

PERSPECTIVE

February 25, 2022



Legislative update: State budget, medical marijuana and county zoning take center stage at start of session

As Oklahoma Farm Bureau kicks off the 2022 legislative session, both chambers have been busy considering legislation through committee work. The first deadline of the session is approaching on March 3rd, giving the Oklahoma House of Representatives and Senate little time to pass new legislation out of its assigned committee. Following the March 3rd deadline, both chambers will move into a three-week period of floor work.

This year's session is one that will be marked with a significant budget surplus, which has already led to extensive discussion about what to do with the extra funds. While some state leaders believe the surplus will best serve Oklahomans by padding the state's savings account in preparation for tighter fiscal years, others think it best to use the surplus to increase

funding to education, roads and bridges, and other state-appropriated purposes. Additionally, the surplus has the Capitol buzzing with talk of eliminating the state's portion of the grocery sales tax as well as proposals to cut the state's personal and corporate income taxes. As Oklahoma Farm Bureau members have long-held concerns regarding the effect cutting taxes on sales and income could have on state revenue, and the fear that revenue losses would be recouped by increasing ad valorem taxes, OKFB will continue engaging in discussions with legislators to ensure the concerns of Oklahoma farmers and ranchers are considered in legislation that impacts state revenue and taxes.

After an interim marked by constituent concerns and complaints over the lack of regulation in the medical marijuana industry,

legislators have wasted no time moving legislation that aims to address issues of enforcement and oversight and seeks to give farmers and ranchers more certainty when using routine agricultural production methods.

SB 1261 by Sen. Brent Howard would limit compensation for crops and plants damaged by unintentional spray drift to those insurable under the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation program or those that are sold directly to the consumer by the producers. In addition, compensation cannot exceed the amount the producer has received from a proven yield from the area impacted by the drift, and any claims for a sensitive crop must have been registered with the Department of Agriculture

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OKFB hosts successful leadership conference

More than 100 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members, guests and legislators gathered for OKFB's State Leadership Conference Tuesday, Feb. 15 in Oklahoma City.

The event kicked off with Donnie Anderson, director of the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics, giving an update on medical marijuana in Oklahoma and explaining the challenges the booming industry has posed. Anderson shared with OKFB members the significant growth OBN has seen in illegal activity surrounding the industry.

Oklahoma has seen exponential growth in marijuana operations – both legal and illegal – due to cheaper land prices, inexpensive licensing fees and no limits on number of dispensaries. Oklahoma has 2,300 marijuana dispensaries, while states like Oregon, Colorado and California have a fraction of that with 560, 520 and 261, respectively.

Continuing the discussion of Oklahoma's medical marijuana industry, Farm Bureau members had the chance to hear from Adria Berry, executive director of the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority. Six months into her role at OMMA, Berry is optimistic about the direction her organization is taking.

Oklahoma's medical marijuana industry began with the passage of State Question 788 in June 2018, and now has more than 8,300 growers in the state, Berry said.

Like Anderson, Berry attributed the unprecedented growth to the absence of licensing caps and lack of qualifying conditions to obtain a medical marijuana card.

Berry said the process to get a medical marijuana card is as simple as meeting with a physician online and submitting the doctor's recommendation along with a photo ID. The applicant often receives their card within a week.

She encouraged OKFB members to be a part of the solution and communicate with her organization if they notice

suspicious activity.

During lunch, Sen. Roger Thompson and Rep. Kevin Wallace visited with attendees to give a state appropriations and budget update.

They spoke on the proposed grocery tax elimination and the importance of increasing the state's savings. They also discussed expanding rural broadband, improving roads and bridges and the importance of the Oklahoma State University extension service.

State auditor Cindy Byrd kicked off the afternoon speaker lineup, discussing her role as state auditor and the many types of audits she performs.

Byrd explained the role ad valorem taxes play in funding public schools and shared the details of the investigative audit of Epic Charter Schools. She also encouraged OKFB members to be involved in county government and volunteer to sit on county boards.

Farm Bureau members had the opportunity to hear from Oklahoma's delegation of congressional staff, including staffers from the offices of Sen. Jim Inhofe, Sen. James Lankford and Rep. Frank Lucas. They visited with OKFB members about the upcoming farm bill, challenges with Waters of the United States and the growing tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

Harrison Pittman, director of the National Ag Law Center, gave the evening's keynote address, stressing the importance of understanding agriculture before understanding agricultural law. Pittman explained the factors that influence agricultural law, including consumer influence, interdependence on foreign countries and tactical changes.

He also spoke on the future of agricultural law, citing challenges like increased foreign ownership of agricultural land and urban encroachment on rural areas.



OFKB YF&R members visit with state legislators Feb. 16



Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers members from across the state gathered Feb. 16 at the state Capitol for OKFB YF&R Day at the Capitol. An opportunity for YF&R members to build relationships with legislators from their respective areas, each member had the chance to share more about how upcoming legislation could affect them as producers.



OKFB YF&R Committee members Austin Jackson, Leslie Lewis, Brittany Hukill and Jaden Brunner gather in the rotunda of the state Capitol Feb. 16.



District two YF&R Committee members Gaven and Taylor Harting meet Sen. Brent Howard to discuss a piece of legislation he is sponsoring this session.

OALE's class XIX visits OKFB home office Feb. 14



Members of Oklahoma Youth Expo's Oklahoma Agricultural Leadership Encounter class XIX visited Oklahoma Farm Bureau's home office Feb. 14 to learn more about what OKFB does for agriculture and rural communities across the state.

Ten legislators honored with OKFB Champion award

Ten Oklahoma legislators were honored with the 2021 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Champion award at the organization's annual leadership conference Feb. 15 in Oklahoma City.

The 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 2021 legislative session.

"Decisions made at the state Capitol have a lasting effect on the way Oklahoma farmers and ranchers raise crops and livestock," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "We are thankful for lawmakers who understand the rural way of life and stand up for agriculture in our state."

The 2021 award recipients include House Speaker Charles McCall, Atoka; Rep. Ryan Martinez, Edmond; Rep. Dell Kerbs, Shawnee; Rep. Carl Newton, Cherokee; Rep. John Pfeiffer, Orlando; Sen. Greg Treat, Oklahoma City; Sen. Darcy Jech, Kingfisher; Sen. Lonnie Paxton, Tuttle; Sen. Frank Simpson, Springer; and Sen. Zack Taylor, Seminole.

Champion award winners were nominated by county Farm Bureau members and the OKFB board of directors. Award recipients received a plaque in recognition of their service to agriculture and rural Oklahoma.



Rep. Charles McCall

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fourteen days prior to the incident. SB 1261's goal is to give more certainty to farmers, ranchers and applicators after many were unable to spray their crops during the 2021 season due to concern of unknown financial liability and potentially unknown medical marijuana growing operations to which they could unintentionally cause damage. SB 1261 has passed out of committee and now awaits full Senate consideration.

HB 4432 by Rep. Kenton Patzkowsky would require all medical marijuana growers to post a conspicuous sign at the entrance to their growing site that lists the business name, physical address, phone number and medical marijuana license number. SB 1737 by Sen. Blake Stephens and SB 1779 by Sen. Shane Jett would require signage to be posted at any medical marijuana business with the license number and phone number that is accessible to the public. SB 1779 has been passed from its assigned committee while HB 4432 and SB 1737 still await committee

consideration. OKFB members adopted policy at the 2021 annual meeting supporting required signage at marijuana businesses so the public can know where licensed medical marijuana facilities are located. State medical marijuana regulators have indicated that clear signage will assist them in knowing where legally licensed businesses are and could also help them identify suspected marijuana businesses that are not marked and may not be operating in compliance with state laws and rules.

OKFB members have long been opposed to any law giving counties authority to increase regulation or create zoning. HB 2990 by Rep. Carol Bush and SB 1182 by Sen. Dave Rader could allow a county to create and enforce any rule, regulation, policy, procedure or code they deem necessary as long as there was not any state rule or law that specifically prohibited them from doing so. Currently, counties can only create or enforce rules, regulations, and

policies directly specified by the state. If passed, HB 2990 and SB 1182 would create significant uncertainty for producers in the affected counties. Each county could create their own regulations in unincorporated, rural Oklahoma that could increase the burden on farmers and ranchers, restrict them from conducting their normal agricultural practices or potentially prohibit them entirely from operating within the county.

OKFB's policy team has been urging legislators to oppose these bills and have educated them on how such legislation could negatively impact rural Oklahoma as a whole and farmers and ranchers specifically. It is important for Farm Bureau members to know who their legislators are in preparation for a potential call to action if either bill receives consideration on the House or Senate floors.

For questions or more information, please contact the OKFB Public Policy division at (405) 523-2300.