and future generations,” Berry said.

She emphasized state trust lands differ from federal public lands in both purpose and management framework.

“You see a lot of talk about public lands versus state lands, and most times people talk about them interchangeably. And they’re different,” Berry said. “State trust lands were given to the state... with that specific purpose of generating revenue for the common school account.”

OSLI manages approximately 3.4 million surface acres and 3.9 million mineral acres. About 86 percent of the surface acreage is classified as common school trust land, with the remaining acreage supporting other beneficiaries such as the University of Wyoming and the Wyoming Veterans Home.

Grazing remains the most widespread surface use. Berry noted just over 4,000 grazing leases cover roughly 99 percent of the trust surface estate.

“You are our partners out in the field,” Berry told the farmers and ranchers in attendance. “Without our partners that are being stewards of the land, these lands wouldn’t look like they’re supposed to.”

Grazing lease qualifications and rental rates

Assistant Director Cody Booth said the Trust Land Management Division administers leases, easements and permits across both the surface and subsurface estates.

He also reminded members that comments on proposed rule changes affecting special use leases are due by March 20, 2026.

Grazing and Agricultural Leasing Program Manager Tori Thacker said nearly every trust parcel carries a grazing lease.

“Ninety-nine percent of our state trust lands have a grazing lease on them,” Thacker said.

To qualify, lessees must be at least 18 years old, meet citizenship requirements, comply with state law and demonstrate agricultural use of the land.

“We’re just wanting to make sure our

lessees are utilizing their grazing lease for grazing and agricultural purposes,” Thacker said.

Annual rental rates for native rangeland are calculated using a formula adopted by the Board of Land Commissioners. Thacker said the formula uses a five-year average of Wyoming private lease rates and a five-year weighted average parity ratio for beef cattle. A 20 percent reduction is then applied to reflect lessee improvements and stewardship.

“We take the average of the five previous years’ private land lease rate... multiply that by the five-year weighted average parity ratio for beef cattle, and then we subtract 20 percent,” Thacker said.

For 2026, the grazing rental rate is \$6.44 per AUM. Hay production is converted to AUMs and charged at that rate. Dryland crop leases are based on productivity, while irrigated cultivated cropland leases are charged at four percent of appraised value, also with the 20 percent reduction.

In fiscal year 2025, grazing leases generated more than \$6 million for trust beneficiaries.

“In the fiscal year of 2025, we generated \$6,055,467.40,” Thacker said.

Renewals and conflicting applications

Grazing leases renew on a staggered schedule, and invoices are mailed roughly 60 days before payment is due. Thacker noted Wyoming statute allows OSLI to accept the postmark date as the filing date for payments and renewal applications.

“That has been a super big help for

both us and our lessees,” she said.

Approximately 10 percent of grazing leases renew annually. Renewal materials are mailed about 120 days before expiration. If an application is not received by the 60-day mark, OSLI must send a second notice and allow additional time to cure deficiencies.

Thacker also explained the conflicting application process, which allows another qualified applicant to submit a bid during a limited renewal window. Conflicting bids are capped at 120 percent of market value. If a bid is submitted, the current lessee is notified and may be eligible to match the higher offer if qualified and in compliance.

Subleases, improvements and wildfire policy

Land Management Specialist Cameron Ross reminded attendees that subleases require approval before they are implemented.

“When you’re applying for the sublease, the lessee must apply and also receive approval before those subleases are considered to be put in place,” Ross said.

In 2025, subleasing generated more than \$250,000 across 410 subleases.

Patrick Bonine, land management specialist, said projects exceeding \$4,000 require director approval. Eligible improvement categories include fencing, water developments, livestock handling facilities and range enhancements.

“Anything that is over \$4,000 needs to be approved by our director,” Bonine said.

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Collegiate members had the opportunity to learn about the legislative process and visit with leaders from across the state. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*



OSLI Deputy Director Kate Barlow visits with WyFB Vice President Cole Coxbill. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*

LEGISLATIVE MEETING... From Page 1

Members also heard from Wyoming Department of Agriculture Director Doug Miyamoto and Chris Brown, senior assistant attorney general in the State of Wyoming's Water and Natural Resources Division.

The evening concluded with dinner, membership awards and an Ag Issues competition presentation by Cheyenne Central FFA.

On the second day, members observed committee meetings and observed legislative proceedings from the gallery.

The Office of State Lands and Investments, led by Director Stacia Berry, presented an informative session at the Capitol. OSLI staff from the grazing team, the field services team and the administrative team spoke about their roles. Following the group presentation, members could visit one-on-one with OSLI staff, before taking a guided tour highlighting the history and architecture of the Wyoming Capitol.

A legislative luncheon hosted by WyFB brought together legislators, elected officials and agency directors, creating space for one-on-one conversations about issues impacting agriculture. Following the luncheon, Agriculture Committee leadership — Chair Rep. Winter and Vice Chair Rep. Banks and Chair Sen. Ide— addressed current legislation affecting agriculture.

"The conversations about Farm Bureau, agriculture and the impact of legislation to Wyoming farmers and ranchers were so valuable during our members

time at the State Capitol," said Clark. "We were pleased with a great turnout at the luncheon. Those one-on-one conversations support the work WyFB is carrying out to implement member policy through the legislative process."

As the budget session continues, Converse County rancher Frank Eathorne said direct involvement remains critical.

"It's important for Farm Bureau members and farmers and ranchers to understand the legislative process because a lot of it affects us," he said. He added that strong relationships with elected officials are essential, as some may not be familiar with agriculture policy. "We need to be comfortable talking with our representatives because we elected them. They're representing us," Eathorne said. "It's important to have a good relationship so we can freely discuss the ideas and concepts being considered that could end up becoming law." ■



Director of State Lands Stacia Berry visits with Converse County Rancher Frank Eathorne. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*



The goal of the WyFB Legislative Meeting is to allow members the opportunity to see the legislative process first hand and meet with leaders from across the state. *CALLIE HANSON PHOTO*



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In the event of wildfire damage, lessees must submit a written request outlining impacts. OSLI conducts an inspection and works with the lessee to develop a stewardship plan. Affected parcels are typically rested, with reduced rental rates during recovery.

Surface impact payments and coordination

Surface Leasing Supervisor Erica Jensen highlighted vacant lease opportunities and encouraged farmers and ranchers to monitor the agency's website.

"Currently, we have 18 vacant leases," Jensen said.

She also emphasized the importance of surface impact payments when additional uses occur on land already under a grazing lease.

"Surface impact payments are very important to our grazing lessees," Jensen said. "Please call us if you have any questions about how to negotiate these

surface impact payments."

When a new easement, temporary use permit or special use lease is proposed on a parcel already under a grazing lease, the lessee must be notified. Jensen said consent forms indicate an activity will not substantially impact the operation, while comment forms allow lessees to outline concerns that must be addressed.

Field services and recreation rules

Field Services Assistant Director Ben Bump said the Field Services Division provides on-the-ground support across the state's trust lands.

"We're really here to be the boots on the ground and help folks out," Bump said.

Five field inspectors cover the statewide portfolio, conducting compliance inspections and responding to issues such as recreation conflicts and reclamation concerns tied to other surface uses.

Bump said public recreation on state trust lands is governed by rules adopt-

ed by the Board of Land Commissioners in 1988. Recreation is a privilege, not a right, and is limited to legally accessible lands. Off-road motorized travel, camping and open fires are prohibited, as are activities that damage land or improvements.

When conflicts arise, OSLI works with lessees, local law enforcement and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to mitigate issues. If necessary, restrictions can be considered through a public notice process and board approval.

Loan programs for producers

Assistant Director of Administrative Services Jennifer Doering outlined financing programs administered through the State Loan and Investment Board.

"We handle all the money," Doering said. "What I want to talk about today is two loan programs."

The farm loan program, established in 1921, provides long-term real estate loans to Wyoming agricultural operators. A beginning producer component is available

for producers who meet acreage ownership thresholds.

"This program is not for investors," Doering said.

Eligible uses include purchasing land, livestock and equipment to increase earning capacity. Farm loans are capped at 60 percent of appraised value, while beginning producer loans may reach 70 percent. Interest rates are tied to U.S. Treasury yields.

Doering also highlighted a small business emergency bridge loan program created in 2025 to assist eligible small businesses affected by governor-declared natural disasters. The program allows loans up to \$750,000 for up to three years and loan applications are vetted through approved financial institutions, before the final decision is made by the Director of OSLI.

As the presentation concluded, Berry encouraged attendees to reach out with questions.

"When folks start to learn about what happens at state lands, it's so diverse that they have very specific questions," Berry said. ■

Miyamoto outlines WDA priorities, regulatory challenges and ag initiative goals

BY CALLIE HANSON

Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) Director Doug Miyamoto provided members with a broad overview of the department's structure, responsibilities and current priorities during the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation Legislative Meeting, highlighting both regulatory realities and long-term strategies aimed at strengthening the state's agricultural sector.

Miyamoto began by explaining WDA's structure and budget, noting much of the department's funding supports partners across the state rather than internal operations.

Budget built on pass-through funding

"Something on the order of 62-63% of the WDA budget is actually passed-through in nature," Miyamoto said.

Those dollars flow through the department to conservation districts, predator boards and county weed and pest districts, supporting work such as water quality monitoring, predator control and invasive species management. While the funding runs through WDA, much of the work happens at the local level.

Analytical lab supports inspections and producers

Miyamoto also highlighted the department's Analytical Services Laboratory in Laramie, housed in the same facility as the state veterinary laboratory on the University of Wyoming campus.

The lab provides testing tied to WDA's delegated federal responsibilities and supports state inspection programs. It analyzes samples connected to dairy and meat inspections, investigates consumer complaints and verifies fertilizer nutrient content to ensure truth in labeling.

The lab also conducts bacteriological analysis for conservation districts monitoring surface waters and evaluating data related to impaired water listings. In addition, producers can utilize the lab for baseline water testing from wells, pivots or surface diversions.

Food safety and meat inspection: a balancing act

One of WDA's most visible divisions is Consumer Health Services (CHS), which oversees food safety and Wyoming's state meat and poultry inspection program. Miyamoto noted Wyoming is one of 27 states operating a state meat inspection program.

CHS licenses custom-exempt and state-inspected meat processing facilities and regulates commercial food establishments. Miyamoto emphasized the complexity of meat plant regulations.

"There's a regulation for everything you can imagine," he said, referencing detailed requirements related to water sampling, plant design, equipment placement and sanitation.

Because Wyoming operates under delegated authority from federal agencies, the state's inspection program is routinely audited. Miyamoto said maintaining that authority requires careful adherence to federal standards.

"Oftentimes we're walking a tightrope between our producers, our processors and our federal counterparts," he said. Losing delegated authority, he added, would leave producers and processors dependent entirely on federal inspection capacity.

Processing capacity has grown — but remains small

Miyamoto said Wyoming's meat processing landscape has improved since he began leading WDA in 2015.

"When I started... we didn't have any federal meat processing plants in Wyoming," he said. "Today we have 15 or 16."

During 2020-2022, WDA administered approximately \$10 million in federal funds for meat processing expansion grants, helping increase capacity among custom-exempt, state-inspected and federally inspected facilities.

"We just about doubled our production," he said.

Even so, Wyoming's scale remains small compared to national packers.

"JBS in Greeley processes more meat before their morning coffee break than collectively we do in Wyoming throughout the course of a year," Miyamoto said.

He explained the challenge is both plant capacity and supply logistics. Many Wyoming plants are small, and the state's cow-calf focus limits the number of slaughter-ready, grain-fed cattle available locally. Grain availability and proximity to feeding operations also factor into feasibility.

"I'd like to see if we could do a pilot project that increased both the capacity and the quantity," Miyamoto said, referencing interest in exploring a model that links Wyoming grain, feeding operations and a medium-sized processing plant.

Inspection levels and interstate limitations

Miyamoto reviewed Wyoming's three processing categories: custom-exempt plants, where owners retain possession of the meat labeled "not for sale"; state-inspected plants, which can sell retail product within Wyoming; and federally inspected plants, which can sell product across state lines.

"For retail sales, it can either be state or federally inspected," Miyamoto said.

However, state-inspected meat cannot be sold outside Wyoming. Miyamoto questioned the logic of that restriction, pointing to the "equal to" standard states must meet under federal law.

"We have never been able to understand why you can't sell that over the internet in other states," he said, noting policy efforts are underway to expand interstate eligibility for state-inspected products.

Natural resources and policy advocacy

Beyond inspection and licensing, Miyamoto emphasized WDA's advocacy role through its Natural Resources and Policy Division. Staff monitor federal land management plan revisions, Waters of the U.S. proposals, pesticide regulations and other federal actions affecting Wyoming agriculture.

The division reviews the Federal Register, submits formal comments on proposed rules and works with the Wyoming Attorney General's Office on litigation strategy when needed.

Miyamoto also highlighted the department's mediation efforts, which help producers resolve disputes involving conservation programs or grazing permits without litigation.

Additionally, WDA supports a rangeland health assessment program that provides producers with scientifically credible data. Under a cooperative agreement, data collected through the state-funded program must be treated by federal agencies with the same level of acceptance as agency-collected data, provided scientific standards are met.

Technical services and predator control

WDA's Technical Services Division oversees weights and measures, certifying scales and fuel pumps to ensure products sold by mass or volume are accurately measured. Miyamoto noted emerging discussions around how similar oversight might apply to electric vehicle charging infrastructure.[KC1.1][CH1.2][KC1.3]

He also described predator control as one of WDA's largest program areas, funded at roughly \$8 million per biennium. Funds are allocated to predator boards, and much of the work is carried out by USDA Wildlife Services trappers, with state dollars covering most of the cost.

Miyamoto acknowledged both predator control and invasive species management are areas where demand consistently exceeds available resources.

Cowboy State Agriculture Initiative focuses on working lands

Turning to the governor's Cowboy State Agriculture Initiative, Miyamoto said the central question was straightforward: what is needed to ensure the success of Wyoming agriculture?

"The reality of the situation is it boiled down to... how to keep working ag operations working," he said. "Working lands and then economic viability of those operations."

The initiative emphasizes workforce development and trades training through community colleges, as well as strengthening core land-grant programs at the University of Wyoming in disciplines such as soils, range and forestry.

"Core agriculture study was kind of the

bread and butter, and I don't think that's the way it is today," Miyamoto said.

The initiative also explores expanding meat processing and evaluating value-added opportunities, including potential improvements in sheep and wool processing. Miyamoto referenced examining whether a wool scouring facility could reduce transportation costs by removing lanolin and debris before shipping.

The plan includes a decision matrix and action table for executive and legislative consideration. A related bill would establish a trust account designed to generate ongoing funding through interest earnings, similar to the Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust.[KC2.1][CH2.2][KC2.3]

Legislative focus and long-term direction

Miyamoto said WDA's legislative docket this session was relatively light, though the department tracked a bill addressing cell-cultured meat to ensure regulatory clarity regarding enforcement.

He emphasized the Cowboy State Agriculture trust fund bill as the measure most closely tied to WDA's long-term vision.

Ultimately, Miyamoto framed the department's work — from inspections and predator control to policy advocacy and workforce development — as interconnected pieces of a larger goal: ensuring Wyoming's producers remain viable in a challenging regulatory and economic environment.

"We're trying to figure out what it takes to sustain and grow the sector," he said.

For Miyamoto, that means balancing regulatory responsibility with strategic investment — and keeping Wyoming's working lands working for the next generation. ■



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