



FINAL REPORT

COWBOY STATE AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE

Building on a Legacy of Innovation and Resilience

February 2026



COWBOY STATE AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE

Agriculture is a central part of the history and culture of Wyoming. The next generation of agriculturalists, whether operating a family ranch or researching new crops and techniques, is essential to maintaining many attributes of Wyoming industries. Individuals seeking a successful career in agriculture need more tools in their toolbox. The business and financial acumen required of any person working in the field of agriculture has continued to broaden. Specialization is a part of any agriculture job, but those in the business must also understand regulations, marketing, finance, and interpersonal communications. Wyoming must develop and retain individuals dedicated to agriculture and natural resource management. This includes providing the best education, business climate, and opportunities for growth within the sector.

The main objective of this initiative is to provide ample opportunity for young professionals to enter the industry and ensure existing industry members have the necessary tools to adapt in an ever-changing world. To achieve this, the Initiative promotes projects and efforts that foster innovation, market expansion, diversification, and the sustainability of Wyoming agricultural enterprises along with projects and initiatives which expand capacity, develop well-educated leaders, expand and maintain the workforce, and enhance advocacy for Wyoming agriculture.

Four main areas of discussion have been identified by the working group, each with Action Items that can move towards the overall goal of maintaining working agricultural lands and operations and provide the next generation of agricultural professionals with the tools to handle the dynamics associated with the enterprise in the twenty-first century. Specific Action Items and suggestions regarding their implementation for each major area can be found in Appendix 1. These Action Items have been developed from meetings of the Working Group and revised after public input, which is summarized in Appendix 2.

Mission Statement

The Wyoming Agriculture Initiative exists to ensure the future of agriculture in Wyoming by promoting the enterprise and lifestyle through education, policy, and the protection of young professionals and existing industry members.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Working Lands – The Overarching Goal

Discussions

- I. Farm and Ranch Financing
 - a. *New Producers, Access to Capital, and Expanding Operations*
 - b. *Marketing and Trade*
 - c. *Health Care and Other Costs of Doing Business*
- II. Water
 - a. *Current Infrastructure Concerns*
 - b. *Future Infrastructure*
 - c. *Water Rights and Uses*
- III. Education
 - a. *K-12 Education*
 - b. *Post-secondary Teachers and Students – Recognition, Recruitment, and Retention*
 - c. *Post-secondary and Continuing Education*
 - d. *Applied Research*
- IV. Succession
 - a. *The Importance of Succession*
 - b. *Planning Resources and Challenges*

Conclusions

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Action Items Tables

Appendix 2 – Summary of Public Input

Appendix 3 – Helpful Resources and Links

BACKGROUND

In the Fall of 2025, Governor Gordon formed a Working Group¹ and tasked them with beginning to develop a strategic plan to preserve and enhance the Wyoming agriculture industry for current producers and the generations to come. Specifically, the Governor directed the Working Group to review previous efforts and determine how and where wise investments in education, applied research, and innovative management could bolster the industry in the future. This included a desire to review more than the traditional components of the agricultural industry in Wyoming and integrate other aspects of most, if not all operations. The Working Group also considered unique services provided by Wyoming's working lands, such as habitat, and other potential impacts, such as failing infrastructure and succession planning, when considering the future of agriculture.

The Wyoming agricultural industry is difficult to quantify and is often under-represented in terms of services provided to the State and public. However, the economic figures that are available are worth note. Wyoming remains the leader in average operation size for farms and ranches (roughly 2,400 acres), is a major producer of livestock and crops with over 29,000,000 acres operated (not including federal or state permits and leases), and has an annual Total Economic Contribution to the State exceeding \$2.5 billion dollars.² While these figures can help estimate the value and contribution of agriculture to the state, other outputs are more difficult to quantify or place a monetary figure on. These outputs include services like the preservation of open space, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. Some attempts have been made to develop systems to value these ecosystem services, but no single formula exists at this time. Similarly, it is virtually impossible to place a monetary figure on the customs and culture the state has derived from the agricultural industry. As one of the first industries in the state, it remains a part of the state's history and traditions.

This Report provides a synopsis of the Working Group's efforts, main discussions, and integrates feedback from the public questionnaire completed in December of 2025. Topics are broadly defined as Education (K-12, post-secondary, and research) Farm and Ranch Financing, Agriculture Water, Succession Planning and Mental Health, and Working Lands Conservation. Appendix 1 includes a table with the Action Items identified, along with potential implementation paths. Appendix 2 includes a synthesis of the public feedback received from the Questionnaire.

The Working Group would like to thank the Governor for his foresight and continued support of the agricultural industry and the future of Wyoming farmers and ranchers.

¹ The Working Group includes representatives from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investment, Wyoming Business Council, University of Wyoming, Wyoming County Commissioners, Wyoming Stock Growers Association, Wyoming Wool Growers Association, Wyoming Farm Bureau, Wyoming Agriculture in the Classroom, Wyoming Senate, and Wyoming House of Representatives.

² <https://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B-1393.pdf> (Total Economic Contribution is a combination of Direct, Indirect, and Induced outputs).

Working Lands – The Overarching Goal

The four Main Areas of discussion in this report all connect to one another in some way and to an overarching goal of maintaining working lands – agricultural operations that provide food, fiber, habitat, water, and open space – as functional pieces of the landscape of Wyoming. Although this report has been divided into four sections with specific discussions related to a Main Area, the importance of maintaining working lands has ramifications beyond many of the points discussed in this report.

The concept of working lands represents more than functional agriculture businesses and most, if not all, agricultural operations in Wyoming support ancillary businesses and activities. Some of these ancillary benefits are more apparent than others. Equally, some ancillary benefits are easier to quantify or value than others. In addressing sub-topics within the concept of working lands, part of the intent is to increase awareness of the interconnected nature of all aspects of agricultural operations and their value and importance beyond commodities and businesses. The Working Group encourages all readers to keep this complex dynamic in mind when reading the report. This is particularly true when reviewing the Action Items table in Appendix 1, where Action Items have been placed into categories that be separate from the Main Area in which they were discussed.

Finally, the Main Areas are not presented in order of importance, nor are the Action Items. Some discussions may be more relevant in the near-term, while others are aimed at long-term viability of the industry or systemic issues that are ongoing. Actions Items may be broad, and many other actions may be associated with any single recommendation. However, all the discussions and recommended actions in this report are presented with the overarching goal of working lands in mind.



I. Farm and Ranch Financing

a. New Producers, Access to Capital, and Expanding Operations

Access to capital remains an issue for many producers, especially newer producers, and for certain portions of the agricultural sector. Equally important is the ability to expand existing operations. Some programs exist that aim to help ranchers and farmers access loans, but these programs are not always responsive enough to capitalize on opportunities. Recent influxes in wealthy individuals who are buying property have also made the ability to expand operations more difficult. This is extremely evident in neighboring states like Colorado, Idaho, and Montana.

Some state and federal programs exist to help “beginning” farmers and ranchers, but red tape and back-end requirements of these programs can often have a chilling effect on participation. Many of the programs, like the USDA’s Young and Beginning producer loans have failed to keep pace with inflation and set requirements that may not be realistic in Wyoming’s current demographic structure. While the USDA specifically targets Wyoming for this particular program, those seeking to utilize these loans must be 35 years of age or less and have 10 or fewer years of primary operation management.³ In Wyoming, the median age of all citizens is nearly 40,⁴ and the average rancher or farmer is nearly 60.⁵ This not only highlights a potential pitfall in the program, it highlights one of the challenges with succession in the industry. There is also an inherent paradox in some of these programs. Many of the young producers that seek to enter the industry have little or no credit history, making it difficult for them to qualify for loans.



At the state level, the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI) does offer assistance through two main programs that may be more appealing: Farm Loans and Beginning Agricultural Producer (BAP). Both programs have specific eligibility requirements and eligible purchases. However, some recent changes to the programs via legislative action have impacted participation. In 2019, the legislature repealed irrigation and livestock enhancement loan components, meaning those activities are no longer eligible for loans, and in 2023, the available funding for the loan programs was reduced from \$275 million to \$50 million. Additionally, the changes in 2023 included alterations to the way in which interest rates within the programs work and put the state into competition with private banks and commercial lenders. As of November, 2025, there are 40 active loans (34 in BAP and 6 in Farm Loans) totaling over \$16.8 million in outstanding principal. Interest in the program is inconsistent, and OSLI only received five

³ https://www.fcsamerica.com/financing/specialized-lending/first-time-farmer-loans?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22027643511&gbraid=0AAAAADfvCcIduW1LBkM7PJ4-Vec_bA3Wx&gclid=CjwKCAiAssfLBhBDEiwAcLpwfnbgfAgdo1Mdl82B-UBgr5fF64fFA2TLdu3hSb9LSfluQv9dhmniYhoCIEMOAvD_BwE

⁴ http://eadv.state.wy.us/pop/POP_NEWSRLSE_ASR23.pdf

⁵ https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wyoming/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/WY-2024-Bulletin.pdf

applications during FY24-25. As of November 2025, there are no pending applications for either program.

Action Items

- Explore ways to make state program interest rates more competitive for available programs.
- Explore/research ways in which loans could be better structured to reflect income/expenditure flows within the agriculture industry.
- Explore rules for programs to enhance ability to provide loans to first time ranchers or young producers.
- Determine if there is a level of risk the state is willing to assume to make agriculture loan programs more appealing and functional.

b. *Marketing and Trade*

Marketing and trade are longstanding discussions within Wyoming’s agricultural sector. Investments from both private and public entities have enhanced some marketing, and increases in certain types of infrastructure, such as federally inspected meat processing plants, have had some impact. Programs developed by public agencies, such as the Wyoming Business Council’s Wyoming Table program, are aimed at increasing the availability of Wyoming farm and ranch products through trade shows, online marketing, and direct connections to buyers around the country. However, Wyoming will continue to face challenges with moving any agricultural product to interstate or international markets. Some of these challenges are a function of the type of product (e.g., range cattle versus feeder cattle, fleeces versus clothing) while other challenges are related to regulation or the ability to get products to more robust markets (e.g., interstate inspection requirements, scalability of local operations).



At the national level (interstate), Wyoming does export more commodities, but also faces challenges with placing commodities into general commerce. Previous efforts to increase international and interstate trade have had some success but major bottlenecks still remain. Some opportunities may exist to improve infrastructure and transportation but the return-on-

investment is difficult to fully estimate. Many challenges are related to geography and long distances between agricultural operations and major markets can create barriers. Equally, the limited number of regional aggregation hubs and high costs of shipping can hinder export efforts.

Wyoming has not shied away from interstate or international export efforts, but remains largely limited in terms of total exports. At the international level, there is demand for Wyoming beef, dry beans, wool, and other specialty crops, particularly in Asian markets. And, although beef is

Wyoming's largest agricultural commodity by value, most Wyoming cattle are shipped elsewhere for finishing and processing. Wyoming's largest international export is likely dry beans, but limited access to export ports can still impact overall export efficiency of any product.

Action Items

- Develop regional distribution hubs for major commodities (e.g., wool, beans, beets, etc.).
- Expand or create in-state facilities that would reduce inefficiencies associated with partial-loads.
- Expand cold and dry storage facilities (and other similar infrastructure) to mitigate variability in shipping, weather delays, and missed opportunities within the value-added chain (e.g., wool scouring facility, wash/pack hubs, milling and malting facilities, dehydration, etc.).
- Expand and/or increase funding to specialty crop programs and research
- Develop and/or improve market intelligence tools for producers (e.g., pricing data, freight cost information, buyer requirements, business management support, etc.)
- Expand ways to better market and leverage Wyoming "ag bonds."
- Work with the current administration and USDA to capitalize on trade deals, new programs, and efforts to improve or maintain rural vitality.⁶
- Strive to incentivize the development of one or more mid-sized processing facility(ies) in Wyoming.

c. Health Care and Other Costs of Doing Business

Nation-wide, input costs and inflation have had an out-sized impact on farmers and ranchers. It is common for farming and ranching families to need one or both spouses to seek employment in town in order to secure health insurance. There are federal programs to insure almost everything on the farm or ranch except the farmer and the rancher and their families. Recognizing that agriculture plays a critical role, it is in the best interest of the nation to prioritize producers as an essential workforce. Exploring alternatives for effective and affordable health insurance for producers is a worthwhile endeavor to incentivize agricultural production as a viable family business.

Other operating costs, such as legal assistance, banking and loans, and taxes can become extremely difficult for producers to predict or absorb when or if they arise. Many of these services are also not spread evenly across the state, making access in some instances much more difficult. Some efforts have been made to promote these specialized fields in rural portions of Wyoming, such as rural attorney incentives, but have not been successful or effective. While previous efforts have focused on rural lawyers, many other specialized professionals would be equally, if not more, beneficial for business management within the agricultural sector (e.g., certified financial planners, tax experts, export consultants, etc.). Identifying areas in which specialists would be most impactful, both in terms of geographically and field of expertise, could greatly help producers across all types of agriculture.

⁶ See <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-020.pdf>

The lack of certain specific experts or certified professionals can also frustrate day-to-day operations. Specialists like large animal veterinarians are in high demand, and some states like Nevada, have taken steps to expand the ability for veterinarian technicians to perform certain tasks within a stratified system of oversight.⁷

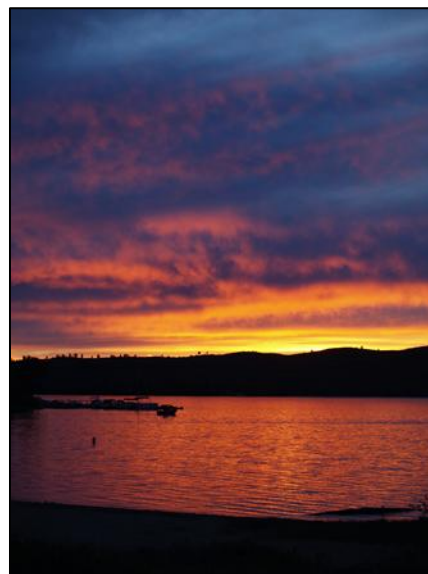
Action items

- Compile a list from industry partners of ag producer health insurance options.
- Create a clearing house of available information on health insurance for agriculture producers.
- Develop a low interest catastrophic health plan for situations that may arise through agricultural operations (use liquid assets like livestock or machinery as collateral to underwrite the loan that is needed).
- Determine where and how many specialized professionals (e.g., lawyers, tax advisors, business consultants) are available for producers across the state.

II. Water

a. Current Infrastructure Concerns

Water continues to be a major point of discussion in Wyoming and will remain a key component of every agricultural operation. Recent issues surrounding infrastructure (e.g., Goshen Irrigation District and the collapse of Tunnel #2, failure of the LaPrele Dam, etc.) have drawn attention to the massive need for funding to retrofit or maintain the water infrastructure currently in place. Wyoming irrigation districts serve a unique function, as do agencies like the Wyoming Water Development Office. The Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers are also key partners on many larger water projects.



“Aging infrastructure” has become a highly used phrase, and with many key pieces of Wyoming’s water infrastructure nearing or exceeding 100 years old, there is good reason for concern. Project funding is constrained in some ways, and the usual legislative efforts (e.g., omnibus bills, specific project funding, etc.) may not be sufficient to address the needed influx of capital necessary to repair or replace these pieces of infrastructure.

As one of the chief agencies within the policy and regulatory space of water, the Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO) is often looked to for guidance and assistance. The Working Group explored how (or if) additional resources may help to streamline processes for repairs, improvements, refurbishing, or maintenance of existing infrastructure. To this end, the unfortunate answer is “no.” Since the WWDO is funded through the mineral severance tax, and the accounts are capped at certain levels, funding becomes the major hurdle for any project. There are three

⁷ The number of doctors of veterinary medicine varies widely across Wyoming counties and not all veterinarians specialize in large animals. See <https://vetboard.wyo.gov/board/statistics> for more information.

main accounts from which WWDO can utilize funds. However, each account has a different cap and the percentage of usable funding from each account varies.

In part, the caps limit the ability to capture high revenue years. For example, a year where coal exports are 200% higher does not mean the accounts grow in a commensurate fashion. Previous legislative discussions explored adding another account, or changing the caps on existing accounts. However, little discussion has revolved around stagnation of revenue compared to the rate of inflation. One issue within this reality relates to non-project expenses that can have a major impact on the ability of WWDO to place funding on the ground. The Board of Control is one of these areas and has previously been a point of discussion. Non-project funding that goes to the Board of



Control represents nearly one-third of the money available in WWDO's Account #1. Previously, this money has been used as a "budget balancer" and can be refunded to WWDO but nothing mandates this refund and it is difficult to speculate what may or may not happen with these funds in any given year. Additionally, a typical year will include roughly \$50 million worth of proposed projects, while the ability to fund projects is limited closer to \$25 million, meaning otherwise worthy projects may go unfunded based on prioritization.

Specific to infrastructure, WWDO has completed critical agriculture infrastructure studies. The most recent study of roughly ten thousand structures indicated major issues with roughly 20% of those structures. Of the ten thousand structures reviewed, roughly two thousand were in "poor" or "failing" condition. Of these two thousand structures, the thirty "worst" would cost \$200-300 million to repair or replace. In other words, to fix roughly 1.5% of the "poor" or "failing" structures, it would take 200% of all the WWDO's biennial water development project budget for 2025-2026.

Action Items

- Explore ways to move non-project expenses out of project account(s); may entail creation of new account and require legislation
- Explore the feasibility of creating a "water trust" or similar funding mechanism that can supplement existing budgets
- Review previous legislative discussions regarding accounts, caps, percentage of use, etc.

b. *Future Infrastructure*

As noted above, budgetary realities are a limiting factor for much of the current infrastructure issues. Future infrastructure needs and strategies may revolve more around preventative maintenance and conversion of existing infrastructure (i.e., converting open ditches to pipelines) than entirely new build-outs. However, some new projects are being undertaken today, particularly in the Big Horn Basin.

Federal partners are also committed to a new way of doing business when it comes to irrigation and infrastructure in the future. USDA-NRCS recently announced the USDA Regenerative Pilot Program which commits \$700M of available assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Security Program in Fiscal Year 2026. This program prioritizes soil health, water management and natural vitality. Gaining efficiencies in agricultural production will be a critical component in addressing the ever-increasing costs of inputs. Water Management Entities such as irrigation districts, watershed improvement districts, and groundwater management districts will be eligible to apply for up to \$900,000 per contract or \$1.8M with an NRCS Chief's Waiver. Fields will be managed with much more specificity than in the past, as there will be assistance available to conduct soil tests on a field-by-field basis. A prescription for that field can then be developed which should lead to higher yields with lower erosion and input costs. Other USDA Farm Bill Programs will also provide opportunities for producers and water managers to upgrade some facilities while gaining efficiencies.

Action Items

- Provide outreach to Water Management Entities as NRCS funds become available.
- Find more ways to fund WWDO or SEO for infrastructure projects.

c. *Water Rights and Uses*

Maintaining agricultural water rights was identified as a critical component for a sustainable agricultural industry in Wyoming. As a headwaters state and the one with the lowest population, Wyoming's water will increasingly be sought as a solution to downstream shortages. Wyoming's water law and its basis in the Doctrine of Prior Appropriations already positions agricultural water users favorably. Producers' understanding of Wyoming



Water Law, however, represents valuable ammunition in the struggle to keep Wyoming water attached to the land in Wyoming and being put to beneficial use on farms and ranches. One of the best ways to protect Wyoming's water would be to provide outreach and technical assistance to producers to inventory, utilize, and adjudicate their existing agricultural water rights.

Action Items

- Provide training and/or seminars on Wyoming Water Law to producers and organizations throughout the state.
- Develop a clearing house for Water Rights and permits throughout Wyoming to provide information on current standing of water resources.
- Ensure Wyoming maintains a policy of vigorous defense of water rights under interstate compacts.

III. Education

a. K-12 Education

Current K-12 agriculture and natural resource education is entirely voluntary and varies across school districts. Wyoming Agriculture in the Classroom has developed a number of approved curricula that are currently being used in all 23 counties and over 180 elementary classrooms. However, the majority of this educational material is limited to grades 2 through 5. Part of the Agriculture Initiative is aimed at better educating our students and should include agriculture and natural resource studies. This includes education regarding energy production, tourism, and wildlife. Public feedback surrounding this idea and whether this type of coursework should be incorporated on a voluntary or required basis (i.e., as part of the Core Requirements in Wyoming statute) were split (see Appendix 2). Based on this feedback, the Working Group has not reached a consensus recommendation on required or voluntary programs, as both have advantages and disadvantages.



Along with the importance of the curriculum being offered, the need to recognize our K-12 educators and schools that actively promote education in these sectors is vital and proper. Many Wyoming schools have highly active ag and natural resource programs and encourage students to participate in programs such as FFA, 4H, and other clubs. Until recently, one national program, called “Blue Ribbon Schools,” recognized “high-performing schools that have successfully narrowed academic gaps between

student groups.” The Trump administration largely ended this national program in efforts to return education to the states and “recognize excellence in local schools based on education achievements that align with their communities’ priorities.”⁸ In the spirit of President Trump's changes, there appears to be some opportunity to create a corollary at the state level, either through legislation or executive action, that would recognize those schools in Wyoming that excel in teaching classes related to agriculture and natural resources. In theory, recognizing these schools would not only highlight the dedication and hard work of educators, but provide an incentive for industry(ies) to donate to these programs at the local level.

Action Items

- Work with the executive branch and/or legislature to develop a voluntary (or required) curriculum at the K-12 level that focuses on agriculture and natural resources.
- Establish a corollary to the “Blue Ribbon Schools” program at the state or local level to recognize schools and/or districts that excel in agriculture and natural resource education.

⁸ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2025/09/04/blue-ribbon-schools-program-ended-by-trump-administration/>

b. *Post-Secondary Teachers and Students – Recognition, Recruitment, and Retention*

Wyoming’s community colleges and the University provide multiple options for students seeking agriculture or natural resource degrees. To ensure degree programs and other credentials meet the contemporary needs of the workforce and the interests of students and working professionals, a fund or trust should be created to support existing programs, and to develop and offer new educational programs. These funds would be used to develop, deliver, and evaluate educational programs which address the unique opportunities and challenges facing Wyoming agricultural producers and other natural resource managers. Money placed into the trust would be used to create the education programs, as well as recruit, retain, and recognize exceptional educators who are committed to collaboration with Wyoming stakeholders, and to delivering Wyoming educational programs and research projects which are relevant to Wyoming. The distribution of these funds among UW’s College of Agriculture, Life Sciences, and Natural Resources and their Community College partners would be monitored and adjusted by a committee or board established by the Governor.

Action Items

- Work with legislature to develop a funding package to establish perpetual funding that supports Wyoming’s Land Grant mission, including key service units (UW Extension, Agricultural Experiment Station, Veterinary Laboratory) and agricultural disciplines (animal science, plant science, range management, agricultural economics, family and consumer sciences, and soil sciences).
- Fund and expand UW’s GrowinG internship program to support workforce development in agriculture, experiential learning in ag/natural resources, and public awareness/advocacy for Wyoming agriculture.
- Ensure the community colleges have access to, and participate in, any funding for agricultural disciplines, trades, and research opportunities.

c. *Post-secondary and Continuing Education*

While the trust conceptualized above could help with student and faculty, there is also a desire for continuing education of professionals and the development of key areas within agriculture and natural resource education beyond the K-12 realm. Several initial certificate programs have been discussed and may be highly beneficial: agriculture and natural resource policy, ranch management, invasive species management, water infrastructure and rights, leadership development, and small producer finance. Certification would help students and working professionals fill key roles in the field and compliment other skills and degrees.

Action Items

- Expand available continuing education programs for working professionals and current students at the community college and university level.
- Expand support of practical education and statewide engagement in agriculture and natural resource management.
- Provide additional and consistent funding for Graduate Research Assistants working on Wyoming-relevant research projects.

d. *Applied Research*

A portion of the proposed funding (above) would be directed at applied research which specifically addresses challenges or informational needs facing Wyoming agricultural producers and other natural resource managers. These funds would be used to design and implement studies that respond to producer questions, either through UW or a Wyoming community college. Money for applied research should be focused at a statewide or an intrastate landscape level, allowing for increased localization and negating the requirements attached to federal or national grants in many instances. Additionally, the ability to fund more research outside of conventional pathways could provide an incentive and attract more high-quality researchers and students that may otherwise choose to complete their work somewhere else.

As part of the applied research funding, monies should be limited to actual research needs, and awarded based upon careful consideration of the existing research capacity and record of achievement of the institution and/or investigator. The distribution of these funds may also consider scientific rigor, practicality of implementation, matching funds from other sources, and demonstration of collaboration with Wyoming stakeholders.

Action Items

- Survey existing producers and invite research questions that are highly relevant to Wyoming
- Develop research grants to attract new professors and researchers by establishing a Wyoming Producer-Driven research fund.
- Catalogue existing producer-driven research projects (either completed or ongoing) as well as existing applied research that has broad application across Wyoming.



IV. Succession

a. The Importance of Succession

Planning for generational changes and succession within the agricultural world has always been somewhat difficult, for any number of reasons. Some generational norms do not readily migrate to the next generation, and the pace at which things like technology have changed some parts of the industry are on a truly exponential growth curve. Similarly, Wyoming's demographics can be a difficult hurdle to overcome. However, the importance of succession planning to the maintenance of the industry cannot be understated. The inability - for whatever reason - to keep working lands within the hands of Wyoming families not only threatens the future of the industry, but also can have implications to ancillary benefits of agricultural lands (e.g., open space, wildlife habitat, water, tourism, etc.).



Intact landscapes provide multiple benefits. From livestock forage, energy production, and wildlife habitat to clean water and tourist attractions, these landscapes continually prove to be the backbone of Wyoming industries. Novel attempts to quantify the positive impacts of these intact landscapes range from carbon capture to habitat leasing. Other programs at the federal level aim to provide compensation for maintaining these landscapes but are often too cumbersome or slow to adapt to pressing situations. As part of succession planning, some programs may help facilitate generational transfer of land. While some programs allow “stacking” (combining multiple programs on a single acre), others do not. Current efforts exist in many aspects of valuing open space and services provided by intact landscapes and these efforts should be supported.

Action Items

- Work with federal agencies and within programs to allow producers to combine multiple programs on a single acre.
- Explore term easement and habitat leasing options and/or feasibility.

b. Planning Resources and Challenges

There are existing programs and partial financial assistance available for producers of Wyoming to develop succession plans for farms and ranches. The Wyoming Department of Agriculture Mediation Program provides mediators and farm/ranch succession coordinators to assist producers in developing draft plans for legal review. The Wyoming Business Council also provides Succession Planning Loans that are designed to help with the ownership transitions for existing

Wyoming businesses.⁹ Other partners, such as industry groups, also have some resources for producers.

Traditional models of succession planning are often not flexible enough to reflect diversified operations. Equally, operations that do not diversify often run into challenges associated with multiple family members not having a niche or role to fill within the operation. As part of succession planning, efforts should be made to encourage and facilitate further diversification of operations – both on the ground and within the marketplace. More traditional examples of diversification include guided hunts, camping or guest lodging, or tours. Modern examples can include branded clothing, specialty products, and cooperatives. Other models, such as fractionalized ownership, may provide avenues that allow generational transfer or expansion within a generation, and could help keep operations intact or bolster capital. As part of a discussion of succession, operators should be encouraged to diversify within their operation and, theoretically, help find a niche that can keep family operations intact.

Finally, one major challenge that persists revolves around the large amount of federal land in Wyoming. Much of the federal lands are open for grazing, yet the number of active allotments and available animal unit months continues to fluctuate and trend downward. For many ranches, these federal lands are vital to the operation and sustainability of the business. Previous conversations with federal partners have highlighted barriers, especially for new producers who may not meet the traditional requirements to obtain a grazing permit. As part of any succession planning efforts, these federal permits should be included in the discussion and efforts should be made to ensure these areas remain available for grazing as part of the overall working landscape of Wyoming.

Action Items

- Develop a catalogue of available resources for succession planning that includes private and public resources.
- Work with public and private partners to highlight successful ways in which diversified operations have benefited the longevity of operations.
- Work with federal partners to identify vacant allotments and maintain policies that ensure federal lands remain open for production agriculture as part of Wyoming's working lands.



⁹ <https://wyomingbusiness.org/business/financing/loans/succession-loan/>

Conclusions

Although this report is purposely limited, and fairly high-level, the importance of Wyoming agriculture is still easily recognizable. The issues identified in this document are some of the most commonly discussed within the sector, and many of them are not new. However, it is the hope of the Working Group that the identification of issues and the inclusion of potential solutions will spur action in both the private and public sectors. Wyoming, as a whole, is facing new challenges that have not been deeply contemplated. If history is a teacher, many of the impacts that are on the horizon or beginning to show now, will impact the agricultural sector first.

Many of the suggestions included within Action Items and Appendix 1 are not as simple to implement as they may appear. Some Action Items could be broken into multiple pieces or implemented in a phased approach. Others are worthy of their own study, be it through legislative interim topics or new, topic-driven groups tasked by an agency or the Governor. Although similar efforts have been undertaken to address many issues identified in this document, the Working Group is optimistic the potential actions described in this document will provide a more direct route to meaningful discussions and solutions. The work of this group has also identified a common goal to which all discussions are linked – keeping Wyoming’s working lands working. Regardless of challenges within in any subset of the agricultural sector, or differences in opinions on how to achieve any outcome, this foundational goal remains the same. In order for Wyoming’s agricultural sector, and all the ancillary benefits that are derived from it, to continue to succeed, farms and ranches must remain truly functional as working lands.

The Working Group would again like to thank Governor Gordon for his attention to these issues and his efforts to sustain a truly functional agricultural sector in the great state of Wyoming.



Appendix 1

Summary Table of Action Items and Implementation Recommendations

Funding

<i>Items where funding represent the primary means by which to achieve the Intended or Projected Impact of the Action Item.</i>			
Action Item	Page	Suggested Action	Intended or Projected Impact
Establish a corollary to the "Blue Ribbon Schools" program at the state and/or local level to recognize schools that excel in agriculture and natural resource education.	7	Develop funding mechanisms to further recognize high-achieving schools.	Incentivize agriculture and natural resource education at the K-12 level. May also require Legislation.
Fund and expand UW's GrowinG internship program to support workforce development in agriculture, experiential learning in ag/natural resources, and public awareness/advocacy for Wyoming agriculture.	8	Establish a sustained funding source.	Improved workforce, awareness, and industry visibility.
Provide additional and consistent funding for graduate research assistants working on Wyoming-relevant research projects.	8	Establish a sustained funding source for at least ten (10) GRAs per biennium.	Increased recruitment and benefits of research completed by GRAs.
Develop research grants to attract new professors and researchers by establishing a Wyoming Producer-Driven research fund.	9	Establish a sustained funding source.	Make UW and Wyoming community colleges the premier research and agricultural schools. Improved focus on land grant mission and quality graduates.
Strive to incentivize the development of one or more mid-sized processing facility(ies) in Wyoming.	3	Provide business development loans.	Adding a mid-sized processing facility could increase export opportunities and marketability (both foreign and domestic).

Industry Initiation

<i>Items where private sector and industry groups should be the lead entity, with government assistance or inputs only existing where truly necessary.</i>			
Action Item	Page	Suggested Action	Intended or Projected Impact
Develop and/or improve market intelligence tools for producers (e.g., pricing data, freight cost information, buyer requirements, business management support, etc.)	3	Look to other states/organizations that have market intelligence tools.	Make available or disseminate critical data for business decisions.
Expand ways to better market and leverage Wyoming "ag bonds."	3	Review and promote the concept.	Determine if the program is being used and how it could be improved or further utilized.
Develop regional distribution hubs for major commodities (e.g., wool, beans, beets, etc.).	3	Industry study/partnerships	Increase avenues for Wyoming commodities to reach broader markets.
Expand or create in-state facilities that would reduce inefficiencies associated with partial-loads.	3	Industry study/partnerships	Incentivize transportation companies and increase export of Wyoming products.
Expand cold and dry storage facilities (and other similar infrastructure) to mitigate variability in shipping, weather delays, and missed opportunities within the value-added chain (e.g., wool scouring facility, wash/pack hubs, milling and malting facilities, dehydration, etc.).	3	Industry study/partnerships	Improve shelf-life and storage opportunities for Wyoming commodities while improving market visibility and access for producers.
Explore the feasibility of creating a "water trust" or similar funding mechanism that can supplement existing budgets	5	Work with legislature and other partners	Determine if a "water trust" is a viable option and would help ensure water delivery as well as agricultural water use as beneficial.
Provide training and/or seminars on Wyoming Water Law to producers and organizations throughout the state.	6	Coordinate and/or host trainings and seminars as requested by producers.	Provide key technical information to producers regarding ag water, water law, and protection of water rights.
Survey existing producers and invite research questions that are highly relevant to Wyoming	9	Producer and organizational outreach	Ensure applied research and producer-driven research questions are relevant to Wyoming.
Work with public and private partners to highlight successful ways in which diversified operations have benefited the longevity of operations.	11	Producer and organizational outreach	Increase sustainability of operations through diversification.

Executive Action/Policy

Items best suited to executive actions such as executive orders, proclamations, or other instruments. These items may also represent areas where policy would require broader

Action Item	Page	Suggested Action	Intended or Projected Impact
Determine if there is a level of risk the state is willing to assume to make agriculture loan programs more appealing and functional.	2	Policy Decision	Increase the utility of existing state agriculture loan programs, particularly for younger producers.
Work with the current administration and USDA to capitalize on trade deals, new programs, and efforts to improve or maintain rural vitality.	3	Policy Decision	Leverage federal funding, programs, and initiatives to increase the marketability of Wyoming agricultural products across the country and the world.
Find more ways to fund WWDO or SEO for infrastructure projects	6	Work with Congress	Given the large amount of funding required, Congressional action is more likely necessary.
Ensure Wyoming maintains a policy of vigorous defense of water rights under interstate compacts.	6	Policy Decision	Protect Wyoming's water and uphold compacts and decrees.
Establish a corollary to the "Blue Ribbon Schools" program at the state and/or local level to recognize schools that excel in agriculture and natural resource education.	7	Proclamation or EO	Recognition for high-achieving schools.
Expand the support of practical education and statewide engagement in agriculture and natural resource management.	8	Proclamation or EO	Incentivize focus on agriculture and natural resources in our schools.
Work with federal agencies and within programs to allow producers to combine multiple programs on a single acre.	10	Work with Congress and Federal Agencies	Some existing agency program may require changes to law, regulation, or rule at the federal level.

Legislative Action/Reform

Items that would require, or more logically come from, legislative action.

Action Item	Page	Suggested Action	Intended or Projected Impact
Expand and/or increase funding to specialty crop programs and research	3	Legislation	Increase state-level funding to further leverage existing federal funding to the program.
Develop a low interest catastrophic health plan for situations that may arise through agricultural operations (use liquid assets like livestock or machinery as collateral to underwrite the loan that is needed)	4	Legislation; Interim Topic	Address critical, long-standing barriers to healthcare within the agricultural sector.
Explore ways to move non-project expenses out of project account(s)	5	Statutory change/legislation	Improve efficiency of project implementation (focus resources towards on-the-ground projects).
Explore the feasibility of creating a "water trust" or similar funding mechanism that can supplement existing budgets	5	Legislation; Interim Topic	Determine whether other mechanisms, such as a "water trust," could supplement existing budgets or open new pathways to other funds that are currently unavailable.
Develop legislation that would require agriculture and natural resource education at the K-12 level.	7	Statutory change/legislation	Ensure Wyoming students understand the important role of agriculture, working lands, and the various natural resource industries in Wyoming.
Work with legislature to develop a funding package to establish perpetual funding that supports Wyoming's Land Grant mission	8	Legislation	Existing/Ongoing efforts as of 2026 Budget Session

Agency Action/Policy

<i>Items that could come from an agency action that is currently allowed, from rule, policy, or procedural changes, or are based in agency review or study.</i>			
Action Item	Page	Suggested Action	Intended or Projected Impact
Explore rules for programs to enhance ability to provide loans to first time ranchers or young producers.	2	Agency review (OSLI)	Determine whether current rules and regulations allow for program improvements to direct funding to individuals with limited or no credit history.
Explore/research ways in which loans could be better structured to reflect income/expenditure flows within the agriculture industry.	2	Agency review (OSLI)	Match program loans/requirements to industry realities regarding cashflow (i.e., most producers are paid only once or twice per year).
Explore ways to make state program interest rates more competitive for available programs.	2	Agency Study (OSLI); Interim Study Topic	Determine if, or how, state program interest rates can be changed. May also require Legislation or be a productive interim topic for Legislature.
Create a clearing house of available information on health insurance for agriculture producers	4	Agency review (WDA, WDI)	Provide resources for producers looking for information regarding health insurance.
Determine where and how many specialized professionals (e.g., lawyers, tax advisors, business consultants) are available for producers across the state.	4	Agency review (WDA, UW, WBC)	Create resources that identify technical assistance "deserts" and which professionals are most needed where.
Review previous legislative discussions regarding accounts, caps, percentage of use, etc.	5	Agency review (WWDO, OSLI)	ID areas for improvement and areas where prior discussion was not effective or identified major issues (i.e., required statutory changes).
Provide outreach to Water Management Entities as NRCS funds become available.	6	Agency action (WDA)	Develop resources that are readily available.
Develop a clearing house for Water Rights and permits throughout Wyoming to provide information on current standing of water resources.	6	Agency Study/Report (SEO, Conservation Districts)	Create a one-stop-shop for water-related information that is vital to producers. May require outside contracting or legislation.
Work with the executive branch to develop voluntary curriculum at the K-12 level that promotes agriculture and natural resource education.	7	Agency and Industry action (WDE, WAIC)	Promote agriculture and natural resource education beyond current levels on a strictly voluntary basis.
Ensure the community colleges have access to, and participate in, any funding for agricultural disciplines, trades, and research opportunities.	8	Agency action (UW)	Coordinate efforts at UW with similar curriculum at community colleges and provide mechanisms for shared funding. Promote classwork and study that will reduce labor shortages in the agricultural sector.
Expand available continuing education programs for working professionals and current students at the community college and university level.	8	Agency action (Colleges)	Develop a certificate program that focuses on key industry areas, such as policy, water, soil health, and economics. May also require Legislation.
Catalogue existing producer-driven research projects (either completed or ongoing) as well as existing applied research that has broad application across Wyoming.	9	Agency action (UW)	Create a comprehensive list of research completed to date in order to either build upon existing study or reduce duplication.
Explore term easement and habitat leasing options and/or feasibility.	10	Agency study (WDA, OSLI, WWRNT, UW, private partners)	Determine what would be necessary to fairly and consistently value term easements, their durability, and potential markets. Would also require industry input.
Develop a catalogue of available resources for succession planning that includes private and public resources.	11	Agency action (WDA)	Provide readily available resources in a centralized location.
Work with federal partners to identify vacant allotments and maintain policies that ensure federal lands remain open for production agriculture as part of Wyoming's working lands.	11	Agency action (WDA et. al.)	Maintain grazing opportunities for livestock producers and, where possible, expand operations.

Appendix 2

Synopsis of Public Input

Farm and Ranch Financing

Are you aware of state and federal programs, such as Wyoming's Beginner Farmer/Rancher loan program, and do you have ideas of how they may be improved? (153 Responses)

- **Awareness and Outreach:** A significant number of respondents were not aware of the state and federal programs, suggesting a need for better advertising, outreach, and public education (including through 4H and FFA) to increase knowledge and participation.
- **Application Process and Program Administration:** Many responses highlighted that the application process is too long (taking up to 9 months), complicated, and needs to be streamlined and simpler. There were also complaints about poor program management, unhelpful or incompetent staff, and high interest rates that are not much better than commercial loans.
- **Loan Limits and Financial Considerations:** Several respondents suggested that loan limits need to be increased to keep pace with land inflation and the high startup costs of today's agriculture businesses. There were also suggestions for farm expansion loans and better support for land leasing for beginners.
- **Eligibility and Program Scope:** Suggestions for improvement included expanding the definition of "beginner farmer" and extending the age requirement, considering an applicant's net income instead of gross income for eligibility, and allowing those with good credit or existing capital to qualify.
- **Education and Resources:** Respondents proposed mandatory education (especially in finance and marketing) with the loan programs and the development of a robust farm link program/website to connect new producers with land lease and purchase opportunities, as well as providing more succession planning resources.

What have you seen in regard to land, farm, or ranch ownership in your area? Is it concerning or acceptable? (154 responses)

- **High Land Costs and Affordability:** The most prominent concern is that land prices are too high, driven by wealthy out-of-state buyers, recreationists, and developers, making it impossible for young, beginning, or even generational farmers/ranchers to afford land, expand, or compete, as the cost often exceeds the productive value of the land.
- **Loss of Agricultural Land to Development:** Many respondents expressed concern over farms and ranches being sold, subdivided, or 'chopped up' into smaller acreages or 'ranchettes' for housing and residential development, leading to the permanent loss of productive agricultural land.
- **Consolidation and Change in Ownership:** There is a concerning trend of smaller farms/ranches being bought up and consolidated into much larger operations, often by large corporations, out-of-state interests, or absentee owners, some of whom are not focused on production agriculture or are using the land for recreational/investment purposes.
- **Generational and Succession Challenges:** Landowners are aging out and difficulty in transferring land affordably, combined with the high cost of entry, makes it challenging for the next generation to take over or start an agricultural operation.

At what level of government, if any, do you believe programs to help farmers and ranchers operate should exist? (155 responses)

- **Support for Programs at All Levels:** The most common response suggests that programs to help farmers and ranchers should exist at **all levels of government** (local, state, and federal), with many emphasizing that local and state levels are preferable or more effective due to a better understanding of regional needs.
- **Preference for Local/State Control:** Many respondents specifically favor programs at the **local and state levels** because they are seen as more effective, easier to access, tailored to unique needs, and less volatile or restrictive than federal programs.
- **Call for No Government Involvement/Free Market:** A significant number of responses advocate for **no government subsidies or involvement**, believing that the free market should dictate the realities of the economy, or that government interference creates long-term structural difficulties and hurts in the long run.
- **Federal Role in Specific Areas:** Federal involvement is noted as important for **large-scale issues** such as disaster relief, crop insurance, and loan programs (like an improved beginner farmer/rancher loan program). Existing federal programs like NRCS and FSA are recognized as beneficial resources.
- **Focus on Specific Program Types and Needs:** Suggestions for specific program focus areas include **conservation programs** (Weed & Pest, Conservation Districts), assistance for **young/beginning farmers and ranchers**, and support for **food security** and **smaller operations**.

What are other issues you see within the realm of farm and ranch financing? (124 responses)

- **High Costs and Low Returns:** Respondents frequently cited rising interest rates, high input costs (equipment, fertilizer, parts, tires, insurance), and high land prices, which make it difficult for operations to cash flow, expand, or for new producers to enter the market. Commodity and livestock prices are often too low or stagnant compared to input costs.
- **Barriers for New and Smaller Producers:** There is a strong feeling that the current system favors larger, established operations, making it nearly impossible for young or startup ranchers to afford land and equipment without significant capital or outside income. The lack of direct, long-term, low-interest farm ownership loans with reasonable caps for new producers is a significant issue.
- **Financing and Loan Structure Issues:** Concerns include loan terms being too short, high interest rates (especially for non-FSA eligible producers), the FSA farm ownership loan cap being too low, and the slow pace of state-available funds. Banks often require very high down payments, indicating perceived risk.
- **Non-Financial External Pressures:** Issues like high property taxes, capital gains/inheritance taxes, foreign ownership of Ag Real Estate, unnecessary regulations, environmental pressures, and the lack of local processing/distribution infrastructure significantly impact financial viability and are seen as threats to agriculture.
- **Lack of Awareness and Support:** Many respondents noted a lack of knowledge regarding business finance, unawareness of available resources, and the difficulty/complexity of accessing aid from agencies due to excessive documentation and requirements. Support is

needed for local food production and for addressing issues like drought/fire insurance and water availability.

Additional Thoughts (63 Responses)

- **Need for Support and Coordination:** Assistance is needed for business planning, financing, and forms, and a one-stop source to coordinate local, county, state, and federal funding should be created. Organizations like the Wyoming Food Coalition and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union should serve as liaisons between producers and governance.
- **Market and Economic Concerns:** Producers are negatively impacted by high costs for operations and equipment, with commodity prices not keeping pace, and middlemen retaining most of the profits. Foreign, corporate, and large business money, along with tourism and development, are driving up land taxes, making it difficult for family farms/ranches to continue.
- **Concerns with Government and Policy:** There is a need to reduce government bureaucracy (red tape), and policies concerning federal land, such as NEPA, are viewed as roadblocks. Some feel the government prioritizes data centers and windmills over agriculture, and there is a need for stronger political support for protecting agriculture.
- **Next Generation and Workforce:** It is critical to support the youngest generation to keep the ranching/farming way of life alive, and help with generational asset transfer by stabilizing buyers and securing transactions. Concerns also exist about the lack of large animal veterinarians and the availability of knowledgeable employees.
- **Local Food Systems and Distribution:** Wyoming desperately needs a strong, statewide distribution system so producers can sell food within the state. The state should mandate that a percentage of food budgets for state and University events be spent on food grown in Wyoming.

Protection of Wyoming's Water for Agriculture

What information could we provide to increase the depth of knowledge for those interested in the status of agricultural water in Wyoming? (139 responses)

- **Need for simplified, accessible information:** Many responses request easily understandable resources such as "Cliff's Notes" versions, handbooks, simplified overviews, infographics, or a "Western water 101" brochure on water law, rights, and history, written in layman's terms. Suggestions also include online classes, video tutorials, and interactive outlines.
- **Education and outreach methods:** Recurring suggestions for sharing information include local meetings, workshops, seminars, and presentations organized in partnership with local organizations like UW Extension and Conservation Districts. Media outlets such as radio, news, newspapers, social media (including a dedicated Facebook page), and public forums were also suggested.
- **Focus on water rights and law:** Respondents emphasized the need for information on water rights (including junior/senior rights, priority of use, and how to find/research individual rights), the history of Wyoming water law, water compacts (like the Colorado River Compact), and the importance of keeping water rights tied to the land.

- **Current status and data:** Requests were made for data on groundwater levels, an overall picture of Wyoming's watershed (source, destination, and rights per county), quarterly or annual reports with historical comparisons, and information regarding out-of-state claims or ownership of Wyoming water resources.
- **Importance of protection and policy:** A strong theme was the need for the state to protect agricultural water rights, address issues of over-allocation, monitor groundwater more systematically, and provide information on how current laws are or are not being followed (e.g., change of use/location). Education for realtors, developers, and city planners was also suggested.

How can we ensure that the interests of Wyoming ranchers and farmers are adequately represented in Wyoming water policies? (137 responses)

- **Prioritize Agricultural Water Use and Protect Existing Rights:** Responses emphasized the need to honor existing water rights, maintain statutory protections, and prioritize water for agriculture over industrial uses (like data centers and petroleum industry) or municipal development. There is a strong concern about not allowing water rights to be transferred away from agricultural land.
- **Involve Producers in Policy and Decision-Making:** A significant theme is ensuring that farmers and ranchers have a "seat at the table." This includes putting active producers on boards, committees, and advisory groups, and having them testify in hearings on water policy. Many feel that policymakers and decision-makers should have an agricultural background.
- **Increase Outreach and Communication:** Respondents suggested holding public meetings, listening sessions, deploying surveys, and conducting direct outreach (mailing lists, door-to-door check-ins, or contacting independent producers) to gather input from a wide range of producers, including those not involved in major organizations.
- **Educate and Staff Appropriately:** Several responses mentioned the need to educate legislators on agricultural water issues and ensure that offices like the SEO's (State Engineer's Office) and the Board of Control have strong foundations in agricultural water needs. There were also calls for more funding for legal support and adequately staffed water law staffers.
- **Support Advocacy and Legal Efforts:** Suggestions included listening to established advocacy groups like stock growers and farm bureaus, and establishing a robust office of water lawyers to protect Wyoming's legal rights under interstate compacts.

Do producers know where and how to find information about their own water rights? (140 responses)

- **Knowledge Varies:** Responses are mixed, with many believing that most producers, especially older or established ones, know or have a general understanding, while others strongly believe most do not, or that knowledge varies depending on the producer's experience (multi-generational vs. first-generation) and whether they regularly deal with irrigation.
- **Challenges for Newcomers:** Producers new to the state or those with smaller acreages often struggle to understand water rights, irrigation district rules, and regulations.

- **Difficulty in Access and Information:** Finding information is often described as difficult, time-consuming, and not easy. The State Engineer's Office (SEO) website is cited as confusing and not user-friendly, and research can be financially burdensome (e.g., water search costs).
- **Need for Better Resources/Outreach:** Suggestions include creating a helpful handbook/pamphlet, hosting local meetings, improving mapping data availability from the SEO, and providing short programs/information outreach through entities like UW Extension to make the complex legal language more understandable.
- **Resource Identification:** Producers are noted to contact their local conservation districts or irrigation companies/ditch managers, and the SEO is a common resource, although some find it adversarial or slow to respond, with concerns about decreasing staff knowledge.

What methods are most effective for delivery of technical information pertaining to water rights and interstate compacts and decrees do you prefer? (136 responses)

- **Digital Communication (Email and Websites):** Email was the most frequently mentioned preferred method for receiving information, often coupled with websites, online articles, or links to state government databases for easy reference and updates.
- **Print and Direct Mail:** Traditional methods like hard copy mailings, newsletters (especially the Wyoming Livestock Roundup), and newspaper articles were also highly valued, particularly for producers who may dislike using computers.
- **In-Person Engagement:** Workshops, public/town hall meetings, conferences, and direct, one-on-one conversations with knowledgeable people (like Extension office staff, Conservation District employees, or State Engineers) were frequently cited as effective for complex technical information.
- **Broadcast and Social Media:** Radio, social media (like Facebook and Twitter), and existing agriculture publications were suggested for broader public service announcements and initial notices.
- **Clarity and Simplicity:** Several responses emphasized the need for information to be easy to understand, with "dumbed down" language, visual guides, and simple, short publications.

Additional Thoughts (41 responses)

- **Water Rights and Conservation:** Concerns were raised about water rights being diverted, lost, or abandoned, with a strong emphasis on keeping water rights tied to the land, increasing water storage, improving delivery systems, and joining other states in having a water agency to deal with the EPA. Several respondents believe civil wars will be fought over water, and the state needs to be more aware of entities looking at Wyoming's water.
- **Water Management Issues and Communication:** Issues include tribes shutting down water early due to mismanagement, new hydrographers altering water right management without proper communication, and the cost of moving irrigation water rights leading to abandonment. It was suggested that Irrigation Districts should be allowed to move water rights themselves without expensive engineers. The need for clear, simplified explanation of water law and better communication with water right holders was mentioned.

- **Support and Outreach:** Respondents feel the state is weak in support and needs to be present at properties rather than just providing a phone number and web link. Public meetings were criticized as being of no value when speakers just want to "blow their own horn."
- **Agricultural Importance and Education:** Farmers and ranchers were called the "backbone of this state" who are "hurting." Quick, easy educational opportunities are preferred over long sessions.
- **New Topics:** Soil health was noted as a missing topic needing more teaching and assistance to increase productivity.

Water Infrastructure

Do you have ideas for leveraging resources to restore aging agricultural water infrastructure? (118 responses)

- **Funding Sources and Financial Mechanisms:** Suggestions include demanding federal agencies fund O&M and replacement, making it a priority in the legislature using state government funds with limited federal control, utilizing the Wyoming Rainy Day fund, flexible financing options, allocating severance tax funds, or a state-wide 1% sales tax for a period of time. There are also suggestions for raising taxes, impact fees for development, and creating a Trust Fund using interest for grants.
- **Cost Responsibility and Allocation:** Multiple responses suggest that the property holder, growers, or the people using the water should bear the brunt of the cost, possibly through cost-share agreements, tax levies, or self-sufficiency from irrigation districts, while others suggest the costs will need to be subsidized or that taxes on land with water rights should be reduced. There is also a suggestion to start taxing data centers or diverting funding from new developments.
- **Prioritization and Strategy:** Several responses emphasize prioritizing the restoration of aging infrastructure and maintenance over new projects (like new pipelines for data centers or the Westfork dam project) and assessing which infrastructure can and should be preserved. Streamlining the process by removing unnecessary red tape and multi-year studies was also suggested.
- **Leveraging Existing Programs and Resources:** Ideas include making it easier to access and leveraging existing programs like the Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO), NRCS programs (WaterSmart, EWP, RCPP), and Conservation Districts, including removing restrictions so more entities are eligible for funding.
- **Conservation and Technology:** Suggestions include offering low-interest water loans for pivots to promote water conservation, looking at technology like drip tapes, and using underground piping for future infrastructure.

What technical assistance could the State of Wyoming provide to assist producers and special districts with agricultural water infrastructure issues? (117 responses)

- **Financial Assistance and Funding:** Provide cost-share programs, low-interest loans, and grants for infrastructure repair and replacement, potentially utilizing budgetary surplus and actively seeking federal funding.

- **Engineering and Technical Support:** Offer engineering design assistance, more state engineers (with practical experience), and help with water well designs and infrastructure assessments (like those done by the Corp of Engineers or modeled after WDOT bridge work).
- **Education and Outreach:** Conduct workshops, conferences, town hall meetings, and provide easy access to information on best practices, available resources, regulations, and opportunities, especially for new producers.
- **Administrative and Regulatory Support:** Streamline state bureaucratic processes, assist with federal processes, and provide legal help to fight outside lawsuits; also mentioned was establishing consistent, minimal rules and regulations.
- **Local and On-the-Ground Support:** Hire folks to be housed in local conservation district offices, provide on-site reviewers, and ensure funding is distributed directly to producers or through less biased mechanisms than some special districts.

Additional Thoughts (28 responses)

- **Funding and Finances:** Concerns were raised that the initiative ultimately comes down to money and funding, and producers are operating on thin margins, yet some feel commodity producers can afford to pay more for water, citing new equipment in the fields.
- **State Action and Policy:** The state is encouraged to be more proactive, listen to Wyoming producers before making policy, and focus on maintaining existing infrastructure over new development.
- **Water Management and Infrastructure:** Suggestions included state assistance for conservation measures like piping canals and installing sprinkler systems due to increasing shortages, limiting development within irrigation areas at the state level, and providing education on the best infrastructure and operations.
- **Agency and Communication:** There's a need for better communication and outreach through Extension, local and social media about impending water issues, and a demand for the SEO and State Engineer to answer water rights questions and address problems instead of avoiding them.
- **Wyoming Specifics:** A point was made to highlight and keep the only pure bison in Wyoming, which is in Yellowstone.

K-12 Education

What should be done to encourage agriculture and natural resource education beyond the current focus of grades 2 through 5? (142 responses)

- **Mandatory Curriculum and Integration:** A key recurring suggestion is to make agriculture and natural resource education a required, mandatory curriculum from elementary through high school (K-12 or K-16), integrating it into existing core subjects like science, math, economics, and history, or establishing it as a standalone class for high school graduation.
- **Hands-on and Experiential Learning:** Many responses stress the importance of practical, hands-on learning, including field trips to local farms, ranches, feedlots, and ranges, as well as work-study programs, school gardens, and greenhouses.

- **Support for Existing Programs:** There is strong support for promoting, funding, and providing resources to existing youth agriculture programs such as FFA and 4-H, including expanding them into middle schools and ensuring they have the necessary resources.
- **Educating the Educators:** Several respondents highlighted the need to educate teachers, school boards, and school administrators about the importance of agriculture and natural resources so they can effectively teach the subjects and advocate for the programs.
- **Vocational and Career Focus:** Recommendations include developing vocational and technical courses (e.g., welding, mechanics), creating clear career pathways, and hosting expos to show students the diversity of jobs and opportunities within the agriculture and natural resource sectors.

How can we better educate students on agriculture, natural resources, energy, tourism and wildlife in the K-12 setting? (142 responses)

- **Curriculum Integration and Requirements:** Many responses recommend building agriculture and related topics into the standard K-12 curriculum, making it mandatory for all students, and expanding beyond early grades. Some suggested following the model of required Wyoming history class, or creating a mandatory introductory course.
- **Hands-on and Experiential Learning:** A strong consensus emphasizes hands-on activities, field trips (to ranches, dams, oil patches, wildlife refuges), school gardens, and tours to allow students to see and experience these industries firsthand and make personal connections.
- **Industry and Community Involvement:** Frequently suggested methods include bringing in local experts, professionals, and guest speakers from the agriculture, energy, and natural resource industries, and encouraging more student involvement with organizations like FFA and 4-H, and community service projects.
- **Educator Support and Resources:** Several responses highlight the need to better educate K-12 teachers on these subjects, provide them with well-developed, unbiased, and age-appropriate curriculum materials (e.g., from Wyoming Ag in the Classroom), and ensure they have the time and support to teach these topics effectively.
- **Career and Vocational Focus:** A number of respondents suggest using this education to expose students to the diverse career paths in these sectors, promoting vocational education, and offering opportunities like job shadowing or internships for older students.

Would you prefer voluntary and incentive-based approaches such as a monetary award for school district adoption or would you prefer a requirement for this type of curriculum in schools? (138 responses)

- **Requirement is preferred by most:** Many responses advocate for a requirement, emphasizing its critical nature to Wyoming's culture and economy, and expressing doubt that the curriculum would be adopted otherwise. Some suggest a state graduation requirement or integration into civics education.
- **Incentive-based approaches:** A significant portion of respondents favor voluntary and incentive-based approaches, often including monetary awards, believing it would lead to better buy-in, more positive outcomes, and avoid the "meet the minimum" mindset of a mandate.

- **Combination/Balance:** Several responses suggest a combination of both, such as integrating lessons into existing standards but offering incentives, or starting with voluntary approaches before potentially requiring adoption.
- **Alternatives and Concerns:** Suggestions included focusing on educating teachers, incentivizing existing programs like FFA and 4-H, and concerns were raised about funding for already stretched school staff and the preference for local control over curriculum.

Additional Thoughts (33 responses)

- **Need for comprehensive and applied education:** Students need more tools and real-life application, and a curriculum like "Ag in the Classroom" is valuable for career path exposure. Children need to understand the complexity and importance of agriculture and natural resources in their everyday lives, including where food comes from, and why they should value and protect the land.
- **Focus on youth and early education:** Education about agriculture should start with the youngest generations, as it is valuable for the country's food supply, safety, and security. Engaging kids in activities like gardening is also important for learning.
- **Support for Ag Education and Homeschooling:** Programs are needed to present a modern picture of careers in agriculture and natural resource conservation to entice people. There is a need to provide curricula and field trip opportunities for homeschooling families.
- **Community involvement and recognition:** Ag producers should be valued in their communities, and town councils and county commissions should recognize those stewarding the land and growing food. Speaker programs featuring retired ranchers could also be beneficial.
- **Concerns about funding and bias:** There are concerns about property taxes that fund education and special districts for farmers/ranchers. Additionally, there is a desire for Wyoming-specific climate science materials free of political bias.
- **School garden coordination:** A strategy should be developed with educators, possibly initiated by 4-H, to coordinate school garden programs across the state and use them as educational spaces.

Agriculture Supply Chain Basics

How can we increase the depth of knowledge of interested individuals on the basics of the agricultural supply chain? (132 responses)

- **Education in Schools and Curriculum:** Start teaching about the agricultural supply chain in schools (K-12, high school, and college classes, including economics and civics curriculum) to build fundamental knowledge for current and future generations, including through "Ag in the Classroom" and required education.
- **Hands-on and Experiential Learning:** Offer "farm-to-plate" excursions, field days/trips, on-site classes at stores, and encourage producers to host consumers to see firsthand where food comes from, emphasizing that pamphlets or literature alone are not effective.
- **Digital and Mass Media Outreach:** Utilize online videos, podcasts, social media campaigns, local news articles, radio, and public service announcements (PSAs) to reach interested individuals and the general public.

- **Partnerships and Existing Organizations:** Leverage and provide financial support for existing organizations like the Wyoming Food Coalition, UW Extension, Wyoming Beef Council, Wyoming CattleWomen, 4H, and FFA to coordinate and expand educational efforts.
- **Information at Point of Purchase:** Implement in-store outreach at grocery stores (e.g., posters, placards, brochures at meat counters, labeling programs) and restaurants to educate consumers at the time of purchase, including information on "Made in Wyoming" branding and the truth about labels (e.g., hormones and antibiotics).

Are you aware of the various pamphlets and brochures have been developed to assist small, local businesses in getting raw agricultural products to market and how can we improve the dissemination of this type of information? (125 responses)

- **Low Awareness:** The majority of respondents were not aware of the pamphlets and brochures developed to assist small, local businesses in getting raw agricultural products to market.
- **Alternative Digital Dissemination:** Several respondents suggested using digital methods like social media campaigns, QR codes, podcasts, streaming video segments, a dedicated website with good information, and blogs to reach a younger audience and combat short attention spans.
- **Targeted Distribution Locations:** Suggestions for better physical distribution included:
 - **Agricultural and Government Offices:** Ag Extension offices, Conservation Districts, Weed & Pest District offices, FSA, NRCS, and local government offices.
 - **Community and Retail Locations:** Farmer's Markets, local Chambers of Commerce, libraries, banks, grocery stores (especially at the meat counter), and public places.
 - **Direct Mail:** Mailing the information to every property or using the post office.
 - **Events:** County fairs, festivals, and school sports events.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Respondents recommended working with existing organizations like the Wyoming Food Coalition, Stock Growers, Wheat Growers, Wool Growers, local Chambers of Commerce, and the University of Wyoming (UW) Extension.
- **Focus on Business and Purchasing Decisions:** Some respondents felt the problem wasn't a lack of consumer information but a need to target grocery store owners/managers, institutional food services, and restaurants, and suggested state-level personnel or incentives to increase local food purchases by businesses.

What new educational materials should be created to assist producers and consumers in navigating the supply chain? (102 responses)

- **Digital and Social Media Content:** Suggestions heavily favored digital formats like videos, podcasts, online guides, social media campaigns, and the use of AI, websites, and phone apps for broad and modern consumer reach, noting that younger audiences do not engage with traditional pamphlets.
- **Educational Platforms and Human Resources:** Respondents recommended a web-based clearinghouse of information, better searchable websites, and a dedicated place

for people to talk to actual humans (county resources, extension/grassroots groups) to help direct them to available resources.

- **Focus on Local and Transparent Supply Chains:** Many comments called for materials that promote **building local/regional food chains**, teach **how to avoid the consolidated food industry**, and provide **transparent costs** from producer to consumer, including information on **local products** and where to find them.
- **Youth and Community Education:** Recommendations included integrating **Ag in the Classroom** for kids, creating **brochures at meat counters**, and holding **seminars, workshops, and cooking/canning classes** for the community, emphasizing that educational materials require effective teaching.
- **Specific and Practical Information:** Suggestions were made to create material with **specific marketing**, such as recipes and cooking classes, and practical guides on **how to start a business** in agriculture, including paperwork, regulations, and market opportunities.

How can we expand the opportunity for agricultural producers to market Wyoming value-added products in Wyoming, other states, and in global markets? (113 responses)

- **Branding and Marketing:** Develop a strong, statewide "Wyoming Ag Products" or "Grown/Produced in Wyoming" brand and implement a marketing campaign emphasizing the value and integrity of Wyoming products, potentially using a state-hosted website as a one-stop-shop for consumers and producers.
- **Reducing Regulatory and Bureaucratic Barriers:** Lessen restrictions, regulations, and "red tape" at the state and national level (e.g., advocating for the PRIME Act, easing inspection systems) to make it easier and more affordable for small and mid-sized producers to process and sell across state lines and to grocers/institutions.
- **Infrastructure and Distribution:** Incentivize the building of in-state processing plants (packing, co-packing) and establish a stronger, statewide distribution system, including cold chain transportation, to enable producers to keep and sell more of their food within Wyoming and reduce trucking costs for finished products.
- **Education and Resources:** Provide financial assistance (grants, low-interest loans) and educational opportunities like classes, programs, and easily accessible information/resources to help producers with marketing, business planning, scaling up, and utilizing existing programs.
- **Interstate and Global Trade:** Seek interstate compacts/agreements, particularly with surrounding states, to allow for the legal trade of state-inspected meat and products, and continue participating in trade missions to enhance global market opportunities.

Additional Thoughts (24 responses)

- **Support for Local and Existing Efforts:** Collaborate with existing grassroots movements and organizations, such as the Wyoming Food Coalition, rather than creating new efforts to achieve the same goals, and direct resources to groups already doing good work.
- **Processing and Market Barriers:** Address regulatory and facility roadblocks for compliant slaughtering, meat packing, and processing, to ensure more money stays with Wyoming producers and to allow local meat to be purchased in stores.

- **Focus on Food and Consumers:** Emphasize the connection between agriculture and food, and tailor marketing campaigns to address consumer interests in food security, knowing where their food comes from, and how it is produced.
- **Need for Modernization and Innovation:** Encourage creativity and 'out of the box thinking' to move away from old school thinking and reorganize agricultural practices with more efficient and up-to-date technologies.
- **Other Specific Needs:** Assist retailers in transporting food into Wyoming, and provide resources for niche agriculture like grape brewing and winemaking, given the availability of winter-hardy vines.

Post-secondary Education and Certifications

How can Wyoming attract and retain the highest quality professors and researchers within the land grant mission (agriculture specifically)? (112 responses)

- **Compensation and Benefits:** The most frequent suggestion is to offer competitive salaries, better pay, and attractive compensation packages, including sign-on bonuses, publication assistance, and better benefits to attract and retain high-quality professionals.
- **Support for the Land Grant Mission and Research:** Respondents emphasize the need for the UW President and Board of Trustees to verbally and financially support the land-grant mission, establish quality research programs (similar to the energy program), and provide better research support, lab facilities, and advancement of techniques. There is a desire for more applied research relevant to Wyoming agriculture.
- **Recruitment and Retention Strategies:** Suggestions include targeting individuals with ties to Wyoming, cultivating homegrown talent through scholarships and internships for high school students (like FFA members) and high school ag teachers, and recruiting professors who have actual experience in agriculture, care about student success, and believe in the importance of agriculture.
- **Improving the Work Environment and University Culture:** Many responses stress the importance of fostering a culture of excellence, valuing the institutions, providing stability, and stopping the perceived politicization of higher education. A strong need for hiring professors who can relate to Wyoming producers and understand the nature of Wyoming agriculture was also mentioned.
- **Community and Student Focus:** Suggestions were made to hire non-researching professors to focus on teaching, ensure faculty are dedicated to student success, and focus on connecting the university with local producers and agencies like Extension and Conservation Districts.

How can we optimize the role of Extension Education in Wyoming? (106 responses)

- **Increase Funding and Staffing:** Many responses emphasized the need for increased and consistent funding to support better salaries for educators, reduce staff turnover, provide adequate resources, and hire more educators to cover all counties effectively. This would help address the current gaps in coverage and reduced educational events.
- **Improve Outreach, Visibility, and Relevance:** Suggestions included better advertising and communication of available offerings, engaging more actively in the community and on social media, focusing on current producer needs and applied research, and making

education relevant to early adopters, non-ag members, and different scales of business (small to mid-scale).

- **Focus on Local and Community Engagement:** Respondents recommended returning to the model of having an educated extension agent for agriculture in every county, promoting place-based education, and encouraging local community meetings, workshops (like ag budgeting), and educational programs at various times.
- **Enhance Educational Offerings and Partnerships:** Suggestions involved offering distance education, partnering more with community colleges, high schools, FFA, conservation districts, and other non-profit organizations, broadening 4-H requirements, and focusing on practical skills like business, marketing, finance, and succession planning.
- **Improve Educator Quality and Accountability:** Some feedback pointed to the need for extension offices to hire and retain individuals with real-world agriculture knowledge and experience, with some even suggesting lowering the Master's degree requirement to a Bachelor's to broaden the pool of candidates.

What methods should be employed to train, then recruit and retain experts in critical specialties such as agricultural policy, water law and management, small agricultural producer finance and forest management? (95 responses)

- **Compensation and Incentives:** Paying competitive, fair market wages and salaries is a recurring critical point for recruitment and retention, with some suggesting the best in the nation. Offering bonuses, incentives, and a career trajectory is also important.
- **Education and Training:** Starting education early in high school, 4-H, and FFA, then investing in university programs, community college certificates, and trade schools is recommended. Suggestions include scholarships, creating programs tailored to these specialties, and involving students in real-life issues through internships and project-based learning.
- **Experience and Expertise:** There is a strong emphasis on utilizing individuals with real-world, on-the-ground, and generational agricultural experience, including independent producers, successful farmers/ranchers, and retired folks. Some suggest balancing academia with this practical experience and hiring "home-grown" talent.
- **Work Environment and Location:** Reducing "drama" and fostering a positive team environment, as well as allowing specialists to be spread out across the state (not centralized in Laramie), are suggested for retention. Affordability, including supporting affordable housing in rural communities, is also key for attracting and retaining young professionals.
- **Organizational and Policy Focus:** Conducting an audit of University Ag programs, creating job needs with appropriate compensation, and having public policy that prioritizes agriculture are mentioned. Utilizing citizen advisory committees with actual authority is also recommended.

Which academic study areas are the most beneficial to Wyoming agriculture? (112 responses)

- **Range and Natural Resource Management:** Many responses highlighted the importance of **range management** or **rangeland science** and broader **natural resource management**, which includes **soil science/health**, **weed and pest management**, and **forestry**.
- **Water Management and Resources:** **Water management**, **hydrology**, and **water law** were frequently mentioned as critical academic areas.
- **Agricultural Business and Economics:** Multiple responses emphasized the need for strong foundational knowledge in **agribusiness**, **ag economics**, **marketing**, **finance**, and **business management** for successful agricultural operations.
- **Animal and Crop Science:** **Animal science**, **livestock production** (especially cattle/beef), and **agronomy** or **crop science** were noted as essential, along with the need for **rural veterinarians**.
- **Emerging Areas and Practical Skills:** Other suggested areas included **ag law**, **ag policy**, **leadership**, **ag communications**, **agritourism**, **meat processing**, and incorporating **hands-on/trade skills** and **emerging technology**.

Would creating certification programs for trainees help to meet technical assistance requirements of Wyoming producers, and if so, which specialty areas would be most beneficial? (102 responses)

- **Support for Certification Programs:** The majority of respondents believe creating certification programs would help meet technical assistance requirements, with many answering "Yes" or "Absolutely." Some, however, expressed doubt, stated 'No,' or were unsure about the need or effectiveness of more certifications, noting that experience and compensation are also key factors.
- **Most Beneficial Specialty Areas:** Financial and business-related topics were highly recommended, including **Ag economics and finance**, **marketing**, **small business operating classes**, and **business management/profitability training**.
- **Natural Resources and Technical Skills:** Numerous responses suggested areas like **water management**, **soil health**, **grazing/range management**, **weed control**, **irrigation technologies**, and **mechanics/equipment operation** (e.g., **welding**, **CDL programs**, and **tractor technology** like GPS).
- **Livestock and Production:** Specific areas related to animal agriculture were also mentioned, such as **veterinary**, **meat processing training**, **animal husbandry**, **vaccination programs**, and **animal nutrition**.
- **Value-Added Production:** Several responses highlighted the importance of training in **value-added production** for current products.

Additional Thoughts (22 responses)

- **Education and Training:** Responses highlighted a need for more hands-on practical skills training (like fixing equipment or pulling a well) not covered in typical Ag Business degrees, less "fluff" in programs, and a focus on training a thought process that fosters ingenuity rather than promoting for-profit ideologies. There was also a sentiment that college is overpriced and not necessary for ranching and farming.

- **Program and Institutional Support:** Suggestions included expanding the University of Wyoming (UW) campus across the state for better accessibility, partnering with the Wyoming LEAD program for leadership training, and addressing issues with the UW intern program contract to make it less liability-heavy for ranchers.
- **Specific Industry Needs:** There is a need for more large animal veterinarians, with a suggestion to require WY practice if state funds were used for their education, and a desire for more support in seed production research, especially in the Big Horn Basin.
- **Business Support and Consumer Access:** Producers need better access to funding and to consumers, with the Wyoming Food Coalition mentioned as an existing organization working on these areas.
- **Questionnaire Feedback:** Several respondents found the survey questions too long or believed they were designed to engineer a desired outcome, suggesting the questions should be shorter and more focused.

Producer-driven and Applied Research

How can we leverage the academic expertise in Wyoming's community colleges and the University to solve problems for producers? (101 responses)

- **Increase hands-on engagement and collaboration:** Academics and students need to get out into the field, work side-by-side with farmers/ranchers, and focus on real-world, relevant problems in Wyoming agriculture. Suggested methods include internships, coops, student/producer partnerships, and real-life case studies.
- **Improve the connection between academia and producers:** Build genuine relationships, make experts more available outside of college towns, enhance the conduit of extension offices, and convene groups to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between campus experts and producers.
- **Focus research on practical and producer-driven needs:** Fund research programs, encourage unbiased research driven by profit-driven producers, and query the industry to focus on high-priority concerns, rather than research for research's sake. Support the Wyoming Ag Experiment Station and research trials.
- **Adjust academic culture and curriculum:** Incentivize community or extension work for faculty, allow for more professors of practice, align and coordinate curriculums across post-secondary schools, and potentially revamp grant opportunities like the former AGRGP program.
- **Provide financial support and resources:** Fund research programs, provide grants (including larger ones), offer first-timer loans/loan forgiveness, and support local agencies that partner with institutions.

Which research questions or topics would add the most value to farms, ranches and forests in Wyoming? (98 responses)

- **Water Management and Drought Resilience:** Numerous responses highlighted the importance of research into water conservation, long-range water availability improvements, drought management, and water usage, reflecting a critical concern for this limited resource.

- **Land Management and Soil Health:** Key topics include range management, grazing systems (rotational, adaptive, rest-rotation), improving carrying capacity, soil conservation and health, and the effectiveness of soil amendments.
- **Weed and Pest/Invasive Species Control:** Research is needed on noxious and invasive weed control (especially cheatgrass), chemical control studies, pest elimination, and effective methods of combating them.
- **Livestock Health and Production:** Respondents emphasized research on issues like brisquet disease and high-altitude problems in cattle, reducing inputs, increasing gains in a shorter amount of time, line needle abortion, and sulfur toxicity.
- **Economic and Business Aspects:** Many responses focused on the value of research in business, finances, marketing (especially direct-to-consumer), break-even analysis, market manipulation, and improving per-acre profitability and economic efficiency.

How could agricultural research and development be incentivized to spur innovation and entrepreneurship? (82 responses)

- **Financial Support and Incentives:** The most frequently mentioned suggestion is providing financial support through **grants** (with less burdensome requirements), **loan forgiveness**, **reduced interest**, and **funding** for pursuing opportunities and for new producers. Monetary rewards, cost-share programs, and support for startups (like an "agriculture Shark Tank" program) were also suggested.
- **Collaboration and Real-World Application:** Emphasizing **collaboration** between producers, the University of Wyoming (UW) or community colleges, and private industry is crucial. Research should be **applied in the field**, at an operational level, and led by local people to address real-world problems (e.g., cheatgrass).
- **Educational Programs and Competitions:** Suggestions include creating **prize-oriented competitions** (similar to the Ellbogen Challenge at UW), developing programs like the Paul Engler program at UNL, and focusing on **conversations and education** by those who have practical experience.
- **Support for Market and Business Development:** Incentives should promote **profit-driven agriculture**, support **market research** and value-added paths, and offer entrepreneurial support and **business education** (Business 101). Suggestions also included creating a delivery system for the public to purchase or commercialize developed products.

Additional Thoughts (24 responses)

- **Producer-driven research and innovation:** Suggest creating a state program similar to the federally funded Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program and encouraging producers to take on testing and finding solutions, with one producer detailing personal testing of chemicals for weed problems that saved significant money.
- **Market Infrastructure and Processing:** Investment is needed in growing market infrastructure, warehousing, and processing capabilities, especially for small agriculture (e.g., poultry processing, creameries, seed cleaning) in areas like Fremont County, as growing is only a fraction of reaching consumers.

- **Business Acumen and Tradition:** Emphasize that financial honesty and adaptation are crucial for the survival of ranches across generations, and that relying on outdated, traditional methods is detrimental.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** Advocated for more collaboration rather than re-inventing the wheel, and stressed that regulators and researchers must listen to and act on what producers say.
- **Survey Feedback and Roadblocks:** The questionnaire was criticized as being too long, going in circles, wasting time, and being "B.S." There was a call to eliminate roadblocks created by state and federal government on public lands.

Succession Planning

What are the barriers to participation in the existing programs offered by the state and industry partners? (103 responses)

- **Lack of Knowledge and Awareness:** A significant number of responses cite a lack of knowledge, awareness, and insufficient outreach/publicity about existing programs as the main barrier, with some noting the programs are "one of the states best kept secrets."
- **Time and Availability:** Producers' busy schedules, commitment, and being overworked make it difficult to find the time to participate, attend in-person programs, or complete necessary paperwork.
- **Reluctance to Discuss Private/Family Business:** Many producers are very private and fear revealing personal or family business, and there is a stigma about asking for help or involving outside/government entities in sensitive family matters like succession planning.
- **Family Dynamics and Conflict:** Issues within the family, such as conflict, confrontation, difficulty reaching agreement among members, and the fear of splitting an operation that is barely enough to make a living are major obstacles.
- **Program and Agency Issues:** Barriers include difficult state government agencies to navigate, lack of interagency cooperation, rules and regulations attached to programs, and the opinion that some prior programs yielded unspectacular results or are "worthless."

What should be done to better assist families in agricultural succession planning? (108 responses)

- **Education and Outreach:** Provide more succession planning courses and workshops, advertise them earlier (20-15 years out), and increase outreach to rural communities to raise awareness of available resources and programs.
- **Professional and Legal Assistance:** Offer free or low-cost legal counsel, planning facilitation services, or a directory of experts (legal, accounting, financial) to work directly with families, including through county-based sessions or legal clinics.
- **Tax and Financial Relief:** Permanently eliminate death, estate, and capital gains taxes to ease the financial burden of transferring assets and address the "land rich, cash poor" issue.
- **Support for Family Dynamics:** Encourage the use of third-party mediation or coaches to help with family conversations, mental health, and the emotional difficulties of succession planning.
- **Resource Development:** Create a web-based clearinghouse of information, modifiable templates, guidebooks, and lists of local professionals to make resources easily accessible.

Is there a need for helping producers explore options for agricultural diversification including both traditional and novel diversification, and if so, how could that assistance best be delivered? (96 responses)

- **Need for Diversification Assistance:** The vast majority of respondents agree there is a need to help producers explore options for agricultural diversification.
- **Delivery Methods:** The most suggested ways to deliver assistance are through **workshops, courses, and educational outreach**, often recommending utilization of **UW Extension offices** and **Community Colleges**. Other suggestions included **conferences, webinars, social media, flyers/mailings/brochures, and websites**.
- **Focus on Practical Examples and Expertise:** Several responses emphasized the importance of connecting interested parties with **existing producers** who have successfully diversified, using **local and state success stories**, and providing **financial gain** and **profitability models** to demonstrate the benefits.
- **Suggested Diversification Areas:** Specific diversification suggestions included **animal diversification** (stacking species), **agri-tourism/recreation, value-added products, and Regenerative Agriculture**.
- **Other Considerations:** Some respondents mentioned that diversification is difficult due to Wyoming's climate limitations and cultural resistance to change, and that the assistance should be **free** and focus on **families/future generations**.

How can the state better assist farmers and ranchers with the stress and mental health challenges endemic to the agriculture sector today? (100 responses)

- **Increase Resource Availability and Accessibility:** Several responses called for providing mental health resources and outreach, ensuring mental health coverage is included in all insurances, making healthcare and mental healthcare affordable, and recruiting mental health professionals to work in Wyoming, potentially through loan forgiveness or specialized training.
- **Destigmatization and Awareness:** Many emphasized the need to address the high stigma associated with mental health in the agriculture sector, suggesting open dialogue, acknowledging the issue, and continuing to advertise resources like AgStress and the 988 Helpline.
- **Community and Peer Support:** Suggestions included building stronger rancher communities to combat isolation, supporting existing associations (like wool growers or cattle men) where producers already gather, and creating support groups or resources where people can talk comfortably with qualified, county-specific people or peers who have gone through similar experiences.
- **Focus on Economic Factors:** Some respondents linked stress to financial issues, recommending actions to increase profitability, eliminate the estate tax, offer reasonable access to capital, and stabilize volatile markets to ensure producers are paid what they are worth.
- **Reduce Government Interference:** A significant number of responses advised the state to reduce regulations, common sense legislation, stop trying to regulate good operators, or generally stay out of the business, with some asserting that addressing mental health is not the state's job.

Would you support a permanent fund for stress and mental health for agricultural producers? (110 responses)

- **Support for a Permanent Fund:** A significant number of respondents expressed a clear "yes" in support of a permanent fund for stress and mental health for agricultural producers, with some noting that it is "needed."
- **Broader Scope/Inclusion:** Many suggested the fund should extend beyond agricultural producers to benefit all Wyoming residents, or at least rural populations, given the state's high suicide rate and general mental health decline.
- **Implementation and Management Concerns:** Several responses expressed caution, indicating support only if the fund is "properly managed," "done well," and not just "throwing money around" or becoming a "money pit." Some also asked for more information on management, funding, and how it would be prioritized.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** Some respondents felt the fund would only be a "band-aid" and that a "root of problem solution" is needed, suggesting solutions like a State Food Policy or addressing government-created stressors.
- **Producer Engagement and Existing Resources:** Concerns were raised about whether agricultural producers would actually use the services, and some pointed out that existing county or state health department resources should be leveraged instead of "reinventing the wheel."

Additional Thoughts (20 responses)

- **Succession Planning/Generational Issues:** Generational planning is critical for the longevity of multi-generational operations, with one respondent noting the difficulty of convincing younger people to accept the financial requirements of passing on an operation. One suggestion was to partner with the Wyoming LEAD program, which already focuses on succession planning.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Incorporating advanced technology like virtual fence and forage heat mapping is considered crucial for encouraging younger generations to remain in agriculture and should be supported by assistance programs.
- **Mental Health and Stress:** Concerns were raised about the aging producer population and the high stress levels and mental health issues among agricultural producers, with a suggestion to consult RMFU for support work. The stress is partly attributed to the high cost of production and government regulations.
- **Market and Government Involvement:** Several respondents expressed a desire for less government involvement and federal regulation, suggesting the market should guide the industry. Another called for focusing on small, family-owned operations to increase Wyomingites' control over their food supply.
- **External Concerns:** One comment highlighted the apparent conflict between sportsmen and agriculture, mentioning the issue of wildlife privatization, and another suggested looking at the real estate market.

Landscape Conservation

What is the economic impact of large, intact landscapes and what role does agriculture play in maintaining these landscapes? (112 responses)

- **Economic Impact:** The economic impact of large, intact landscapes is described as "huge," "massive," "significant," and "incalculable," primarily supporting **tourism, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat** which are major economic drivers for Wyoming. They also provide valuable **ecosystem services** like clean water, healthy soils, and carbon storage, and reduce public costs by limiting wildfire severity and avoiding expensive development infrastructure.
- **Role of Agriculture in Maintenance:** Agriculture, particularly ranching and grazing operations, is considered **critical and key** to maintaining these landscapes by **preventing subdivision, fragmentation, and urban sprawl**, thus preserving open space and wildlife migration corridors. The economic viability of agriculture is seen as directly linked to keeping these landscapes whole.
- **Stewardship and Benefits:** Ranchers and farmers are seen as the **stewards and ultimate preservers** of these lands, managing them through practices like grazing which can maintain healthy grass and forests, reduce fine fuels, and support wildlife populations.
- **Need for Support and Compensation:** Several responses suggest that producers should be **compensated or incentivized** for their conservation efforts and for keeping land in agriculture, as they carry the burden of creating an environment to support both livestock and wild animal populations.
- **Management Focus:** The consensus is that all land needs management, with agriculture serving as a primary tool, and that preserving the land *in perpetuity for ag production* is necessary to maintain Wyoming's production levels, culture, and character.

What role does agriculture play in the public land management within these landscapes? (108 responses)

- **Stewardship and Management:** Agriculture, primarily livestock grazing, is viewed as a critical steward and on-the-ground manager of public lands, helping to maintain open space, manage invasive species, and support healthy rangelands. Ranchers' presence provides "eyes on the land," aiding early detection of issues that agencies may not have the staff to monitor.
- **Fire Mitigation:** Grazing is highlighted as a key tool for fire mitigation by reducing fine fuels (understory vegetation) and lowering the risk of wildfires.
- **Economic and Landscape Connection:** Ag operations are seen as essential for providing an economic incentive for good land use, maintaining the viability of adjacent private lands, and ensuring the continued ecological health, wildlife habitat, and open landscapes of Wyoming.
- **Voice and Influence:** Many respondents believe agriculture needs a leading voice and a seat at every table concerning public land management, with federal agencies legally mandated to incorporate local opinions from ag producers.
- **Conservation and Wildlife:** Agriculture contributes to conservation, development of water resources, nutrient cycling, and wildlife habitat maintenance.

Would you support a no net loss of federal grazing AUMs policy in Wyoming? (115 responses)

- **Strong Support:** The overwhelming majority of respondents support a "no net loss of federal grazing AUMs policy in Wyoming," with many expressing this support definitively or enthusiastically.
- **Need for Flexibility and Science:** A significant number of responses opposed or cautioned against the policy, emphasizing the need for flexibility, adaptive management, and calculating AUMs based on sound science, climate conditions (like drought/wet spells), and the health of the ecosystem.
- **Calls for Increased Use and Better Management:** Some respondents suggested supporting a net increase in AUMs, forcing the use of suspended units, or coupling the policy with state investment to improve management and range conditions, noting that rangelands are often under-managed.
- **Lack of Knowledge:** Several respondents indicated they did not know what an AUM was or that they would need more information or policy details before taking a position.
- **Land Management Concerns:** A few responses suggested that state management of federal lands would be better or that closed grazing allotments are closed for a reason and should not be opened just to satisfy a no net loss policy, while others want to stop stock from being removed for recreation purposes.

What other strategies could be employed to incentivize the stewardship of intact and working landscapes? (94 responses)

- **Financial Incentives and Compensation:** Offer cost-share programs (like EQIP, ACEP, CRP, RCPP, CREP) for adopting best practices, support ecosystem services markets, provide grants for targeted conservation, improve tax incentives for land used in ag production, and compensate producers for reducing production to care for the landscape.
- **Conservation Easements and Open Space:** Utilize conservation easements (both permanent and shorter-term) and open space contracts to prevent land fragmentation and reward landowners for keeping land undeveloped for continued agricultural use, while also improving the value proposition of these easements.
- **Reduce Regulations and Improve Flexibility:** Decrease burdensome federal and state regulations, simplify application processes for federal programs, reduce delays for small projects (like Environmental Assessments), and allow flexibility in grazing plans and stocking rates, rewarding good management.
- **Support for Public Land Grazing and Water Development:** Empower regional BLM grazing boards, ensure stability in public-land grazing permits, allow deductions from lease costs for producer-funded improvements (water, riparian areas), and update permits to reflect flexible stocking rates.
- **Education and Promotion:** Emphasize education for the public and K-12 on the value of working landscapes and the role of producers as stewards, promote awareness of available funding and tax benefits, and help ag producers share their message with consumers.

Additional Thoughts (22 responses)

- **Survey/Initiative Feedback:** The questionnaire was perceived as too long, and some respondents ran out of time or requested more time to complete it. One comment urged immediate implementation of the initiative.
- **Land Management & Conservation:** Concerns were raised about poor management and overgrazing on state sections of rangeland and the detrimental effects on the native ecosystem and wildlife habitat. The issue of subdividing irrigated land was highlighted, which takes land out of agricultural production. Support for working lands, including financial and policy changes, and the need to save farmland were emphasized.
- **Program & Agency Suggestions:** Suggestions included changing the federal CRP program to encourage responsible grazing, increasing funding and enforcement power for Weed and Pest Districts, and improving collaboration between Extension and NRCS. One suggestion advocated for a program similar to the Idaho Rangeland Resources Commission.
- **Policy & Access:** Concerns were raised regarding foreign agricultural land ownership, the long-term landscape damage from wind farms, and the problems posed by large pieces of land locked into land trusts/conservation easements when passing on land. One comment requested allowing hunting access on most public land for wildlife management.
- **Outreach & Awareness:** A respondent suggested broadening outreach for the questionnaire through conservation districts, weed and pest districts, public libraries, and various agricultural associations and groups.

Appendix 3

Helpful Resources and Links

USDA NRCS – Find your local service center

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center?state=56&county=>

USDA NRCS Wyoming

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/wyoming>

USDA NRCS Soil Health

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/soil/soil-health>

USDA NRCS Soil Science

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/soil/soil-science>

USDA NRCS Programs and Initiatives

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives>

NRCS Regenerative Pilot Program

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/regenerative-pilot-program>

NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program/wyoming/wyoming-agricultural>

NRCS Agriculture Management Assistance

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/agricultural-management-assistance>

NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/conservation-stewardship-program>

NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/eqip-environmental-quality-incentives/wyoming/wyoming-environmental-quality>

USDA Grants and Loans

<https://www.usda.gov/farming-and-ranching/financial-resources-farmers-and-ranchers/grants-and-loans>

USDA Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Loans

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/resources/beginning-farmers-and-ranchers-loans>

USDA Rural Development Programs

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs>

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Grants

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants>

USDA Farm Service Agency Programs – Wyoming
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Wyoming/programs>

USDA Heirs' Property Relending Program
<https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/heirs-property-eligibility/relending>

Resources for Landowners in Wyoming
<https://www.uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/private-lands-stewardship/resources-land-owners.html>

Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments
<https://lands.wyo.gov>

Wyoming OSLI Farm Loans Program
<https://lands.wyo.gov/grants-loans/state-funded-grants-loans/farm-loans>

Farm Bureau Financial Services
<https://www.fbfs.com/learning-center/what-you-need-to-know-about-farm-succession-planning>

Farm Credit Mid-America
<https://www.fcma.com/community/insights/the-five-phases-of-farm-succession-planning>

University of Wyoming
<https://www.uwyo.edu/agecon/what-we-do/programs/succession-planning.html>

Wyoming Department of Agriculture
<https://agriculture.wy.gov/farm-ranch-succession-planning>

Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust
<https://wsplt.org/ranchland-succession-program/>

Wyoming Department of Agriculture Mediation Program
<https://agriculture.wy.gov/mediation-program>

Resources for Landowners in Wyoming
<https://www.uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/private-lands-stewardship/resources-land-owners.html>

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I am pleased to present the strategic roadmap from the Cowboy State Agriculture Initiative. This working group was assigned a critical mission: to ensure that agriculture remains the backbone of Wyoming's culture, heritage, and economy for generations to come.

The findings within this report are vital to every Wyomingite. Our agricultural industry faces modern pressures—from shifting global markets and rising input costs, to the ever-present threat of invasive species and wildfire. This report is not just a high-level summary, it is a call for full engagement.

The diversity of this 13-member group—including state agencies, legislators, educators, industry and local producers—has resulted in a strategy that leverages applied research and innovative management to give our producers more 'tools in their toolbox'. I am encouraged by our focus on financial and educational opportunities as well as more personal issues like succession planning. While we have 'skimmed the surface' of these complex issues, we are now committed to diving deeper into what impacts our ag communities and ways we can support them.

This effort will not get easier as we face future challenges; but by deciding collectively what we can achieve, we can steward our agricultural industry and leave it better than we found it.

I applaud the working group and encourage all of Wyoming to review the areas identified as the most critical to our agricultural industry, the action items needed to address these issues and to support the implementation of the recommendations. Together, we will continue to build a future of innovation and resilience for the next generation of Wyoming agriculturalists.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mark Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Governor Mark Gordon