



Rotunda Roundup from Montana Farmers Union

March 31 – April 4

Week 13

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:

HB 119 -- Establish MT Cattle Committee: second beef check-off in the works, sponsored by Speaker Brandon Ler. The Senate Agriculture committee did a work session on March 25 to discuss the bill and the many amendments that have been put forth. [You can watch the work session here.](#) After organizations voiced amendments they'd like to see during the work session, the Senate Ag Committee voted to table the bill on Tuesday, April 1. **MFU opposed to the bill** as written. The bill would have provided for a politically appointed committee that would collect an assessment fee of \$1 from Montana Cattle producers upon a referendum vote. **The bill was tabled on Tuesday, April 1 by the Senate Agriculture Committee**

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 that 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 (MCOOL). In 2015, Congress repealed MCOOL only for beef and pork following lobbying from the multinational meat packing monopoly.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 – the Montana Legislature, Montana ranchers, and consumers want this issue fixed. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill has passed the Montana Senate on 2nd reading, 35-15.

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 has returned to the Senate for a final concur vote on the amendments. It will then go to the Governor's desk!

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 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:

HB 886 – Provide for water division court, judges, sponsored by Rep. Ken Walsh. MFU opposed HB 886. The bill will grow bureaucracy by making permanent the intended-to-be-temporary Water Court. There was a good reason to create a temporary water court to oversee the adjudication process. There were thousands of water rights that needed to be adjudicated and having a court focus on that was critical but once the adjudication process is complete the critical need will be resolved. Currently district judges do rule on water cases. Having these cases go to the district court once adjudication is complete allows for local control for Montana farmers and ranchers, water users. HB 886 creates a conflict of interest in Montana water law. Most water cases involve the DNRC at some level, either as a water right holder, witness, plaintiff or defendant. The director of the DNRC is appointed by the Governor and HB 866 would allow the Governor to appoint the water division judges. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill failed to pass 2nd reading in the House on Thursday, April 3.

SJ 27 - Joint resolution urging Congress to act on brucellosis vaccines for livestock, sponsored by Sen. Willis Curdy. MFU supported SJ 27. MFU member-written policy supports a fully funded vaccine bank. Maintaining herd health and security is critical in the state and nation to ensure the resiliency of public health and our food supply chain. It's critical that we support efforts to ensure access to the Brucellosis vaccine and that we are supporting the producers who are within the Designated Surveillance Area of Montana. **Status & Next Steps:** The bill has passed the Montana Senate on 2nd reading.

HB 401 – Prohibit the sale of lab-grown meat in the state of Montana, sponsored by Rep. Braxton Mitchell. MFU supported the bill. 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 had a hearing in the Senate Agriculture Committee on Tuesday, April 1. The bill has passed the Senate Agriculture committee where it will go to the Senate floor for a 2nd reading vote next.

HB 860 – Provide for veterinary training loan program, sponsored by Rep. Randyn Gregg. Montana Farmers Union supports HB 860. The bill sets up a loan program for vet students who commit to practicing in underserved areas in Montana, as well as a preference for applicants who are Montana residents. Veterinarians play a key role in ranching and animal health. The job comes with high levels of stress and expense, and doing what we can as a state to support and help bring veterinarians to our rural communities is a priority. MFU supports funding for education, training, apprenticeships, and startup funding for large animal vets and vet technicians. **Status and Next Steps:** The bill was heard in the House Education committee and passed. It has since passed out of the House Appropriations committee following the addition of an amendment to add a sunset to the bill. The bill will go to the House floor for 2nd reading.

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 was heard in the House Education committee on April 4.

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
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