



Rotunda Roundup from Montana Farmers Union

April 7-11

Week 14

The following is a weekly update of Montana Farmers Union priority bills of 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.

Action Alert Updates:

SJ 25 – **Joint Resolution urging Congress to support MCOOL, sponsored by Sen. Willis Curdy.** MFU supports SJ 25. This is a policy priority of our membership. Ranchers deserve credit for the high-quality products they raise and consumers deserve accurate and honest labels so they can make the decisions that are best for their family and their food dollars. Pork and beef are the only products that are not subject to mandatory Country of Origin Labeling. In 2015, Congress repealed MCOOL only for beef and pork following lobbying from the multinational meat packing monopoly. These multinational packing companies stand to profit more without mandatory COOL because they can import foreign cheaper, lower quality products, mix or repackage it here in the USA, and enjoy the USDA label which often is confusing to consumers who think it's a label of origin. This resolution will once again push the issue at the federal level, where meaningful action is possible thanks to the reintroduction of Sen. John Thune's American Beef Labeling Act. This resolution will send a message to Montana's Congressional Delegation, Governor Gianforte, Secretary Rollins of USDA, and the United States Trade Representative that the Montana Legislature, Montana ranchers, and consumers want this issue fixed. **Status & Next Steps:** The resolution has its next hearing in the House Agriculture Committee on April 15. [Send a note of support to the committee today using this action alert!](#)

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 how Montana taxpayer dollars are used for procurement with our large state institutional contracts (think food for the state hospital, Department of Corrections, University systems, etc). This reporting will help us know how much of that is local Montana food so farmers and ranchers understand better how to market to and serve institutions in Montana. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill is moving through the enrollment process and heading to the Governor's desk! Thank you for everyone's hard work in advocating for the passage of this bill.

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 food safety and liability. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill unanimously passed the House Ag Committee following its hearing on April 4, and will have a 2nd reading vote in the House soon.

Some additional highlights from this week:

SB 215 – **Revise the definition of public school system and requirements of school funding formula, sponsored 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 was heard in the House Education committee on April 4 and was subsequently tabled.

SR 103 – **Confirm the Governor’s Appointments to the Livestock Loss Board, sponsored by Sen. Butch Gillespie.** We support the nomination of all three candidates to the Montana Livestock Loss Board. Jordan Mannix, Doreen Gillespie, and Joseph Kipp. MFU member-written policy supports full funding for the livestock loss program, and livestock producer perspective on this board is critically important. We appreciate the work that the board does to support producers who are negatively impacted by wolves, grizzly bears, and mountain lions, as well as proactively approaching livestock loss mitigation programs that decrease the risk of negative impacts on livestock from predation. We look forward to the good work of these members on the board. **Status & Next Steps** The resolution has been adopted by the Senate.

HB 848 – **Provide funding for regional rail authorities, sponsored by Rep. Denise Baum.** MFU policy encourages establishing a coordinated national system of rail transportation that will serve both rural and urban areas at reasonable rates. These rates in Montana should be comparable to other states to keep the cost of moving farm products via rail competitive. This bill is a step in the right direction to making this a possibility in our state. Rail transportation in Montana can provide the opportunity for farmers and ranchers to use rail to distribute more products within our state. Encouraging more in-state distribution and transportation will be critical to help Montana remain competitive and establish a local food system that is resilient as we weather the uncertainty of a trade war. MFU policy also urges support for a Southern Montana passenger rail service from Missoula to Billings. **Status & Next Steps** The bill was heard in the Senate Highways and Transportation committee on April 9 where it awaits a committee vote.

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