INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2026 Interim

October 1, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fifth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture was held on October 1, 2026, at 9:00 AM ET/8:00 AM CT in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Jason Howell, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Jason Howell, Co-Chair; Representative Myron Dossett, Co-Chair; Senators Gary Clemons, Matthew Deneen, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Matt Nunn, Aaron Reed, Craig Richardson, Robin L. Webb, and Mike Wilson; and Representatives Ryan Bivens, Anne Gay Donworth, Daniel Fister, Chris Freeland, David Hale, Mark Hart, Kim Holloway, Kim King, Candy Massaroni, Shawn McPherson, Adam Moore, Michael Sarge Pollock, Sarah Stalker, Walker Thomas, and James Tipton.

Guests: Dana Feldman, Executive Director, Consumer and Environmental Protection, Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA); Heather Becker, General Counsel, KDA; Kimberly Pryor, General Counsel, JBS Foods Group; Ken Carver, Executive Principal, Christian County High School (CCHS); Sandra Hancock, Academy Coach, Academy of Agriculture and Skilled Trades (AAST), CCHS; Christina Russell, Career & Technical Education Coordinator, AAST, CCHS; Julie Gilliam, Agriculture Teacher, AAST, CCHS; Sidney Johnson, Agriculture Teacher, AAST, CCHS; Cameron Williams, Student, AAST, CCHS; Sarah Kate Gilliam, Student, AAST, CCHS; Kevin Gomez, Student, AAST, CCHS.

LRC Staff: Kelly Ludwig, Hillary Abbott, and Rachel Hartley.

Approval of September 3, 2026, Minutes

A motion was made by Representative Pollock and seconded by Representative Bivens to approve the minutes of the September 3rd, 2026, meeting. Minutes were approved by voice vote without objection.

Implementation of 26 Senate Bill 5 (SB 5)

Heather Becker, General Counsel, and Dana Feldman, Executive Director, Office of Consumer and Environmental Protection, KDA provided an update on the implementation of 26RS SB 5 and the local first school nutrition initiative. Ms. Becker

and Ms. Feldman discussed KDA's technical assistance partnership with Kentucky Education Development Corporation (KEDC) in outreach efforts to local school districts. Ms. Feldman highlighted that Kentucky school districts were featured at the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Harvest to Hallways launch. Ms. Becker emphasized the impact 26RS SB 5's removal of barriers to forward contract as highly beneficial but noted that more work needs to be done with legislation and outreach.

In response to Representative McPherson, Ms. Becker agreed agricultural diversification stemming from the tobacco settlement agreement and 2000 RS HB 611 has helped put Kentucky farmers in a position to produce different crops that contribute to food programs.

In response to Senator Funke-Frommeyer, Ms. Becker encouraged communities and school districts to reach out to Tina Garland and the Farm to School program for more information about participation in the local first school nutrition initiative. Ms. Becker noted a correlation between the shortage of agriculture science education teachers statewide and lack of communities prioritizing agriculture.

Senator Howell encouraged members to meet with local school food service directors to determine what they need and let them know about available resources.

In response to Representative Stalker, Ms. Becker stated fuel price concerns are being addressed by the Commissioner in asking the Governor to ease state restrictions related to red-dyed diesel.

Representative Dossett commended the foresight of the committee in the creation of 26RS SB 5 to encourage local produce in schools. With the rising fuel costs and potential for accessibility to produce, having avenues for local access helps everyone.

Representative Hale commended KDA and the work of Tina Garland on the Farm to School programs. Representative Hale noted that his local FFA grows produce in its greenhouse that is used in the local school, which is a great program for kids and future farmers to see the benefits of their hard work.

In response to Representative Donworth, Ms. Becker explained that red-dyed diesel is diesel that has red-dye added so that it could be distinguished for farm-use only.

Senator Howell praised Commissioner Shell's commitment to Kentucky farmers and for his dedication to Farm to School initiatives. Senator Howell emphasized the layers of 26RS SB 5 including the barriers removed for local producers and school districts,

highlighting the importance of forward contracting for farmers so that they can scale their crop production with a guaranteed price or price range for their product. Senator Howell encouraged members to focus on the successes of these initiatives rather than the failures; as wins and losses are a natural result of new markets.

Bridging the Rural and Urban Divide in Agriculture

Kimberly Pryor, General Counsel, JBS Foods, discussed the economic impact of agriculture, stating that food processing alone employs nearly 30,000 Kentuckians, both urban and rural, through production and industrial jobs. Ms. Pryor stated that JBS Food's pork plant in Louisville and Pilgrim's Pride small bird deboning plant in Mayfield employ over 3000 workers and contribute over $14 million in payroll combined. Ms. Pryor emphasized the strategic local and statewide importance of having local processing plants to Kentucky farmers and to the state economy by offering a market for local farmers, use of local businesses for construction, utilities, wastewater treatment, recycling, and capital investments.

Senator Howell stated that the price processors like JBS are able to pay grain producers provides them with a rare price hedge for their crop which cannot be understated as market opportunities nationally are unpredictable.

In response to Representative Tipton, Ms. Pryor echoed his praise for the tuition assistance JBS offers to its employees. Ms. Pryor stated that a barrier to building more meat processing facilities has been that a lot of communities do not want a processor in their backyard.

In response to Senator Howell, Ms. Pryor stated that JBS's Louisville plant is a one-shift plant due to local ordinances and most JBS plants run on two-shifts. Ms. Pryor noted that the economic impact would double if local ordinances allowed the plant in Louisville to run as a two-shift plant. Ms. Pryor noted processors are a dependable customer for all Kentucky farmers, and urban investment in processors is also an investment in the rural economy, and vis versa.

In response to Senator Funke-Frommeyer, Ms. Pryor stated that many acres are needed for new meat processors which is why movement into urban locations is challenging.

Representative Bivens thanked JBS for its commitment to the Louisville plant in spite of the local scrutiny and emphasized the importance of local processing plants to Kentucky producers.

Overview of the Academy of Agriculture and Skilled Trades

Ken Carver, Executive Principal, CCHS introduced members to the AAST at CCHS. The AAST offers career pathway courses for agribuisness, ag power, structural, and technical systems, aircraft maintenance, automotive maintenance, and more. In addition to core high school classes, these pathway programs give students a pipeline into the workforce as well as an advantage going into college technical programs. Local businesses and community members collaborate with the pathway students which helps enrich the student and community experience. AAST staff and students stated there is a marked increase in school engagement and participation for students who are enrolled in a pathway.

Senator Nunn praised the career pathway program and encouraged teachers to keep investing in those students and for the students to stick with the programs as it will pay off.

Representative Dossett offered his thanks to Principal Carver and the group for the great work they are doing for the future of agriculture, our children, and the wider community.

Informational Item:
Senator Howell noted that staff had copies of the Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Authority Biennial Report for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026.

Adjournment
With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned.