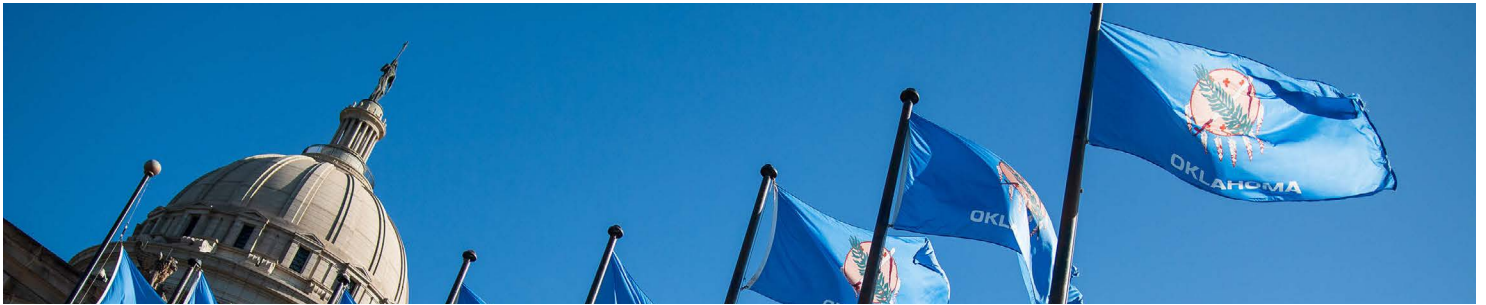


PERSPECTIVE

February 23, 2024



Legislative update: 2024 legislative session kicks off with state of the state, poultry bill and water discussions

The 2024 Oklahoma legislative session kicked off Monday, Feb. 5, with Gov. Kevin Stitt's annual State of the State address before the combined Oklahoma House of Representatives and Oklahoma Senate.

Highlights of Stitt's speech as it relates to Farm Bureau policy included a call for strengthening education for Oklahoma students, increased jurisdictional clarity in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2020 *McGirt* ruling, and mention of the progress made in reining in bad actors in Oklahoma's medical marijuana industry.

Stitt also underscored his resolve to pass tax cuts for hardworking Oklahomans, including the elimination of the state income tax. While Farm Bureau members have long supported lowering taxes, OKFB maintains a strong stance against new or increased ad valorem taxes, which inequitably impact farmers and ranchers, to recoup any lost revenue incurred from lowering or eliminating other taxes.

The state house and senate have spent the weeks since the opening day of the second session of the state's 59th legislature in committee meetings as they waded through the thousands of bills

proposed at the beginning of session. The deadline for bills to be passed out of committee in their chamber of origin is Thursday, Feb. 29.

Already, a major bill of interest to Farm Bureau members was approved by the house and will now move on to the senate. HB 4118 by Rep. David Hardin of Stilwell and Sen. Brent Howard of Altus provides liability protection for poultry growers who are in compliance with a nutrient management plan that has been approved by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

The bill is in response to lawsuits filed against poultry growers in eastern Oklahoma who were in compliance with their approved nutrient management plan, but who were yet targeted by groups with civil lawsuits under the premise of water quality. OKFB advocated for passage of the bill, sharing the progress Oklahoma has made, due in large part to the work of farmers and ranchers, in increasing water quality in watersheds throughout eastern Oklahoma.

OKFB members were asked to contact their legislators through OKFB's text-message-based action alert system, helping the bill to pass off the house floor

by a margin of 62-28 on Monday, Feb. 19. Members can sign up for OKFB action alerts online at okfb.news/takeaction.

Two major pieces of legislation have emerged dealing with water measurement and water usage that OKFB continues to monitor.

HB 3194 by Rep. Carl Newton of Cherokee would require all groundwater wells permitted by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board to have "flow meters or an alternative measuring system as defined by the Board."

SB 1341 by Sen. Brent Howard would require all permitted water wells to have "metering or measuring" in place. The bill would also create several new concepts in Oklahoma water law for the OWRB to utilize in an effort to reduce the amount of water permitted users can access. These bills are expected to undergo changes as all stakeholders, including OKFB, engage in the process.

Other highlights from the opening week of session include the Senate republican caucus electing Sen. Greg McCortney of Ada as president pro tempore designee, making him the successor to the post currently held by Greg Treat of Edmond.

Don't forget to join OKFB's Public Policy department for weekly legislative updates every Friday during session at noon via Zoom. Contact your OKFB field representative for information on joining the calls.



OKFB members hear from political consultants on a panel hosted by Tres Savage, editor-in-chief of journalism website NonDoc.



HJ Reed walks OKFB members through a process of best practices to follow when advocating at the state legislature.

OKFB members discuss foreign land ownership, 2024 election cycle during leadership conference

Nearly 100 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members gathered in Oklahoma City for the organization’s 2024 Leadership Conference held Tuesday, Feb. 13.

The annual event brings OKFB members together to learn from and fellowship with a number of speakers and guests throughout the conference.

The event kicked off with Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur giving an update on Oklahoma agriculture and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, of which Arthur is the president.

Arthur recounted some of NASDA’s top priorities for the coming year, including the farm bill, agricultural research, animal disease preparedness, conservation efforts and more.

She also expressed the need for programs like OKFB’s Young Farmers and Ranchers, noting the average age of agricultural producers is 57.

Arthur shared with Farm Bureau members the growth of Oklahoma’s agritourism industry and encouraged members to think about tourism opportunities on their operations to diversify income, create space for family members to return to the farm, and educate fellow Oklahomans about the agriculture industry.

Farm Bureau members also heard from Tres Savage, the editor-in-chief at NonDoc Media, a journalism project that started in Savage’s garage in 2015. Savage described NonDoc as a community journalism platform that

aims to support under-covered issues around the state of Oklahoma.

Savage noted the decline in traditional journalism and the effect of shuttered main-street newspapers in communities across Oklahoma and the United States. NonDoc aims to bridge the gap between local and national news organizations, allowing local newspapers to run content in their print issues free of charge to provide another source of content for dwindling newspaper staff.

He also walked members through best practices as news consumers in an age of increased click-bait news and artificial intelligence technology, noting reliable news articles and sources generally list author names, include information from a variety of sources, display funding sources, and make their contact information readily available.

Savage also moderated a panel of political consultants to give conference attendees a glimpse into the 2024 election season. Panelists included Evan Handy of the South Creek Group, Matt Parker of Campaign Advocacy Management Professionals, and Brigette Zorn, a political and marketing strategist who headed Joy Hofmeister’s gubernatorial campaign in 2022.

The panelists discussed top issues for the 2024 elections, polling patterns across Oklahoma voters, upcoming state Senate races and more.

American Farm Bureau Federation Economist Danny Munch gave Farm Bureau members an update on foreign

ownership of agricultural land across the U.S. and Oklahoma. Munch noted the recent uptick of state-submitted policy proposals as AFBF received 11 proposals from nine states concerning foreign land ownership in 2022.

Munch explained the current process in place to track foreign land ownership through the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act, which is coordinated through the USDA’s Farm Service Agency. Munch explained AFIDA’s limitations and inefficiencies, as it is a paper form and only requires the primary investor’s country be listed.

Munch revealed that as of 2021, only 3.1% of agricultural land in the U.S. – about 40 million acres – is foreign-owned, and nearly half is used as forestland and timberland. According to Munch, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany hold 50% of the foreign-owned land in the U.S.

Munch said Oklahoma is ranked fifth nationally in foreign-owned land with about 4.2% of agricultural land in the hands of international investors. The statewide breakdown is similar to the national statistics with Canada, Italy and Germany topping the list of countries owning land in Oklahoma.

This year’s speaker lineup concluded with an advocacy training session with HJ Reed of Loyal and True Strategies. Reed discussed best practices for visiting with legislators and advocating for the agricultural and rural issues that matter most to Farm Bureau members.

Ten legislators honored at OKFB leadership conference

Ten Oklahoma lawmakers were recently honored with the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Champion award at the organization's annual leadership conference on Tuesday, Feb. 13, in Oklahoma City.

The OKFB Champion award is presented to state lawmakers who serve as exemplary advocates for Oklahoma agriculture, going above and beyond for the state's farmers and ranchers during the 2023 legislative session.

Champion award recipients were Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall, Atoka; Rep. John Pfeiffer, Orlando; Rep. Dell Kerbs, Shawnee; Rep. David Hardin, Stilwell; Rep. Anthony Moore, Clinton; Sen. Brent Howard, Altus; Sen. Lonnie Paxton, Tuttle (*not pictured*); Sen. Darcy Jech, Kingfisher; Sen. Chris Kidd, Waurika; and Sen. Chuck Hall, Perry (*not pictured*).

"As Oklahomans, we are fortunate to have state legislators who understand the important role agriculture plays in our state," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "We are proud to honor these individuals for their service to agriculture and rural Oklahoma through their work at the state Capitol."

Award winners were nominated by county Farm Bureau members and the OKFB board of directors. Recipients received a plaque in recognition of their dedication and service.



Rep. Charles McCall



Rep. John Pfeiffer



Rep. Dell Kerbs



Rep. David Hardin



Rep. Anthony Moore



Sen. Brent Howard



Sen. Darcy Jech



Sen. Chris Kidd

AFBF: New ag census shows alarming loss of family farms

New agriculture census data released by USDA in mid-February is cause for concern as the number of farms operating in the United States and the number of farm acres have both fallen significantly.

The 2022 Census of Agriculture reports 141,733 fewer farms in 2022 than in 2017. The number of farm acres fell to 880,100,848, a loss of more than 20 million acres from just five years earlier.

"The latest census numbers put in black and white the warnings our members have been expressing for years," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "Increased regulations, rising supply costs, lack of available labor and weather disasters have all squeezed farmers to the point that many of them find it impossible to remain economically sustainable."

While AFBF notes it is encouraging that the number of beginning farmers increased, the latest census numbers show the number of farmers over the age of 65 is outpacing younger farmers. Almost 1.3 million farmers are now at or beyond retirement age, while just 300,000 farmers are under the age of 35.

AFBF has long-established policies supporting beginning farmers, including through farm bill programs focused on new and beginning farmers.

Reminder: OKFB rural development program applications due March 1

Applications for the 2024 Oklahoma Grassroots Rural & Ag Business Accelerators Program are due March 1.

The program provides rural innovators with a full business and innovation development experience with the Activate Oklahoma track designed for rural innovators and the Accelerate Oklahoma track designed for agricultural innovations.

Innovators can complete the application online by March 1 at okfb.news/AcceleratorApp.

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OKFB staff receive state, national agriculture recognition

Two Oklahoma Farm Bureau staff members received recognition for outstanding efforts in serving the agriculture industry with awards presented at recent events.

OKFB Executive Director Thad Doye was presented with the Oklahoma FFA Foundation's Servant Believer award during the foundation's 2024 "I Believe" Gala on Saturday, Feb. 3, at the Omni Hotel in Oklahoma City.

Doye was recognized for his longstanding efforts to support the FFA

Hunger Challenge, which connects FFA members with hungry Oklahomans through donations through the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture's Pork for Packs and Beef for Backpacks Program.

The FFA Foundation recognized Doye's years-long dedication to picking up donated animals and transporting them to be processed into protein sticks for hungry Oklahoma children.

Amarie Bartel, OKFB's rural economic development coordinator, was awarded the American National CattleWomen's

2023 Outstanding Promoter of the Year Feb. 2 during the 2024 Cattle Industry Convention in Orlando.

The organization said the award each year highlights a cattiewoman who has used her time, talents, and resources to promote to others about the beef industry and agriculture at local, state, and national venues.

Bartel supports the beef industry in Oklahoma and beyond as the president-elect of the Oklahoma CattleWomen.

