



CAPITOL REVIEW

A WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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A Weekly Legislative Report

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COMMISSIONS SEEK INCREASES

The Idaho Bean Commission (IBC) and the Idaho Alfalfa and Clover Seed Commission (IACSC) are both seeking increases in their producer assessments in the 2025 legislature. The IBC has legislation that would allow them to assess their dealers and producers \$.08/pound of seed produced, and to establish a new ceiling in Idaho Code to be up \$.24/pound at the vote of the growers. The IBC assessment has not been increased for over 30 years. The IACSC desires to increase their assessment from \$1/4 cent/pound to \$.01/one cent/pound of processed seed. The largest driver for both commissions to seek an increase is due to the shrinking number of growers of these commodities and shrinking acres. Additionally, the dollar does not buy what it did 10 years or even 5 years ago. Most of the areas where production has been lost is where urbanization is occurring. The IBC and IACSC have statutory duties in the areas of marketing/promotion, research and education. The IBC is starting legislation in the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee, and it is being sponsored by Senator Camille Blaylock and the IACSC is starting in the House Agricultural Affairs Committee with Representative Shawn Dygert sponsoring the legislation. Neither assessment would become effective until July 1, 2025.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

The discussion of voting by absentee ballot continues to linger as a discussion point in the legislature. Recently, H139 was introduced. H139 sets specific requirements for the use of absentee ballots. With the increased use of absentee ballots as high as 49% in the 2024 election, the bill sponsor argues that specific reasons and purposes be set forth for the use of absentee ballots. The original intent of the absentee ballot was to provide access to voters who were physically unable to vote for reasons beyond their control: physical infirmity, illness, work restrictions, and other similar situations. Rep. Alfieri stated that the ballot was never intended as a convenience, as it has most

recently become. Broadening the use of absentee ballots also opens Idaho up to potential voter fraud, as the Commission on Federal Election Reform declared "absentee ballots remain the largest source of potential voter fraud." This legislation addresses those issues by eliminating no-excuse absentee ballots, while preserving the rights of those unable to vote in person because of reasons beyond their control.

There are several provisions in H139 that qualifies an individual for the receipt of an absentee ballot. These include the following:

- A. The individual is involved in active service with the armed forces of the United States.
- B. The individual is dealing with an illness, disability, or hospitalization.
- C. The individual is unable to appear at the polls on the day of the election because of work or attend university classes.
- D. The individual is out of the county on the day of the election on a religious mission.
- E. The individual is occupying a second home or residence outside of the individual's home county on the date the election is held.
- F. The individual is sixty-five (65) years of age or old.
- G. The individual lives in a mail only ballot – in other words a very remote location.

You may ask why this issue is important to agriculture. Often elections might take place during the busy time on a farm or ranch and polls are only open from 8 AM – 8 PM often making it difficult for a production agriculture operator to fit that time into their schedule.

ONION HALL OF FAME

Mike was born on August 10, 1958, in Twin Falls, Idaho, the son of Bob and Carol Thornton. Mike has two brothers, Sam and Rob, and two sisters, Carol and Lisa. Mike's family lived in Caldwell from 1963 -1966, Mike still remembers visiting growers' fields when his dad would take them along with his job as U of I

extension agent in Southwest Idaho. Mike attended high school in Pullman, Washington, where his activities included band, honor society, and wrestling. Mike attended college at Washington State University, where he received his Bachelor of Science degree, and he attended Colorado State University where he received his Master of Science degree. He continued his education at the University of Idaho and received his PhD. After receiving his PhD, in 1990 Mike went to work in Parma for the University of Idaho and that is where he became involved with the onion industry. Mike has also worked for Colorado State University, Monsanto, and AMVAC. Mike has served on many Boards and Committees. He served on the Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee. His original term was from 1990-1991. He also served from 1998-1999. He was re-appointed to the Committee in 2004-2005 and served until 2024. Mike has served on the Idaho Onion Growers Association Board for over 25 years. He was a board member for Leadership Idaho Agriculture, and Idaho Ag in the Classroom. Mike also served on the Pacific Northwest Vegetable Association. Mike met his wife Kristie in 2005 at a bike race, and they were married in 2012. Mike and Kristie have four children, five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Mike commented, "It has been an absolute honor to be associated with the onion industry in the Treasure Valley!" The ceremony took place during the Idaho – Malheur County Onion Convention in Ontario on Tuesday, February 4.

AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS

H104 provides a singular and uniform definition for "agricultural buildings" across all local jurisdictions. The definition of agricultural buildings includes livestock shelters or buildings, barns, storage and maintenance structures for equipment and machinery, horticulture structures, grain silos and more. Essentially it includes any structure designed, constructed, and intended to house, accommodate, or store farm implements, hay, grain, poultry, livestock, or other horticultural products. The legislation outlines what the definition of "agricultural buildings" does not include such as places of habitation, processing facilities, and a place used by the public. H104 also restricts counties from changing or restricting the exemption by imposing size limits on agricultural buildings, setting maximum exit distances and requiring automatic sprinkler systems.

IDAHO BRAND BOARD

Stakeholders have been sitting around the negotiation table for the last two years providing input during the review of the operations and efficiency of the department. The Idaho Brand Board, which operates as the supervisory body for the Idaho Brand Department, has been caught in a "catch 22" situation, where they are a dedicated fee run organization, and those dedicated funds have slowly lost purchasing power.

This has resulted in the lost ability to retain employees at competitive wages due to inflation and inability to succinctly adjust rates. Additionally, the interest from the State's Brand Account (which is currently applied to the State's General Fund) being retained in the account, would generate an additional sum to support operations. Stakeholders support this action, as the monies generated are from, and for the benefit of, livestock producers. The Idaho Brand Department fills the important purpose of facilitating the transparent movement of cattle through the primary service of providing brand inspections, which prove the ownership of livestock. The department also operates in the capacity of investigators of cattle ownership and when required, to resolve conflict or prove theft. The brand board is seeking to adjust fees through S1016.

CLOUD SEEDING

S1064 was introduced this week, and it creates several sideboards in the pursuit of clarity. S1064 adds definitions and seeks to enhance transparency and accountability in Idaho's cloud seeding operations by requiring the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) to publish annual reports that will further detail the operational date, environmental impact, public engagement, effectiveness metrics and practices. By requiring these disclosures, this bill aims to ensure that cloud seeding operations are conducted responsibly, with due consideration for general impacts, public involvement, and legislative oversight. Since 2014, the IWRB has participated in a collaborative cloud seeding program with Idaho Power Company (IPC), and water users in the Boise River, Wood River, and Upper Snake River Basins. IPC conducts program operations, and the IWRB and local water users provide funding support. The legislation is sponsored by Senator Tammy Nichols. Additionally, S1065 was introduced that repeals several portions of Idaho statute dealing with weather modification. If passed, S1065 would prohibit unauthorized weather modification and solar radiation management activities in Idaho to protect the state's environment and public health. The bill ensures that only authorized projects, such as those by the Idaho Water Resource Board would be allowed to move forward, providing oversight to mitigate risks associated with unauthorized weather manipulation. Additionally, the bill removes an unused taxing district related to weather modification that has not been utilized since the 1970s. The legislation is sponsored by Senator Tammy Nichols.

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