

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2025 Interim

November 6, 2025

Call to Order and Roll Call

The sixth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture was held on November 6, 2025, at 9:00 AM 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; Senators Gary Boswell, Matthew Deneen, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Matt Nunn, Aaron Reed, Craig Richardson, Robin L. Webb, and Mike Wilson; and Representatives Chad Aull, Ryan Bivens, Anne Gay Donworth, Daniel Fister, Chris Freeland, David Hale, Mark Hart, Kim Holloway, Kim King, Matthew Koch, Candy Massaroni, Shawn McPherson, Adam Moore, J.T. Payne, Michael Sarge Pollock, Sarah Stalker, Nancy Tate, Walker Thomas, and James Tipton.

Guests: Eddie Melton, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau (KFB); Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, KFB; Aleta Botts, Project Coordinator, Kentucky Farmland Transition Initiative, KFB; Jonathan Shell, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA); Brandon Reed, Executive Director, Kentucky Office of Agricultural Policy (KOAP), KDA; Heather Becker, General Counsel, KDA; Dana Feldman, Executive Director, Office of Consumer and Environmental Protection, KDA; Morgan Bray, Program Coordinator, Food is Medicine, KDA; Dave Maples, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Cattlemen's Association (KCA); and Nikki Whitaker, Director of Operations and Policy, KCA.

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

Approval of October 16, 2025, minutes

The October 16, 2025, minutes were approved by voice vote, without objection upon motion of Representative Pollock and seconded by Representative Payne.

Potential Legislative Issues for the 2026 Regular Session

Kentucky Farm Bureau

Eddie Melton, President, KFB, discussed ongoing agricultural initiatives, including the importance of the Kentucky Farmland Transition Initiative. He expressed gratitude for legislative support on 2025 RS HB 703, which created a tax credit for farmers selling agricultural land. Mr. Melton emphasized maintaining funding for the KDA and highlighted

the importance of tax policies that support farmers.

Aleta Botts, Project Coordinator, Kentucky Farmland Transition Initiative, KFB, provided updates on the selling farmer tax credit and federal tax code changes that benefit land sales to active farmers.

Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, KFB, expressed appreciation for the committee's support and emphasized the importance of collaboration among agricultural organizations and policymakers.

In response to Representative Tipton, Mr. Melton stated rising insurance costs are due to severe weather events and inflation.

In response to Senator Boswell, Mr. Melton stated better management of the deer population is needed to mitigate agricultural damage, and there is potential for collaboration with organizations like Hunters for the Hungry to address the issue.

In response to Representative Bivens, Mr. Melton stated the total damage to agriculture by deer would be difficult to determine, but it is substantial.

Chair Howell discussed the importance of understanding the rural urban divide in policymaking and the role of KFB to bridge that gap.

Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Jonathan Shell, Commissioner, KDA, highlighted the All In For Agriculture Education Week program, which celebrates agriculture through classroom activities and community events. Schools are using innovative teaching methods to integrate agriculture into subjects like math and science. Commissioner Shell stated collaboration is important between rural and urban areas in agriculture. He noted, while production occurs in rural settings, many agricultural inputs and processing activities take place in urban environments. This interconnectedness presents opportunities for dialogue and partnership, which he aims to foster in the coming year.

Brandon Reed, Executive Director, KOAP, KDA, outlined budget priorities for the upcoming legislative session, including requests for funding to support staff recruitment and retention. Mr. Reed also discussed the need for continued funding for agricultural economic development initiatives.

Commissioner Shell recommended an omnibus bill that will propose minor efficiency changes within the KDA to amusement rides, grain licensing, eggs, milk hauling limits, and repealing obsolete boards.

Dana Feldman, Executive Director, Office of Consumer and Environmental Protection, KDA, stated funding is needed for electric vehicle (EV) inspection and testing, which is becoming increasingly relevant as more charging stations are established in Kentucky. The funding is needed to ensure the safety and reliability of charging stations. Ms. Feldman emphasized the importance of preparing for national standards in EV infrastructure.

Commissioner Shell highlighted the KDA's Food is Medicine initiative, which focuses on improving health outcomes through better nutrition. Nearly 50 Kentucky hospitals have incorporated the initiative into its facilities. Morgan Bray, Program Coordinator, Food is Medicine, KDA, highlighted the importance of integrating food as medicine into managed care contracts. Ms. Bray also stated there are plans for a comprehensive package aimed at enhancing local sourcing of food for schools.

Heather Becker, General Counsel, KDA, discussed the barriers to sourcing local produce for school nutrition programs and the need for legislative support to facilitate procurement processes.

In response to Senator Deneen, Commissioner Shell stated the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement program still remains. However, funding has not been allocated in recent years.

In response to Representative Donworth, Commissioner Shell stated the KDA is collaborating with the Kentucky Department of Education to address additional staffing and resources to meet the demands of serving large numbers of students efficiently. Commissioner Shell stated the budget request for staff recruitment and retention will include raises for KDA employees.

In response to Representative Aull, Commissioner Shell challenged the notion that local food is inherently more expensive, explaining that federal funding often requires schools to purchase food at retail prices. He proposed developing a forward contracting process to stabilize prices for local farmers, allowing the farmers to plan better and compete with larger distributors.

Chair Howell highlighted Kentucky's transition of fruit and vegetable production from small-scale operations to more commercial endeavors. There needs to be clear communication and support for farmers to navigate this shift.

In response to Representative Pollock, Commissioner Shell outlined ongoing efforts to align state policies with federal initiatives to support the development of alternative fuels and emphasized the need for Kentucky to leverage its agricultural resources effectively.

In response to Representative Payne, Commissioner Shell stated the US Department of Agriculture defines local, in the context of sourcing food, as within 400 miles, but efforts are being made to refine this definition to better suit Kentucky. There are many school districts that want to participate in local food sourcing and KDA is working to provide best practices and support.

In response to Senator Boswell, Commissioner Shell stated there have been advancements in agricultural technology, emphasizing the high costs associated with new equipment and the need for ongoing innovation.

In response to Representative Stalker, Commissioner Shell outlined the geopolitical factors affecting American farmers and the need for fair trade agreements. He highlighted the importance of maintaining agricultural sovereignty while navigating complex international trade dynamics.

Senator Funke Frommeyer expressed gratitude towards Commissioner Shell's efforts, highlighted the work of the Make America Healthy Again Kentucky Task Force, and emphasized the critical role of nutrition in public health.

Kentucky Cattlemen's Association

Dave Maples, Executive Vice President, KCA, highlighted some of the challenges facing the beef industry and stated there is strong demand for beef products. KCA's priorities for the upcoming legislative session include supporting the next generation of producers, protecting land use and access, and rebuilding the cow herd to secure a stable beef supply.

Nikki Whitaker, Director of Operations and Policy, KCA, thanked legislators for the funding received to support the KCA's Livestock Innovation Center. She shared insights into the design process of the center and its role in educating diverse groups about agriculture.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.