



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE OVERVIEW

Department Head

Ben Thomas, Director (Appointed by Governor; confirmed by the Senate)

Constitutionally Required

Article XII, section 1, requires legislature to provide for a Department of Agriculture to "protect, enhance, and develop all agriculture." The constitution also allows for special levies "for disease control and indemnification, predator control, and livestock and commodity inspection, protection, research, and promotion."

Duties/Responsibilities

Regulation/Licensing	Oversight and Assistance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regulates and licenses:<ul style="list-style-type: none">facilities that condition agricultural seed and assesses fees on certain sales;produce/commodity dealers and commodity warehouses, including use of bonds and claims against bonds;Regulates fertilizers and licenses distributors;Registers and regulates apiaries;Licenses, inspects, regulates:<ul style="list-style-type: none">commercial pesticide applicators and dealers;plant nurseries;commercial feed;pet foods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maintains a testing laboratory for certifying grade or protein of grains;Shares with the Department of Environmental Quality a duty to inspect and regulate hazardous waste pesticides and pesticide container recycling;Provides inspectors and graders for agricultural products;Oversees and provides management help to control pests and weeds;Collects and publishes statistics on ag products and allied interests' production/marketing;Assists and promotes the organization of farmers' institutes, societies, and the holding of fairs, livestock shows, or other ag exhibits;Helps devise and maintain distribution systems;May inspect produce under Montana Produce Act;May maintain a market news service and act as a clearinghouse for producers and consumers;Retains appraisers for losses insured by the Board of Hail Insurance.

Boards or other entities assigned to the Department of Agriculture

With appointments by Governor:

- Board of Hail Insurance, 2-15-3003 and Title 80, ch. 2, part 2, MCA
- Montana Agricultural Development Council, 2-15-3015 and Title 90, ch. 9, part 2, MCA
- Montana Alfalfa Seed Committee, 2-15-3004 and Title 80, ch. 6, part 11, and ch. 11, part 3, MCA
- Montana Wheat and Barley Committee, 2-15-3002 and Title 80, ch. 11, part 2, MCA



For February 2020

Department of Agriculture Overview Economic Affairs Interim Committee

Boards or Entities Attached to the Department With Department Appointments:

- Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council, 80-7-805, MCA
- Montana Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Advisory Council, 80-7-904, MCA
- Organic Commodity Advisory Council, 80-11-601, MCA
- Montana Potato Advisory Committee, 80-11-510, MCA
- Montana Pulse Crop Advisory Committee, 80-11-510, MCA
- Advisory Council on Special Pesticide Problems, 80-8-108, MCA (allows department to set up council, but it hasn't).

Legislative Audits

- Financial compliance audit, for biennium ending June 30, 2017, [17-21](#), had no recommendations and noted past compliance.

Hot Topics and Areas of Interest to Economic Affairs Interim Committee

- Co-located lab study, which involves the Department of Agriculture's Analytical Laboratory, located now on the Montana State University campus in Bozeman. The study was included in [HB 586](#) (2019).
- Concerns about farming and ranching bankruptcies, trade and tariff impacts, and weather or fire-related impacts to farms.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Divisions	FTE	2021 Biennial Budget			Proprietary*	Total: All Sources
		General Fund	State Special Revenue	Federal Special Revenue		
Central Services	18.1	\$606,906	\$2,734,987	\$198,182	\$236,408	\$3,776,483
Agricultural Sciences Division	60.42	\$318,400	\$16,378,794	\$2,735,721	0	\$19,432,915
Agricultural Development Division**	38.52	\$3,873,063	\$18,902,808	\$3,837,799	\$6,150,317	\$32,763,987
Growth Through Agriculture***		\$3,130,000	\$933,931	0	0	\$4,063,931
Wheat and Barley****		0	\$9,728,679	0	0	\$9,728,679
Grain Lab**		0	\$2,748,404	0	0	\$2,748,404

Notes: Chart reflects current budget authority, which includes House Bill 2, federal budget amendments, and statutory authority as of 1/24/2020.

***Proprietary funds** include the Hail Insurance Program.

****The Agriculture Development Division** includes Growth through Ag, Wheat and Barley, and the Grain Lab Budgets, but each are listed separately below for informational purposes.

*****Growth Through Agriculture** includes HB 2 appropriations and HB 52 funding under 15-35-108, MCA.

******Wheat and Barley:** includes grant authority for Wheat and Barley Committee (80-11-205, MCA).