



# CAPITOL *comments*

*The Voice of Agriculture®*

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Week 8

## **This Week at the Capitol**

The first major deadline of the session was reached this week. If a bill was not voted out of committee by Tuesday, the bill died. This deadline resulted in the “death” of approximately 84% of all bills introduced. The next step in the process is floor debate. Both chambers will consider bills from their respective committees, and have a deadline of Thursday, March 3, to pass legislation off the floor.

A joint House and Senate Transportation Committee Meeting was held to hear the Mississippi Economic Council’s (MEC) findings on an infrastructure study. Their study showed that the state needs an additional \$375 million annually for road and bridge repair. MEC offered detailed findings on where the money needs to be spent, but didn't offer any guidance on which taxes should be raised to achieve this outcome. They stated the Legislature should be the body making this important decision. Their plan calls for the Mississippi Department of Transportation to receive 80% of new revenue and the county/municipal local system will receive 10% each. Raising any taxes in this political climate will be a tough sell.

The House Committee on Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks passed a bill that would eliminate legal transport of live wild hogs in the state of Mississippi. Wild hogs wreak havoc on agricultural crops and pose a serious threat to this state. These animals are classified as nuisance animals, which virtually have no restrictions on the taking of these animals. Wild hogs are opportunistic omnivores that heavily compete with our native wildlife for food sources. Their diverse diet consists of baby mammals, grasses, acorns, and everything in-between. Outlawing transportation of live wild hogs is the first step in attempting to take control of these pests.

There were a few fireworks in the House starting Thursday afternoon. The Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus in the House released a statement vowing to slow down the legislative process. This past election cycle led to a House Republican supermajority, and Democrats feel they don't have a voice in the legislative process anymore. In order to slow down the process, they started by having a 293-page bill read, which took roughly six hours. The very next action taken by the House was amending the rules so debate would not be allowed. Currently, tempers are flaring at the Capitol, and nobody knows how things will play out over the next few days.

## **2016 MFBF *Legislative Priorities***

*Production Agriculture—Agriculture is the number 1 industry in Mississippi, contributing more than \$7.5 billion annually. We must protect the industry that supports our local economy.*

*Taxation—The taxes farmers pay should be used to aid the citizens of Mississippi, but taxation must not be allowed to increase to a point that economic development is hindered.*

*Transportation—Our transportation system is falling apart. There is a funding shortage that needs to be addressed to make sure roads and bridges are sufficient to support the agriculture industry.*

*Environment— In order to further conservation efforts in agriculture, attention should be focused toward economic approaches for land management.*

## Bills of Interest

**House Bill 282** Local System Bridge Replacement; increase appropriation to \$60 million.  
**Status:** Died in committee.

**House Bill 584** Transportation; transfer enforcement to Mississippi Highway Patrol.  
**Status:** Died in committee.

**House Bill 767** Trespassers; codify duty of care to licensee or trespasser.  
**Status:** Passed House; transferred to Senate.

**House Bill 1134** Weight tolerance; allow vehicles hauling feed to farm to use Harvest Permit.  
**Status:** Died in committee.

**House Bill 786** Create the Mississippi Church Protection Act.  
**Status:** Passed House, transferred to Senate.

**House Bill 1160** Wild hogs; remove permit allowing transport.  
**Status:** Placed on House Calendar.

**Senate Bill 2174** Dog and Cat abuse; revise penalties.  
**Status:** Died in Committee.

**Senate Bill 2209** Agricultural seeds, Department of Agriculture regulates.  
**Status:** Passed Senate; transferred to House.

**Senate Bill 2361** Establish the Mississippi Department of Agriculture, Commerce, and Natural Resources.  
**Status:** Placed on Senate Calendar.

## 2016 Legislative Calendar

**March 1** — Ag Day at the Capitol

**March 3**—Deadline for floor action on general bills

**March 17**— Women’s Day at the Capitol

Mississippi Farm Bureau® Federation

Post Office Box 1972  
Jackson, Mississippi 39215-1972



[www.msfb.org](http://www.msfb.org)

Justin Brooks  
Public Policy  
Coordinator  
[jbrooks@msfb.org](mailto:jbrooks@msfb.org)