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ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S REPORT ON RULES TO BE ADOPTED PURSUANT TO 2023 ACTS OF THE ARKANSAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture submits this rule promulgation status report in compliance with A.C.A. 25-15-216. Of the 2023 Acts requiring rules from the Department, seven rules are in the process of being finalized. The Department determined that rules are not necessary for Act 588, Act 594, and Act 691. The Department's request to have those excluded from the reporting requirement of A.C.A. 25-15-216 was approved by the Arkansas Legislative Council on January 26, 2024. Additional information on the seven remaining rules is included below.

Act 161

Act 161 provides for the Veterinary Medical Examining Board (VMEB) to issue additional certifications for Veterinary Technician Specialists (VTS) who may enter into a collaborative practice agreement with a veterinarian. However, Act 691 abolished the VMEB and transferred its authority and rules to the Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission. Act 161 requires VTSs to keep records "in accordance with the rules of the board" and further provides for the establishment of initial and renewal application fees "as determined by the board." Draft rules establishing the initial application process, record-keeping requirements, and continuing education requirements are in the review process.

Act 545

Act 545 amends provisions of a law passed in 2021 regarding rate studies required by retail water providers and funds dedicated to replacement and refurbishment of water system as well as training required by members for retail water provider boards. Amendments to the current Arkansas Natural Resources Commission rule will be required to conform the rule to the provisions of Act 545. The draft rule was reviewed by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission on November 15, 2023. The public comment period was open from December 10, 2023 through January 8, 2024, and the Department held a public hearing on January 4, 2024. No comments were received. The Natural Resources Commission approved the rule on January 17, 2024. The draft rule has been forwarded to the Bureau of Legislative Research for placement on the ALC – Administrative Rules Committee agenda.

Act 598

The Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission (Commission) is vested with authority to enforce the provisions of the Arkansas Egg Marketing Act and promulgate rules as may be necessary. Ark. Code Ann. § 20-58-214. Act 598 amends the Egg Marketing Act by adding a provision regarding the direct delivery of eggs to consumers to address food safety in home grocery delivery which will allow delivery of eggs as long as they are maintained at a temperature of 45 degrees or less. Most provisions of Act 598 are self-implementing and require no rulemaking. However, an amendment to Commission rules implementing the Egg Marketing Act regarding the method of maintaining the temperature of eggs during direct delivery to consumers will be necessary. A draft rule is in the review process.

Act 600

Act 600 transfers responsibilities for registration of poultry feeding operations from the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission to the Department. The Act repeals a subsection of the law which provided that portions of the registration program may be delegated to conservation districts and repeals a subsection providing that conservation districts may retain a portion of the annual registration fee. Rulemaking will be required to remove conservation district responsibilities from the rule and to establish the fee. A draft rule is in the review process.

Act 690

Act 690 returns control of conservation district board member elections from the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) to the local districts. The election procedure outlined in the Act comes directly from an ANRC rule that has been in place for several years. While the Act does not explicitly require the promulgation of rules, the provisions in the existing ANRC rule will need to be amended to conform to changes in the Act. A draft rule is in the review process.

Act 695

Act 695 defines “prescribed burning” as “the planned and controlled application of fire to vegetative fuels under specified weather, environmental, and other conditions while following appropriate precautionary measures that will 1) confine the fire to a predetermined area, and 2) accomplish the intended management objectives of the area to be burned.” The Act provides that a “qualified prescribed burner” is a person who has completed training approved by the Department of Agriculture or the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. The Act further states that the Department shall promulgate rules on the requirements for becoming a prescribed burner. A draft rule has been developed and the public notice was published from October 29-31, 2023. The public comment period was open through November 29, 2023, and the Department received six written comments. No verbal comments were received at the public hearing held on November 29, 2023. After reviewing the comments, the Department made non-substantive changes to the proposed rule for clarification purposes and submitted the revised proposed rule to the Bureau of Legislative Research on January 19, 2024 for placement on the ALC- Administrative Rules Committee agenda.

Act 824

Act 824 provides that the Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Division of Environmental Quality, has authority over all liquid animal waste management systems in the state, including issuance of permits for those systems. The Act requires the Department to adopt rules but provides that the Department shall use the current Pollution Control and Ecology Commission Regulation No. 5 until the Department promulgates rules. A draft rule is being finalized.

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