

**GRAIN INSPECTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY OF MEETING
January 21-22, 2026
AMS National Grain Center, Kansas City, MO**

Minutes approved via email by R. Hart 04/29/26

DAY 1 - Wednesday, January 21, 2026

Committee Members Present:

Kia Adams-Mikesh, Chair, Owner/Vice President North Dakota Grain Inspection Service, Inc.
Tracy Logan, Director of Export Documentation, United Grain Corporation
Dr. Carlos Campabadal, Instructor, Kansas State University
Christopher Frederking, General Manager, Zen-Noh Grain Corporation
Barbara Grove, Quality Systems Manager, Central Valley Ag
Rashad Hart, General Superintendent of Plant Operations, Cargill
Mark Heil, General Manager, Prairie Central Cooperative, Inc.
Dr. Gang Guo, Senior Director of Grain Research and Quality, Ardent Mills, LLC
Lyndsey Erb, Director of Industry Affairs, U.S. Soybean Export Council
Erin Casey-Campbell, Program Manager, Missouri Department of Agriculture
Shayleen Rambur, Vice President, JD Heiskell & Company
Charles Bird, Senior Director of Product Management, Neogen Corporation
Dr. Charles Hurburgh, Professor, Iowa State University
Erica Olson, Market Development & Research Manager, North Dakota Wheat Commission
Tristan Bradford, Director, State Grain Laboratory, Montana Department of Agriculture

U.S. Department of Agriculture employees present:

Dr. Melissa Bailey, Associate Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service
Jennifer Porter, Acting Deputy Administrator, Federal Grain Inspection Service
Andrew Ping, Associate Deputy Administrator, Federal Grain Inspection Service
Charles Parr, Director, Field Management Division
Robert Dorman, Grain Marketing Specialist, Policies, Procedures and Market Analysis Branch
Jacob Thein, Branch Chief, Policies, Procedures, Marketing and Analysis Branch
Eric Jabs, Acting Director, Technology & Science Division
Jeffrey Vanfossan, Chief, Instrument Instrumentation Branch, Technology & Science Division
Kendra Kline, Deputy Director, Quality Assurance and Compliance Division
Darrell Hughes, Chief of Staff, Office of the Deputy Administrator
Carlos Lopez, Budget Analyst, Office of the Deputy Administrator
Anthony Goodeman, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Deputy Administrator
Adam Sparger, Director, Transportation Economics Division, AMS Transportation and Marketing Program
Dr. Derek Vote, International Agricultural Marketing Specialist, AMS Livestock and Poultry Program

CALL TO ORDER & OPENING REMARKS

Kia Adams-Mikesh, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. CST, welcomed attendees, and reiterated the Committee's advisory role to AMS on programs and services delivered under the U.S. Grain Standards Act (USGSA). The Chair outlined the meeting's focus: technology and innovation in grain grading, handbook and directive updates, export volume and staffing considerations, fee structure and billing, international activities, and the status of USGSA reauthorization. **Anthony Goodeman** confirmed fifteen members were in attendance (twelve in person and three via remote access), establishing a quorum.

AMS AGENCY UPDATE

Dr. Melissa Bailey, AMS Associate Administrator, highlighted a recent trip to New Orleans to witness operations firsthand, and thanked committee members and FGIS employees who facilitated the trip. Dr. Bailey noted that despite broader workforce reductions in AMS due to deferred resignations (~500 staff; ~18% of the non-seasonal AMS workforce), AMS is prioritizing hiring and onboarding graders and other front-line staff. Dr. Bailey reported that AMS received full FY26 appropriations with reductions: the AMS Marketing Services line decreased by 6.7% (\$13 million) and the grain regulatory line by 15% (\$2.5 million), and sought feedback from stakeholders how to best adjust to those reductions. AMS has set 2026 strategic goals emphasizing innovation and customer service, with an overarching USDA reorganization targeted for completion by the end of the fiscal year. Dr. Bailey noted Jennifer Porter continues to serve as Acting Deputy Administrator for FGIS and that the Agency intends to fill the position permanently in the future. Dr. Bailey closed by charging the committee to provide input on overarching industry trends that impact USGSA activities.

FGIS PROGRAM UPDATES

Jennifer Porter, Deputy Administrator, highlighted the significant progress FGIS has made over the past year, emphasizing both improved financial stability and the dedicated staff behind these accomplishments. Ms. Porter recognized employees who took on difficult tasks—such as reassessing long-standing programs, reallocating resources, supporting compliance reforms, and modernizing data efforts—often requiring tough decisions like shifting work, relocating staff, or discontinuing outdated activities. Ms. Porter commended the quiet, committed work of FGIS employees, several of whom stepped into new roles, embraced flexibility, and ensured mission-critical functions continued despite agency-wide staffing losses.

Charles Parr, Director, Field Management Division (FMD), presented an FY25 Year in Review. FGIS oversaw 146.3 million metric tons of grain exports, with 80.4 million metric tons directly inspected by FGIS (a 21% year-over-year increase). The New Orleans Field Office handled ~68 million metric tons, with ~38,000 vessel loading inspections and ~37,000 barges weighed; licensing exams for official agencies increased by 48% (181 in 2025), with in-person testing at the National Grain Center more than doubling. Mr. Parr outlined staffing steps: onboarding supervisors and graders, using compressed schedules, deploying QA specialists as a rapid-response capability, and drafting a comprehensive contingency plan to maintain uninterrupted services during emergencies or disruptions. Mr. Parr requested the Committee provide high-level recommendations related to

operational improvements under consideration, such as simplifying the fee schedule (tiered options), planning staged deployment of new instruments, and enhancing MyFGIS online service requests.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION - TRANSPORTATION ECONOMICS (AMS)

Adam Sparger, Director, Transportation Economics Division, briefed the Committee on weekly market reporting, modal share analysis (barge critical to export movements), and introduced the **2026 Inland Waterways** report and the **Ag Transport Open Data** platform (interactive dashboards, investment/disruption scenarios).

FGIS DATA REVIEW

Rob Dorman, Policies, Procedures & Market Analysis Branch, reported that FY25 exports ranked **second all-time**. Corn set a market-year record with Mexico as the top destination; soybeans saw reduced Chinese buying while Egypt increased purchases; sorghum shipments to China declined with Spain's demand rising; wheat finished up 13% YoY, with Mexico and South Korea achieving all-time highs. Weekly raw export data (carrier/type/quality) are published for external and internal use, and available publicly on the FGIS website. Mr. Dorman said FGIS is receptive to feedback from the Committee and public as to whether additional data or dashboards would be helpful.

HANDBOOKS, DIRECTIVES & NOTICES

Jacob Thein, Chief, Policies/Procedures/Market Analysis Branch, provided updates on Rice, Grain Grading, Equipment, Weighing, Mycotoxin, Licensing, Non-Standardized Grain, and Container Inspection Handbooks; directives on processed commodities, National Mycotoxin QA program, scale testing, and optional certificate statements. Mr. Thein confirmed discontinuation of the Master Scale Program and transition of track-scale testing to private/state providers with FGIS oversight, significantly reducing time and travel costs.

GRAIN INSPECTION INNOVATION (TSD)

Eric Jabs, Acting Director, Technology & Science Division (TSD), provided an overview of grain inspection innovation initiatives within FGIS, beginning with appreciation for the TSD team's work during periods of staffing transition. He invited attendees to view FGIS's grading technology later in the day and then outlined the agency's ongoing work with Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs) and the Inspection Technology Evaluation (ITE) process. Mr. Jabs reported on progress with two CRADAs—one with Videometer for corn damage detection and one with Cgrain for wheat damage—describing model-development steps, kernel collection volumes, validation phases, and expected timelines. Mr. Jabs also addressed questions about future market competition, clarifying that any new technologies would enter through the ITE validation pathway.

Mr. Jabs summarized the ITE process, noting that it was formalized in 2022 and is used to validate technologies ready for deployment by reviewing submitted data, testing instruments in-house, and determining equivalence to FGIS standards such as the Board of Appeals and Review. He also highlighted new BAR training videos designed to support inspector development. Mr. Jabs concluded by outlining next steps, including continued proof-of-concept testing, potential field

testing later in the year, and ongoing opportunities for manufacturers and partners to engage through ITE and other research avenues.

CROSS-PROGRAM INSIGHT - INSTRUMENT GRADING IN BEEF

Dr. Derek Vote, International Marketing Specialist, AMS Livestock & Poultry Program, reviewed the long trajectory of instrument-based beef grading and emphasized several major lessons learned from decades of research, industry adoption, and system refinement. He noted that successful implementation required patience, collaboration, and a clear understanding of the limitations of both human and machine grading. A key lesson was the importance of quantifying variability in human graders before expecting precision from instruments; without this baseline, early approval standards were unrealistic and sometimes misaligned with field conditions. He also highlighted that technology evolves faster than approval frameworks, and agencies must continually revisit their processes to ensure they are transparent, predictable, and attractive to new technology providers. Industry experience showed that piloting in controlled settings could not fully prepare the system for real-world variability, reinforcing the value of iterative rollout, conditional approvals, and robust data-sharing practices.

A second major lesson involved recognizing the operational and cultural impacts of automation. Dr. Vote explained that early adopters benefited from granular, objective data long before formal approval, demonstrating that value can accrue even during transition phases. He emphasized that predictable validation steps, strong safeguards against data manipulation, and clear retention policies were essential for trust across the supply chain. Additionally, as technologies matured, bottlenecks emerged around staffing, expert-panel data collection, and small market size, requiring creative approaches such as remote grading, hybrid models, and expanded partnerships. Finally, he underscored that industry readiness to accept reasonable variability - paired with mechanisms to monitor overrides, trace anomalies, and recalibrate over time - was crucial. Dr. Vote underscored that technological change in grading systems is a long-term, collaborative process that must balance innovation with practicality, transparency, and continuous improvement.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES & USGSA REAUTHORIZATION

Anthony Goodeman, Senior Policy Advisor: Provided an overview of exporter registrations to China, prior suspensions and reinstatements, and a surge in shipments since December 1; described consent procedures for cooperator sample surveys and rising requests for ochratoxin A testing aligned with Codex (and other country-specific limits). Mr. Goodeman noted that exporters or commodity groups can request FGIS presentations domestically or internationally if needed, and to contact him or Mr. Ping for more information. Lastly, Mr. Goodeman summarized progress on USGSA reauthorization proposals, which include user fee reserve investment authority, technology spending flexibility, advisory committee continuity, and technology reporting language.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

Export Volume & Staffing: The Committee discussed near-term supervisory coverage (including detailing), terminal-specific engagement, and mid-term hiring/training needs.

Fee Structure & Billing: The Committee expressed support for exploring a simplified tiered fee structure and improved invoice transparency; reserve target clarity.

Grain Grading Technology: The Committee placed emphasis on planning for policy/procedure impacts (certificate statements, training standards, tolerances) in parallel with technical validation.

Adjournment (Day 1): The Committee recessed at 4:59 p.m. CST.

DAY 2 - Thursday, January 22, 2026: Chair Adams-Mikesh resumed the meeting at 8:30 a.m. CST.

ENSURING FISCAL STABILITY

Carlos Lopez, Budget Analyst, with Darrell Hughes, Chief of Staff, presented current account balances and fee/rate analysis methods. The primary grain inspection and weighing account (G2) account ended FY25 with 2.6 months of operating reserve and increased to 3.8 months as of December 31, 2025. Based on revenue projections and improved collections (ACH/Pay.gov vs. paper checks), the account is trending toward ~6 months by FY26 year-end. AMS explained shutdown analysis (agency-wide), emphasized conservative spending, and noted planned IT/billing investments that will reduce reserves from upper levels. Leadership indicated that near-term fee increases are unlikely at current levels, though that is subject to change with the variable volume in the grain industry.

OPTIMIZING TECHNOLOGY OPERATIONS

Eric Jabs, Acting Director, TSD, continued with an operational update of TSD. Mr. Jabs noted a reduction in TSD staffing (from 59 in 2024 to 36 in 2026) and appropriated funding at ~\$7.4 million for FY26, alongside program streamlining and cross-utilization. Mr. Jabs announced expanding ochratoxin A sensitivity (toward ~2–10 ppb) to ensure testing capabilities at the levels customers were requesting, and aligning field grinding requirements, consistent with test-kit evaluation. Mr. Jabs spoke to plans to move falling number/mycotoxin monitoring to the FGISonline application QAC to improve selection functionality; 2026 directive calendar includes moisture calibrations, sample collection, pesticide residues, and potential NIRT updates.

ENSURING QUALITY

Kendra Kline, Acting Director, Quality Assurance & Compliance Division (QACD), summarized audit trends (equipment/light maintenance and testing, recordkeeping, moisture logbooks, grading accuracy/training). Ms. Kline previewed upcoming audits and streamlined designation notices (two opportunity and two award cycles per year).

POLICY & INSTRUCTION PROCESS

Jacob Thein, Chief, PPMAB, in response to a question from the Committee, Mr. Thein reviewed directive formatting/approvals, SME working groups, and consolidation examples (generalized ragweed inspection directive applicable to any grain with count or percent outputs). Mr. Thein explained that potential Rice Handbook updates may require standards changes via Federal Register notices and potential rulemaking.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No registered public comments; clarifications requested on grinder implementation timelines and calibration/testing frequencies under updated grinding standards; TSD indicated forthcoming handbook guidance and communications.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS (ADOPTED)

Recommendation on Grain Grading Technology: “The Grain Inspection Advisory Committee (GIAC) recognizes the continued advancement of grain grading technology and provides the following recommendations to the Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) to support the transparent, deliberate, and effective consideration of visual grain grading systems within the official inspection framework.

1. Acknowledgment of Progress

The Committee acknowledges the progress made by FGIS in evaluating and advancing visual grain grading technologies, including efforts to address research and development limitations. The Committee appreciates the work completed to date and encourages continued advancement in a manner that maintains program integrity and stakeholder confidence.

2. Identification of Key Policy and Procedural Considerations

The Committee recommends that FGIS identify and compile a key policy, regulatory, and procedural considerations that may require consideration as visual grain grading technologies move toward implementation. The Committee further recommends identifying approximately ten such areas for structured discussion with the Advisory Committee and industry stakeholders. Early identification and discussion will support transparency, clarify potential impacts, and allow for informed stakeholder input prior to formal decision-making.

3. Continued Engagement with Stakeholder Task Groups

The Committee recommends that FGIS continue engaging with stakeholder task groups including but not limited to, country elevators, producer groups, commodity groups and similar forums to identify and address potential bottlenecks associated with the implementation of visual grain grading technologies.” **Adopted by voice vote with no opposition.**

Export Volume: No formal recommendation; maintain as standing topic for updates on supervisory coverage, terminal-specific needs, and workforce planning. **Accepted.**

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Officer Elections: **Rashad Hart** (Chair), **Barbara Grove** (Vice Chair), **Erin Casey-Campbell** (Secretary) to one-year terms, approved by voice vote.

Charter & Quorum Updates: Mr. Goodman noted that the charter update was approved in July 2025; the Committee quorum is now a simple majority (eight).

Next Meetings: The Committee and FGIS discussed a potential late-spring virtual update (post-appointments) and early-fall in-person meeting.

Adjournment (Day 2): 10:57 a.m. CST.