

Rafe Larsen Named Sandhills Spelling Bee Champ

The Sandhills Spelling Bee was held Tuesday, February 4 in Halsey.

Rafe Larsen a sixth grader at Sandhills Public Schools was the Champion Speller. Another sixth grader, Hazen Clark, was the runner-up and seventh grader, Holt Jensen was the third place winner.

Complete results of the spelling bee are:

Class winners were:

Second Grade - 1. Hayes Zutavern; 2. Annalee Rooney; 3. Tully Thompson

Third Grade - 1. Piper Sikes; 2. Bodell Larsen; 3. Hattie Stithem

Fourth Grade - 1. William Smith; 2. Jakob Payne; 3. Shaelynn Bray

Fifth Grade - 1. Piper Hanson; 2. McKenna Clark; 3. Georgianna Rooney

Sixth Grade - 1. Rafe Larsen; 2. Hazen Clark; 3. Charlie Smith

Seventh Grade - 1. Harper Zutavern; 2. Holt Jensen

Eighth Grade - 1. Hunter Bray; 2. Cesar Chavez; 3. Sophia Glidden

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COURTESY

The top three spellers at Sandhills Public Schools are, l-r: Rafe Larsen, Hazen Clark and Holt Jensen.

Arganbright Appointed To Game & Parks

On Friday, February 7, Governor Jim Pillen announced his appointment of Kurt Arganbright of Valentine to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Arganbright will serve as the representative for District 6. His appointment is subject to confirmation by the Nebraska Legislature.

Arganbright has been in private practice at Arganbright Law Office in Valentine since 2010 with expertise in agricultural law, real estate, estate planning and business planning. He also serves as county attorney for

both Rock and Thomas counties. Additionally, his family owns and operates a cow-calf operation.

Arganbright has served multiple entities in leadership roles including the Sandhills Cattle Association, Valentine Planning Commission, Agriculture Builders of Nebraska and the Nebraska State Bar Association.

Arganbright has a degree in agricultural economics from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln (UNL). He received his juris doctor from the University of Nebraska College of Law.

Returning To The Farm 2025: A Workshop Series

The Center for Agricultural Profitability at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will present Returning to the Farm 2025, a workshop series for families who are in the transition process of bringing members back to the farm or ranch. It will begin with a two-day workshop in for multi-generational families on March 7 and 8, at Central Community College in

Hastings, 550 S. Technical Blvd. The series also includes two follow-up workshops, to be held virtually after the in-person meetings.

The workshop will assist families and agricultural operations with developing financial plans and successful working arrangements to meet their unique needs. It will

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Where’s the beef? Not all Nebraska producers on board with Pillen’s proposed ‘lab-grown meat’ ban

By Sara Gentzler
Flatwater Press

From the respite of his Callaway office, after a cold January day spent working cattle, Jim Jenkins wrangled with a question: Do you think much about meat products cultivated from cells?

“No, I don’t,” he answered. “Maybe I should.”

After researching, he made up his mind: He’d be very surprised if “lab meat” could compete on quality or price with Nebraska beef – like what comes from the Angus he raises – in the near future.

Just days earlier, Gov. Jim Pillen made it clear he did not want to wait to find out. Nebraska, he said, needed to “get on the offense.”

The governor, who founded one of the largest hog enterprises in the country, said the state needed to protect its farmers and ranchers, a critical piece of Nebraska’s economy and identity.

“Most of us want government out of our hair, but there’s places where government needs to step in and protect us,” Pillen said at a mid-January press conference announcing a bill to ban the production and sale of “cultivated-protein food products.”

It’s unclear if a ban, which Pillen named a priority for the current legislative session, has enough support to become law. The senator behind the bill, Niobrara farmer and rancher Sen. Barry DeKay, said he expects a fierce debate.

Some ag groups aren’t currently on board. The Nebraska Farm Bureau and Nebraska Cattlemen support clear labeling, but not a ban. The governor’s office declined to provide the names of any organizations supporting the effort when asked by a Flatwater Free Press reporter.

Jenkins also favors labeling requirements that make the difference clear to consumers, but op-

poses a ban.

“In the good old United States of America, I think people should be able to compete, even if that threatens my business,” he said.

If it does pass, Nebraska could face legal questions. Florida, which passed a ban last year, is fighting off a lawsuit claiming the law is unconstitutional. Alabama also passed a ban last year.

“States are trying to ban an industry that is actually going to create tremendous jobs and opportunities for them,” said David Kaplan, director of the Tufts University Center for Cellular Agriculture. “And they’re banning it even before there’s an industry – or the industry is just barely getting off the ground.”

Meat, grown in a bioreactor

Opponents like Pillen call it “lab-grown” and “bioreactor meat.”

Others call it “cultivated” or “cell-based” or “cultured” – and the industry notes that commercial production will happen in food production facilities, not laboratories.

Likewise, some don’t agree that protein products grown from cells should be called “meat” at all. Mark McHargue, president of the Nebraska Farm Bureau, said in a statement that they “should not be classified as meat.”

But unlike the plant-based imitations some fast-food chains have added to their menus, these products do originate from animals, though animals aren’t slaughtered in the process.

Instead, scientists take cells from an egg or live animal like a chicken or cow. They put select cells into a bioreactor with liquid – imagine a metal fermenter like you might see in a brewery – and add nutrients like amino acids, vitamins and salt that mimic the environment in an animal’s body, according to researchers and companies making the products.



Gov. Jim Pillen has made banning “lab-grown meat” a priority during the current legislative session, saying it’s necessary to protect Nebraska’s farmers and livestock producers. But some don’t see the meat products, made from cultivated cells, as a threat to their business in the near future. And they oppose the government banning a product, even if that product competes for their customers. *Photo by Lori Potter for the Flatwater Free Press*

The cells multiply and eventually form a substance that can be “harvested” and shaped into something familiar like a ground meat or filet.

It’s like cooking – you’re combining different ingredients to reach the right texture and flavor, said Kaplan, the engineer at Tufts. Except this process must happen in a very controlled environment, he said, to ensure it’s high-quality and safe.

Few American families will likely consume it in 2025.

To date, only two cultivated meat products – both poultry – have made it through the U.S. approval process. Neither of those are intended for full-scale commercial release, said Suzi Gerber, executive director of industry lobbying group the Association for Meat, Poultry and Seafood Innovation. They were intended to generate excitement, to show what is possible.

“Cell-cultured” meat products are subject to the same federal regulations and oversight as

products made from slaughtering animals, according to a 2023 federal directive. The U.S. Department of Agriculture must approve product labels to ensure they’re not misbranded.

Gerber and others in the industry tout cultivated meat as part of a solution to climate change and a tool to address food insecurity for a growing global population.

“We do not envision a world where meat production ends,” Gerber said. “We envision a world where you can choose. We see cultivated meat as a complement to existing food systems.”

Some meat heavyweights seem to agree, or are at least hedging their bets. In recent years, major corporations like Cargill and Tyson have invested in it. According to the Good Food Institute, cell-cultured meat and seafood companies had raised \$3.1 billion as of 2023, though fundraising drastically slowed that year.

In the last decade, technology has advanced and

the cost of production has gone down, Kaplan said, and that will continue. He also sees future opportunities for agriculture in the new industry, in part by supplying raw materials to feed the bioreactors.

The biggest challenge, he said, is the scale-up.

“Right now there’s just not the infrastructure to have this field grow, to start to produce enough food to be in supermarkets for people to really purchase and then cook and try,” he said. “Until that infrastructure comes along, it’s going to be very slow, steady development.”

Washington Post food reporter and Omaha native Tim Carman agrees with that forecast. He finds the field compelling and fascinating. But after reporting on it, the 63-year-old doesn’t think he will see widespread availability in his lifetime.

“On the horizon I see nothing that’s going to compete with commodity beef from Nebraska or Iowa,” he said.

Nebraska eyes a ban

Pillen first took action last August, signing an executive order demanding that state agencies not procure lab-grown meat and that state contractors attest they won’t “dis- criminate” against traditional meat producers in favor of “laboratory or cultivated-meat producers.”

This session, senators have introduced at least two bills related to these products: a total ban and labeling requirements.

Iowa passed a similar labeling law last year, in part requiring any lab-grown or plant-based meat product that uses a word like “meat” or “burger” to also include a word like “cell-cultivated,” “lab-grown” or “veggie.”

If passed, Nebraska’s ban would add cell-cultured meat products to the state’s definition of an “adulterated food product,” putting it among food that’s unsafe or made from a diseased

Beef
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