

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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Ag Solutions Focus of Senate Committee

I belong to an agricultural working group from the state Senate that met earlier this summer to map out our priorities for the next legislative session. When lawmakers return to Jefferson City in January, one of the first major bills we are expected to discuss is an omnibus agriculture bill.

The committee is currently exploring ways to increase funding for agricultural programs and services. We are also looking into the need for more inspectors in the grain market. As you may know, two high-profile alleged grain fraud schemes have occurred in two areas of our state recently. At the request of the Missouri Department of Agriculture, the state auditor's office recently announced that it will review the state rules governing grain deals. The auditor's office has already determined the state agriculture department followed procedures and state law. The audit will include recommendations for policy changes that will help detect this type of fraud sooner and help farmers recover more of their financial losses.

Earlier this year, the General Assembly did consider legislation to address this issue ([HB 915](#)) that would have increased the minimum requirements for licensed grain dealers and created criminal penalties for unlicensed dealers, but the legislation did not pass. The hiring of more grain inspectors has been discussed as an option, but it may be difficult given our state's budget situation.

During the 2009 legislative session, I filed a similarly-related bill ([SB 143](#)) that would have required the Missouri Department of Agriculture to require licensed grain dealers to document the cost difference between a grain's cash price and its futures price for every sales transaction of grain. The documentation would have included an explanation of how the dealer determined the difference, with reports provided to the agriculture department at least once a month. I'm confident this proposed legislation will be revisited during the upcoming legislative session.

I also want to take this opportunity to call your attention to the recent formation by the governor of a Livestock & Farm Protection Task Force. The current economic downturn has

apparently resulted in a big increase in thefts on our farms and ranches. Since 2006, the Missouri Highway Patrol has investigated more than 1,346 leads and recovered more than \$2.1 million in stolen agriculture property. Thieves are stealing cattle, trucks and trailers to haul off stolen livestock, equipment, and farm chemicals. The task force will work with local law enforcement agencies to make sure they have the resources needed to pursue these crimes.

The General Assembly addressed this issue during the 2009 session in [House Bill 62](#), the omnibus crime bill. The legislation includes several provisions that increase the penalties for agricultural theft and also deals with livestock sales — allowing a law enforcement officer to inspect the records of any livestock sales or market licensee to determine the origin and destination of the livestock.

You may also have read news reports recently regarding CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations). The Missouri attorney general's office has reported it may review an appeal of a Cole County Circuit Judge's decision last year that prohibits the location of CAFOs near historic sites and state parks. The judge ruled a 4,800-head hog farm could not be located within two miles of the historic community of Arrow Rock, which is located in central Missouri. Ultimately, the farm was not built, but this is still an issue that threatens Missouri agriculture because it has allowed a Missouri court to decide how the state regulates large animal operations. This issue is also expected to be a high priority in the coming year.

Our Senate group will begin drafting an agriculture bill during the annual Veto Session coming up later this month in order to have a bill ready to pre-file in December. The first bills filed are usually the first to receive a hearing. I look forward to working on and keeping you updated on these important issues affecting our state's number one industry.

As always, if you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at 1-877-291-5584.

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