



Special Update
Rotunda Roundup from Montana Farmers Union
Transmittal Update – March 2025

The following is a transmittal update of bills MFU has weighed in on during the 2025 Montana Legislative Session.

MFU is the state's largest and oldest grassroots family farm advocacy organization representing family farms, ranches, and rural communities for more than 100 years.

Key to legislative terminology:

- **Tabled** – the bill has been voted down in committee and is unlikely to be revived for further consideration
- **Executive action** – the committee that heard the bill will vote to pass or fail the bill
- **2nd reading vote** – the Full Chamber (House or Senate) will vote to pass or fail the bill
- **Transmitted** – the bill has completed the process in one full chamber and will be sent over to the next chamber to repeat the hearing and vote process for further consideration.
- **Indefinitely postponed** – the bill has failed in the chamber where the full body voted and the bill is unlikely to move forward

Use the table of contents to navigate to any bills you would like to learn more about. Simply click the bill in the table of contents and you'll be taken directly to it. All bill numbers link to the bill text so you can read the bill, see status, and more information.

We will continue to track bills that impact family farms and ranches and rural communities and keep you informed. Questions or feedback on a bill? Contact Rachel Prevost at rprevost@montanafarmersunion.com or Jasmine Krotkov at jkrotkov@montanafarmersunion.com or Erik Somerfeld riksomer@3rivers.net

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Bills MFU weighed in on pre-transmittal

SB 509 - Revise ownership laws related to farm equipment embedded software- electronic control unit, sensor, switches, and controls, sponsored by Sen. Willis Curdy

MFU supported SB 509. The bill would provide farmers, ranchers, and independent mechanics the tools and diagnostic software necessary to repair their own equipment by designating that all embedded software in agricultural equipment is considered sold to the owner, rather than just licensed. **Status: The bill was tabled (killed) in the Senate Ag committee on March 4. Votes to kill the bill:** Gillespie, Bruce "Butch" (R-109), Glimm, Carl (R-103), Kassmier, Josh (R-113), Lenz, Dennis (R-125), McKamey, Wendy (R-112), Tezak, Tony (R-135), Yakawich, Mike (R-124) **Votes to support the bill:** Boldman, Ellie (D-147), Curdy, Willis (D-149), Dunwell, Mary Ann (D-142), Neumann, Cora (D-130)

HB 390 - MT Ag Right to Repair, sponsored by Rep. Paul Tuss. The bill would provide Montana farmers, ranchers, and independent mechanics access to the tools and software needed to fully repair their own equipment. The bill was unfortunately tabled in the House Business and Labor Committee with an 8-12 vote. **Votes to kill the bill:** Buttrey, Ed (R-21) Fitzpatrick, Steve (R-24) Gist, Steve (R-25) Ler, Brandon (R-33) Maness, Shannon (R-70) Marshall, Ron (R-87) Nicol, Nelly (R-53) Oblander, Greg (R-38) Schomer, Curtis (R-48) Seekins-Crowe, Kerri (R-39) Sprunger, Courtenay (R-7) Thiel, Morgan (R-30) **Votes to support the bill:** Carter, Bob (D-96) DeMarois, Scott (D-71) Fitzpatrick, Chip (D-42) Isaly, Jamie (D-58) Karlen, Jonathan (D-98) Lynch, Jennifer (D-73) Seckinger, Joshua (D-62) Sullivan, Katie (D-93)

HB 813- Provide for the agricultural emissions right to repair act, sponsored by Rep. Tom

France. MFU supports HB 813. The bill would provide farmers, ranchers, and independent mechanics the tools and diagnostic software necessary to repair their own equipment and emissions systems. **Status: The bill was heard and tabled (killed) in the House Business and Labor committee on March 4. Votes to table the bill:** Buttrey, Ed (R-21) Fitzpatrick, Steve (R-24) Gist, Steve (R-25) Ler, Brandon (R-33) Maness, Shannon (R-70) Nicol, Nelly (R-53) Oblander, Greg (R-38) Schomer, Curtis (R-48) Seekins-Crowe, Kerri (R-39) Sprunger, Courtenay (R-7) Thiel, Morgan (R-30) **Votes to support the bill:** Carter, Bob (D-96) DeMarois, Scott (D-71) Fitzpatrick, Chip (D-42) Isaly, Jamie (D-58) Karlen, Jonathan (D-98) Lynch, Jennifer (D-73) Seckinger, Joshua (D-62) Sullivan, Katie (D-93)

HB 440 - Providing tax incentives to put Montana-produced food first, sponsored by Rep. Jane

Weber. After a successful 2nd reading vote on the House Floor of 52-41, on Feb. 27 the House Appropriations committee tabled the bill on a 13-10 vote. **Legislators who voted to kill the bill:** Albus, Eric (R-28) Barker, Brad (R-55) Bedey, David (R-86) Falk, Terry (R-10) Fitzpatrick, John (R-76) Gillette, Jane (R-77) Jones, Llew (R-18) Mercer, Bill (R-52) Nave, Fiona (R-56) Nicastro, Anthony (R-50) Schillinger, Jerry (R-34) Vinton, Mike (R-40) Walsh, Ken (R-69) **Legislators who voted to support the bill:** Caferro, Mary (D-81) Crowe, Thedis (D-15) Fox, Mike (D-32) Hawk, Donavon (D-72) Keogh, Connie (D-92) Matthews, Eric (D-66) Muszkiewicz, Luke (D-79) Powers, Debo (D-3) Rosenzweig, Scott (D-57) Tuss, Paul (D-27)

The goal of this bill was to provide an incentive opportunity for retailers to stock Montana foods on their shelves, providing a subtraction from individual income and corporate income taxes for the income from Montana-Produced food. This is completely voluntary.

SB 246 - Provide for Montana First Procurement laws and establish reporting requirements, sponsored by Sen. Cora Neumann. MFU supports SB 246. The bill provides a reporting requirement for contracts for the procurement of food products by a governmental body with a total contract value of \$100,000 or more. SB 246 is a great starting place to gain an understanding of where we are at with using Montana taxpayer dollars for procurement of our large state institutional contracts (think food for the state hospital, Department of Corrections, University systems, etc).
Status & Next Steps: The bill has passed the full Senate and will have a hearing in the House soon.

HB 649 – Establish a farm to food bank program, sponsored by Rep. Shelly Fyant. MFU supported HB 649. The bill sets up a Farm to Food Bank grant program to be run through the Department of Agriculture. This program can help to build a new, local, more reliable market for farmers and ranchers, direct local money into rural communities, help Food Pantry’s strengthen their local economic buying power, and enable more Montanans to get fresh, locally grown food.
Status & Next Steps: The bill was heard in the House Ag Committee on Feb. 27 and passed out of the House Agriculture Committee 11-6. It will be heard on the House Floor soon for Second reading.

HB 119 - Establish MT Cattle Committee: second beef check-off in the works. MFU is opposed to the bill as written. The bill provides for a politically appointed committee that would collect an assessment fee of \$1 from Montana Cattle producers upon a referendum vote. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was scheduled for a hearing on Thursday, 2/27/25 and was postponed at the last minute.

We are asking folks to act in two ways:

[Click here to use this action alert to contact the Governor and the Lt. Governor and let them know your concerns with the bill](#)

[Click here to use our action alert system to send an email to members of the Senate Ag Committee asking they send the bill back to the drawing board.](#)

SJ 11 – Interim study on farmer's markets and food systems, sponsored by Sen. Butch Gillespie. MFU supports SJ 11. This study will look at clarifying the regulatory framework around farmers markets in Montana and provides the opportunity for stakeholders to come to the table and figure out what may or may not be working. There have been a lot of changes around cottage food laws and homemade local foods in the last couple of legislative sessions which has created confusion for both those selling at markets and those working on the food safety and liability.
Status & Next Steps: The bill unanimously passed the Senate Ag Committee and will have a 2nd reading vote in the Senate soon.

SB 376 – Establish Right to Work act, sponsored by Sen. Mark Noland. MFU opposed SB 376. Our promise to serve and represent family farmers/ranchers is delivered through cooperation, legislation, and education -- to continue to strengthen our family farms and cooperative programs that benefit farmers, consumers, laborers and rural communities alike. Our members specifically have policy that opposes “right-to-work” for less legislation. The bill would lead to lower wages and fewer benefits and workplace protections for workers. Montana Farmers Union has long opposed right to work legislation. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was tabled in the Senate Business and Labor Committee on Friday, Feb. 28.

SB 186 - Provide for expedited processing in district courts of water cases arising under final decrees, sponsored by Sen. Barry Usher. MFU supported SB 186, which is in response to the proposed creation of a new Water Court to oversee water cases after the adjudication process is finished. MFU supports water cases going to the District Court level once the adjudication process is finished. This bill would help to expedite water cases in the district court. It keeps the water cases to be decided at the local level first. It allows the district court judge to have experts if needed to assist in the water case. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill did not pass the Senate, following a failed 2nd reading vote and a failed vote for reconsideration.

SB 189 - Lower residential, commercial, and agricultural property tax rates, sponsored by Sen. Mary Ann Dunwell. MFU supports SB 189 to lower property tax rates for main street businesses, farmers, ranchers, and residential property owners. MFU policy supports rebalancing the tax burden between corporate, small business, residential, and agricultural taxpayers. During the 2023 legislative session, the legislature chose not to equalize taxable values in response to rapid increases in residential property prices. This bill takes a good step to bring back fairness for farmers, who often pay multiple types of taxes. The Department of Revenue projects that, in Yellowstone County, people owning grazing land will pay \$15 less per acre on a 120-acre parcel, and a commercial property owner in McCone County would pay \$408 less on a \$100,000 property. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was heard in the Senate Tax Committee this week where they will vote on the bill soon.

HB 528 – Revise property tax rates for agricultural, residential, and commercial property, sponsored by Rep. Ed Byrne. MFU supported HB 528 as it is a companion bill to SB 189 outlined above. **Status & Next Steps:** The House taxation committee passed the bill where it will now go to 2nd reading in the House.

HB 418 - Ban mRNA vaccines in Montana for animals, sponsored by Rep. Greg Kmetz MFU does not support HB 418, which would hinder farmers' and ranchers' ability to work with their veterinarians to make the choice that is best for their livestock and herd health and security. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was tabled by the House Agriculture committee.

HB 356 - Allow livestock loss reimbursement for black bear predation, sponsored by Rep. Eric Tilleman. MFU supported the bill. The bill is a good addition to the livestock loss program to support producers facing predation losses from black bears. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill had a hearing in the Senate Ag Committee on Feb. 25 where they will vote on it soon.

HB 369 - Create a county road maintenance district, sponsored by Rep. John Fitzpatrick. MFU opposed the bill. The bill would allow private road districts to determine the level of maintenance needed on private roads and the funds for maintenance would come from the county's funds without control from county commissioners. **Status & Next Steps:** The House Local Government Committee tabled the bill.

HB 401 – Prohibit the sale of lab-grown meat in the state of Montana, sponsored by Rep. Braxton Mitchell. MFU supported the bill about truth in labeling and transparency for consumers. MFU policy supports banning production, sale, and import of lab-grown meat to protect our food culture, farmers, and public health. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill has passed the full House and will transmit to the Senate for further consideration.

SB 209 - Revise term length of conservation easements, sponsored by Sen. Tony Tezak.

Montana Farmers Union opposed SB 209. The bill would have effectively gutted conservation easements by placing a limit on the length of the easement rather than it being in perpetuity. This would remove the opportunity to utilize this valuable and voluntary tool for family farmers and ranchers to have at their disposal to keep family farms and ranches protected and in production for the next generation. **Status & Next Steps:** The sponsor of the bill asked for it to be tabled and the Senate Judiciary tabled the bill following the bill hearing.

SB 215 - Revise the definition of public school system and requirements of school funding formula by Sen. Becky Beard.

MFU opposed SB 215. Education is the cornerstone of our democracy. MFU urges full funding for Public Schools, and MFU has concerns that this bill will put funding at risk. Our rural schools are the heartbeat of our communities, and their success shouldn't be put at risk by tying student achievement to inflationary funds that are not all related to student achievement. The cost for our schools to operate and the cost of services necessary to keep our schools running are not necessarily all tied to student achievement. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill passed the full Senate and is now in the House for further consideration.

SB 4 Revise taxation of homesite on certain agricultural property, sponsored by Sen. Becky Beard & HB 27 Remove automatic agricultural classification for certain parcels, sponsored by Rep. Sherry Essmann:

MFU opposed both bills as they are currently written. SB 4 is looking at ag tax structure of 1-acre homesites on agricultural property, while HB 27 looks at land classification/changes for "idle" land that are currently enjoying Montana's Agricultural land tax rate. We think policy should support the continuation of farming, and we urge the Montana legislature to remove all tax advantages that are intended for agriculture from being utilized by non-agricultural operations. As written, do not feel these bills address the problem fully. **Status & Next Steps:** SB 4 was tabled by the Senate Taxation committee. HB 27 passed as amended following its hearing in the House Taxation and will have a 2nd reading vote soon.

HB 360 - Establish the child care workforce recruitment and retention support payment program, Sponsored by Rep. Melissa Romano.

MFU supports HB 360. HB 360 would accomplish two things for rural families: bolster the availability of child care, and provide a kick start to child care businesses. Child care is especially important to beginning farmers and ranchers. If we as a society value keeping the tradition of agriculture alive in Montana, we have to level the playing field for rural families. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was tabled in the House Health and Human Services committee.

HB 129 - Provide income tax benefit to support emergency response volunteers sponsored by Rep. Llew Jones.

MFU supports HB 129. The bill provides an income tax benefit for volunteer firefighters and volunteer emergency care providers. MFU is deeply invested in supporting our rural EMS providers. **Status & Next steps:** The bill passed the House and will have a Senate hearing soon.

SB 188 - Revising solar energy policy laws – Implement Montana Shared solar Sponsored by Sen. Chris Pope The bill would enable opportunity for Montanans who are feeling the impacts of rising energy costs the freedom to choose the energy they want. SB 188 would allow multiple households, buildings, or businesses to access more affordable energy by purchasing individual shares of a single solar array. SB 188 would update our laws so that everyone – businesses, homeowners, and renters – could enjoy the benefits of solar technology if they so choose. **Status and Next Steps:** The bill has passed the full Senate and transmitted to the House for further consideration.

HB 269 - Eliminate the organic commodity advisory council, sponsored by Rep. Eric Tilleman MFU opposed the bill in its original form, but worked on amendments to alleviate concerns. Concerns were raised as the bill would allow the department to cut the certification program if there were budget issues. Rather than cut the program if budgetary issues arise, we would like to see amendments that add a certification fee for producers to keep the program functioning rather than cutting it. A loss of Montana’s certification program would mean Montana organic producers would need to depend on private certification programs that are not based in Montana leading to long wait times. Further, with the removal of the advisory council, we would like to see amendments that the Department of Agriculture will seek input from the Montana Organic Association, producers, handlers and processors and others in the community on a quarterly basis. **Status and Next Steps:** The House Agriculture committee passed the bill with the [amendments](#). The bill passed the full House and was heard in the Senate Ag committee where they will vote on the bill soon.

Medicaid Expansion and Medicaid: MFU supported three pieces of legislation geared toward the continuation of Medicaid Expansion in Montana and provider rates. Both House bills were heard in the House Human Services Committee. SB 523 was heard in the Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Safety Committee. We need emergency medical response systems, critical access hospitals, rural clinics and assisted living facilities. Farming and ranching communities face serious hurdles getting access to mental health, substance abuse and addiction resources. Medicaid Expansion plays a critical role in providing funding for and access to rural Montana healthcare.

- **[HB 230](#) Generally revise Medicaid laws sponsored by Rep. Mary Caferro** – the bill was tabled in the House Human Services Committee
- **[HB 245](#) Revise the Montana HELP Act workforce development provisions and termination date sponsored by Rep. Ed Buttrey** – This bill implements Medicaid expansion in Montana and is on its way to the Governor’s desk for a signature.
- **[SB 523](#) – Revise reimbursement for medicaid services, sponsored by Sen. Chris Pope.** An important part to maintain access to rural healthcare services by providing an increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates. The bill would have helped Montana stay on track with reimbursement rates for future years. - The bill was tabled by the Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Safety committee on March 3.

MFU supported SB 78, SB 79, and SB 80 from the Department of Livestock, which align Montana law with current practice as well as some modernization and continue to work toward efficiency for

ranchers. Of particular note is SB 80, sponsored by Josh Kassmier, which allows digital copies of livestock transportation documentation.

- **SB 78** *Revise laws related to marking hides and meat - Josh Kassmier* – the bill passed the full Senate and will be heard in the House Agriculture committee soon.
- **SB 79** *Repeal laws related to inspection of animals in feedlots - Josh Kassmier* - the bill was heard in the House Ag Committee on Feb. 18 where they will vote on the bill soon.
- **SB 80** *Allow for digital copies of required documentation for transport of livestock - Josh Kassmier* - the bill was heard in the House Ag Committee on Feb. 18 where they will vote on the bill soon.

HB 229 - Generally revise Montana environmental policy act to implement court decision sponsored by Rep. Debo Powers and heard in the House Natural Resources committee. MFU supported the bill. **Status and Next Steps:** The committee tabled the bill.

HB 490 – Revise civil liability laws opposed in original form, sponsored by Rep. Amy Regier. MFU opposed the bill in its original form, as it would have provided a liability shield for utility companies related to wildfire mitigation plans. The bill raised concerns on the harm this would have for farmers and ranchers who could be impacted by wildfires. The bill has been heavily amended in an effort to address the many concerns raised in the initial hearing and MFU will continue to track it. **Status and Next Steps:** The bill has passed the full House and has transmitted to the Senate for further consideration.

HB 504: Expand livestock loss eligibility to include domestic bison, sponsored by Rep. Eric Tilleman.

MFU supported HB 504. Domestic Bison being managed as livestock in the state of Montana are livestock. These domestic bison producers pay per capita. Domestic bison like other livestock eligible for livestock loss funding, face predator depredation pressures which can be devastating to bison producers, just as it is to cattle and sheep and other livestock producers. With that in mind, MFU fully supports funding for the livestock loss program and wants to ensure there remains a balance in funding for all livestock that are currently listed as eligible in the program, including cattle, sheep, and swine. **Status and Next Steps:** The bill has passed the full House and has transmitted to the Senate for further consideration.

SB 416: Establish label requirements for pasteurized milk & 415: Generally revise milk laws.

Both bills sponsored by Sen. Greg Hertz. – MFU opposed both bills. The changes to the 12 day rule for milk labeling proposed in both bills would not benefit our rural communities nor support food security and local food system resiliency. Maintaining the 12-day rule ensures that milk moves faster out of our stores, is fresher for Montanans. Also, our 12-day rule means Montanans are drinking milk from Montana’s dairies and that’s a win for Montana consumers and food system resiliency. **Status and Next Steps:** The Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Safety committee tabled both bills.

SB 90: Redistribute certain state tax revenue to primary residence property tax relief,

sponsored by Sen. Carl Glimm. Montana Farmers Union opposed SB 90 in its original form, as the bill would have ended the funding for some critical programs that benefit rural and agricultural communities, notably Commerce's Agritourism Grant program and the marketing funding for the Made in Montana program. The bill was amended to protect the funding for those programs at the Department of Commerce. **Status & Next steps:** The amended version of the bill has passed the full Senate and will be heard in the House for further consideration soon.

SB 62: Provide for phaseout of Medicaid expansion program, sponsored by Sen. Carl Glimm. MFU opposed SB 62. This bill to phase out Medicaid expansion would have negatively impacted many rural Montanans. Medicaid expansion has made major inroads in improving access to care for rural Montanans. Rural health services should be maintained and strengthened, not phased out. This benefits all of rural Montana, not just Medicaid recipients. Farming and ranching families who get the healthcare they need can return to work and school more quickly, stay in the workforce longer, and stay productive. **Status & Next steps:** The bill failed a 2nd reading vote in the Senate and was indefinitely postponed.

SB 199, Revise the Medicaid expansion program, sponsored by Sen. Jeremy Trebas. MFU also opposed SB 199 due to its harmful impacts it would have had on the state's Medicaid Expansion program which is essential to rural health care access. **Status & Next steps:** The bill failed a 2nd reading vote in the Senate and was indefinitely postponed.

HB 120 – Expanding CPACE opportunities to add in multi-family housing Facilities Sponsored by Rep. Julie Darling. This bill expands a current state program that creates more opportunity for energy independence and use of renewable energy through financing to make energy efficiency upgrades, water conservation projects, and renewable energy investments more attainable to commercial building owners, including farms. Expanding this program further adds the opportunity for counties and rural communities further their energy independence by expanding to include multi-family housing facilities, which includes, assisted living facilities, hospitals and more to be a part of the program. **Status & Next steps:** The bill was heard in the Senate State Admin Committee on Feb. 21. The committee will vote on the bill soon.

SB 8 – Allow for online voter registration Sponsored by Sen. Wendy McKamey. Our member written policy supports voting processes which secures the ease of access to voting by all citizens. Online voter registration will help rural Montanans who many of which live very far from polling locations, ensure they are registered to vote in elections from their own home, saving valuable time that can be spent on our farms and ranches. **Status & Next steps:** The Senate State Admin committee tabled the bill on Jan. 22, followed by a failed motion to revive the bill in the Senate on March 5.

SB 523 – Revise reimbursement for Medicaid services, sponsored by Sen. Chris Pope. MFU supported SB 523 as it is an important part to maintain access to rural healthcare services by providing an increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates. The bill would have helped Montana stay on track with reimbursement rates for future years. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was tabled by the Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Safety committee on March 3.

HB 385 – Establishing the school mental health promotion pilot program, sponsored by Rep. Melissa Romano. MFU supported HB 385. As noted in the bill, “the purpose of the program is to encourage and support schools in implementing innovative, student-led, and locally determined mental health promotion initiatives.” MFU membership has prioritized increasing access and funding for mental health services. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill was heard in the House Appropriations committee and will be voted on soon.

SB 204 - Sunset or reapprove existing voter approved property tax levies & SB 205 Revise laws related to voter approval for property tax levies and bonds, both sponsored by Sen. Greg Hertz. MFU opposed both bills in their original form as they would have had a significant negative impact on local government funding, school funding, and funding for emergency services that both our urban and rural communities rely on. **Status & Next steps:** SB 204 failed to pass on a 3rd reading vote in the Senate. SB 205 failed to pass on a 2nd reading vote and was indefinitely postponed in the Senate.

HB 811 - Increase the generating capacity for customer-generated electricity, sponsored by Rep. Jamie Isaly. MFU supported HB 811 as it would have expanded the benefits of net metering by raising the current cap of 50KW to 100 KW. **Status & Next steps:** The bill was tabled by the House Energy, Technology, and Federal Relations committee.

HB 704 - Generally revise ground water laws, sponsored by Rep. Mike Vinton & SB 436 – Generally revise laws relating to exempt wells, sponsored by Sen. Carl Glimm. MFU opposed both bills in their original form. MFU has specific written policy to oppose the drilling of exempt wells that affect existing water users. Partly this is because exempt wells are outside our current prior appropriations doctrine: first in time, first in right. Creating a second exemption pathway for developers would amount to a taking of senior water rights without just compensation and due process. There is not an unlimited amount of groundwater in Montana. When exempt wells go in, it dewater the ranches of hardworking Montanans. **Status & Next steps:** HB 704 failed on a 2nd reading vote in the House. SB 436 was amended on 2nd reading in the Senate and passed 2nd reading.

HB 775 – Repeal sunset on Water Court Actions, sponsored by Rep. Ken Walsh. MFU opposed HB 775 as we would rather see another date set for a sunset on Water Court actions rather than a full repeal. **Status & Next steps:** The bill has passed its 2nd reading vote in the House.