

Idaho Farm Bureau. Quarterly

Fall Issue • Volume 23 Issue 4

There are currently
9.8 million open
jobs in the U.S., and
only **5.9 million**
unemployed workers



Help
WANTED



The battle for U.S. seasonal produce

There is a quiet battle being waged to ensure the high quality food and fuel being produced by U.S. farmers and ranchers reaches eager consumers around the world.

From non-scientific trade barriers to market prices and even constantly changing trade agreements, it seems new challenges are always arising. That is why trade has long been a top priority for Farm Bureau.

Farmers and ranchers feel these struggles directly and we want to ensure they have those

tools of strong trade agreements and fair markets to win the battle.

We put special focus on this cause through our Trade Advisory Committee, made up of state Farm Bureau presidents who are tasked with researching trade challenges and opportunities and establishing recommendations.

Last week, I was joined by several TAC members in Traverse City, Mich., to meet directly with produce growers and industry leaders around the issues facing seasonal produce.

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By **Bryan Searle**
President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Farming is not for the faint of heart

Summer has come and gone. Many things were enjoyed by agricultural producers this growing season and many challenges were faced.

As farmers and ranchers, you just begin to sense the season beginning to change.

This means time for the harvest or bringing the cows out of the mountains. The roundups begin, along with the harvest. This brings an urgency to get the crops harvested.

Fall's the time of year that farmers and ranchers see how well the cattle have done on grass all

summer or how the crop turned out. It's also the time of year when the weather changes, which can interfere with the harvest.

Though we need water, rainfall also delays a harvest and makes you wonder when the first frost or even hard frost that can cause damage to the crops will occur. Many uncontrollable events can take place during the autumn season that can cause damage to the crops that farmers have worked so hard on all year.

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By **Zak Miller**
CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



It's just not that easy

For thousands of years, the fundamental principles of agriculture have remained the same. Plant a seed, nurture it, and harvest the crop for consumption or replanting. Care for an animal to receive a product.

Essentially, modern farmers still do what their ancient counterparts did.

In our modern world of "change agents," "disruptors," and "Innovators," to name a few, why haven't we "hacked" the system and found a better way to produce food and fiber?

Because I asked the question, I'll complete the

loop with my answer, and it's twofold.

1. It's biology, baby! Living organisms follow strict rules, and while humans continue to make tremendous improvements by "breaking the rules" in business and tech, when it comes to biology, Mother Nature doesn't bend. If you break nature's rules, you lose.
2. It's truly fascinating what humans are capable of achieving, isn't it? Agriculture has come a long way from prehistoric times to the present day. Let's take a closer look at one

See **MILLER**, page 6

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MAGAZINE CONTACTS:

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
 EDITOR (208) 239-4292 • ADS (208) 239-4279
 E-MAIL: seanellis@idahofb.org
 ADS: advertising@idahofb.org
 web: www.idahofb.org



Idaho State Department of Agriculture photo

See page 26 for a story on Idaho's battle to fight quagga mussels.

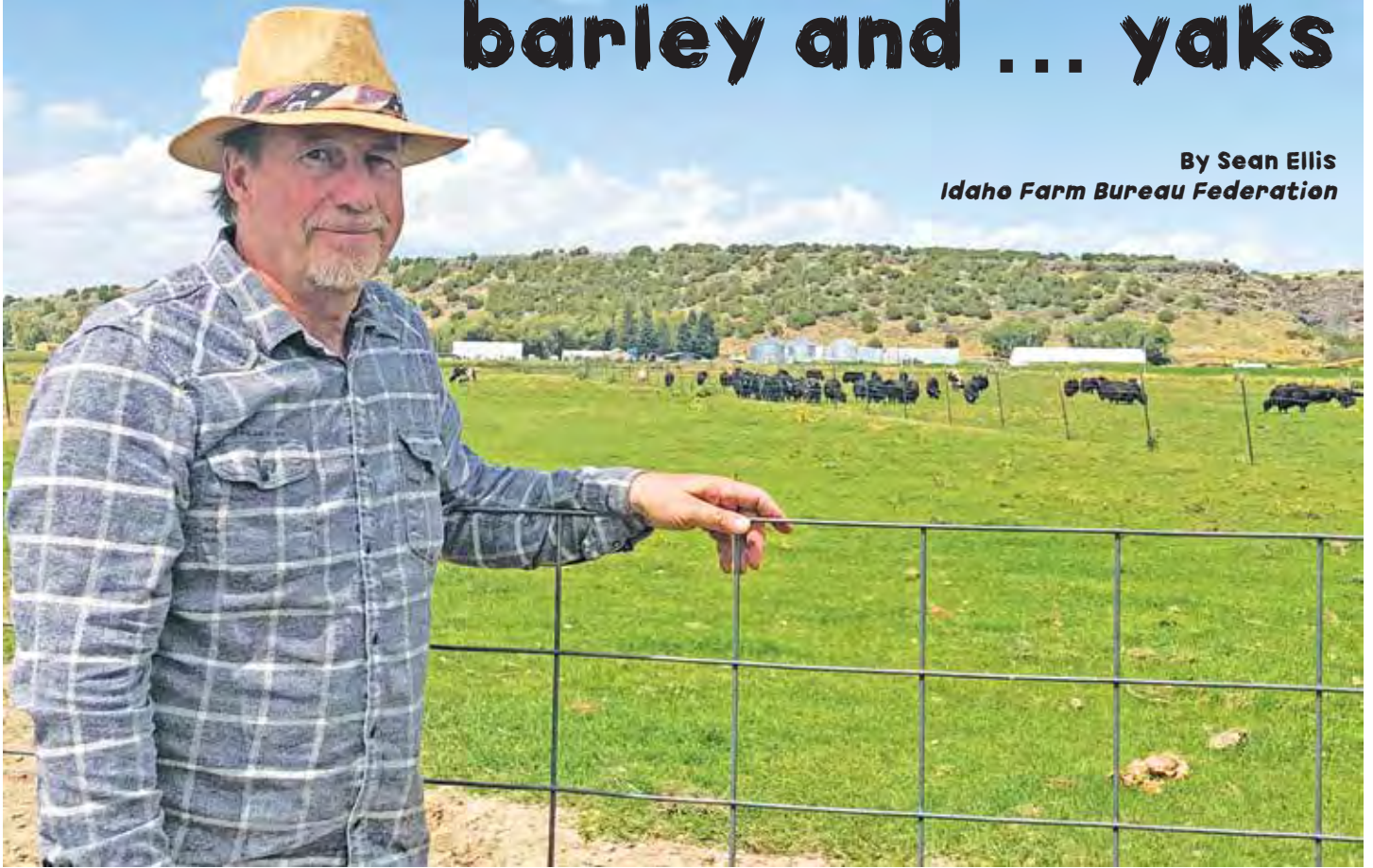
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COVER: See page 16 for a story on the very tight labor supply in Idaho and the nation. (Illustration by Joel Benson)

Farming potatoes, barley and ... yaks

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Photos by Sean Ellis

Kent Sutton stands near his yak herd in Archer, Idaho.

ARCHER – Yaks have gone from being a hobby to a profitable business for East Idaho farmer Kent Sutton.

“It’s kind of exploded into a large hobby for me instead of a small hobby,” said Sutton, a potato and barley farmer from Archer, which is located south of Rexburg. “It’s been a really fun thing and it’s working out.”

Yaks, which are native to the high altitudes of the Himalayan region, are famous for their long, dense, shaggy hair and handle-bar horns.

Sutton bought five yaks from northern Idaho about 15 years ago after his family decided to start raising some of their own food. This started with a few pigs, chickens for eggs and although his wife initially wanted to get a cow, Sutton settled on yaks instead.

“I started looking around a little bit, doing some studying, and I learned a little bit more about yaks,” he said. “I thought, I’d like to get some yaks. They do everything a cow can do, plus a little bit more.”

The animals are well suited for high altitudes and harsh weather but apparently can also do well in Idaho.

Sutton said because yaks are hardy, strong animals, they are known as beasts of burden in Tibet, China and other areas in Central Asia where they thrive.

“Where they’re from, they are used as a beast of burden, for transportation,” he said. “The people there use the yaks to get from place to place. You load them up just like you would a station wagon.”

Yaks can be raised for their meat, wool and milk, although the Sutton yak business centers around the animals’ meat.

“The meat’s incredible,” Sutton said. “If you compare it to anything, it would be similar to a bison. The fat is outside the carcass, not marbled inside the meat, so it’s extremely lean, and it’s good for you.”

The female yaks on the Sutton farm will reach about 700 pounds and males weigh up to 1,500 pounds.

Sutton grows his own hay to feed the animals and says they eat about a third of what a beef cow eats.

“They’re not really picky eaters. They seem to do good on just about everything,” he said.

“Idaho agriculture is very diverse and innovative and the Sutton yak operation is a great example of that.”

- Cam Hammond, IFBF regional field manager

Sutton said yaks have a lot of spunk – “If they get scared or nervous, their instinct is to fight rather than flee” – and can run about 40 mph.

“They’re very athletic and can jump over anything,” he said. “So we keep them in the fence on the honor system. As long as they’re happy and calm and have plenty to eat, they stay in. There’s no reason for them to go anywhere.”

Sutton said the animals do prefer the cold weather – “The first snowstorm of the year, they run around like kindergarteners during break; they just love it” – but he makes sure they always have access to

shade and cold, fresh water during the summer months.

“I do all I can to provide them with a comfortable, enjoyable life,” he said while watching his herd graze and wade in water. “You can tell they’re happy.”

“More than 185 agricultural commodities are raised in Idaho and Sutton’s yaks are a good example of the creativity that is prevalent among Idaho producers,” said Cam Hammond, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s regional field manager for East Idaho.

“Idaho agriculture is very diverse and innovative and the Sutton yak operation is a great example of that,” he said.

The yak meat is sold via Sutton’s small direct marketing business, which covers about a 30-mile radius.

“We mostly sell locally,” he said. “We deliver or people stop by our potato warehouse and pick it up.”

A restaurant in Rexburg serves “Tibetan burgers” that are actually yak meat from the Sutton operation.

“We don’t have any problem marketing the meat. It’s been very popular,” said Sutton, who said the meat is priced similar to beef.

The Suttons have farmed potatoes and barley in this area since the early 1980s, and now yaks have made a nice, and fun, addition to the farm’s portfolio.

“They’re really fun, intriguing animals,” Sutton said. “They have a lot of personality and each one has its own unique personality. It’s been fun and now it’s actually turned into a profitable business.”

For more information about the Sutton yak farm online, search for, “Sutton yaks.” ■



The Sutton farm, which has grown potatoes and barley in East Idaho since the early 1980s, added yaks about 15 years ago.

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

It was really impactful to visit their farms, hear their stories and discuss changes they think need to be made.

Our seasonal produce growers continue to be heavily impacted by the substantial increase in exports of fruits and vegetables to the United States. Since 2000 there has been a major influx of fruits and vegetables - an increase of more than 120%.

Some of this increase is attributed to product dumping by other countries, which means they offload products at a price lower than their own market price and sometimes lower than the cost of production.

We saw firsthand as we toured Michigan orchards and processing facilities how harshly this issue is affecting them.

They made a compelling case that there is simply no way for them to compete with countries who grow the same produce year-round and flood the U.S. market during the narrow 6-8 week window of harvest for U.S. produce.

Many of the farmers we visited shared that they originally moved to the area or switched over from row crops or dairy due to the great climate of the area and the booming market of seasonal produce.

However, it now feels impossible to them to compete. They face no good options and must either accept the losing market or find another way to stay in business.

I'm always impressed by the resilience of farmers and this trip delivered more examples of it. One family completely switched their business model to make sure they kept their orchard going for the next generation.

They turned their multi-generation apple orchard into a very successful business producing craft apple cider.

Unfortunately, massive makeovers are not within reach for other producers we met. Frankly, I think forcing fruit (and other produce growers) to get into the processing or product development business to stay afloat amid a market flooded with imported products is an unfortunate road for our country to go down.

I also learned a lot from sitting down with many cherry, blueberry and other produce farmers to hear more in-depth about their concerns. It was alarming to me how many of them had to shut down their multi-generation orchards or consolidate just to stay afloat.

The seasonal produce industry is hard enough as it is, so hearing these stories of how they have had to completely change their channels of revenue, consolidate or ultimately give up farming altogether in order to support their families, is simply heartbreaking.

U.S. farmers have shown time and time again that we compete and win in any market when we're given a fair opportunity.

However, when it comes to seasonal produce it's not just about establishing fair international markets. We must ensure fair competition for farmers right here in our own market.

These individual stories are compelling on their own, but collectively they impact the strength and stability of our food supply.

Our specialty crop growers are at a crossroads, and our federation stands with them in calling for action. Leveling the playing field at home and abroad must be a priority for lawmakers and trade officials. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

aspect of it – the percentage of people needed to feed the population. I must warn you though, there will be a lot of data to process.

World population estimates

- 10,000 years ago, 90 – 95% of all people were involved in agriculture.
- 5,000 years ago, 85 - 90% of all people engaged in agriculture.
- 2,000 years ago, 70 - 85% of all people were involved in agriculture.
- 100 years ago, 60 - 70% of all people engaged in agriculture.
- 50 years ago, 40% of all people were involved in agriculture.
- Today, less than 30% of all people engaged in agriculture.

Worldwide, agriculture demands 65%

less of the population to feed us than it did during the time of our earliest ancestors.

But wait, there is more.

U.S. population estimates

- 250 years ago, 70 - 80% of the U.S. population was involved in agriculture.
- 50 years ago, 4 – 5% of the U.S. population was involved in agriculture.
- Today, less than 2% of the U.S. population is engaged in agriculture.

Our nation today requires 78% fewer farmers to feed us, and much of the world, than it did during the time of our founding.

Today, agriculture produces a greater abundance and variety of safer, high-quality foods with fewer human hands required.

Feeding our neighbors and the world still requires many human hands and can

be demanding for those who work the soil and care for our animals.

Labor remains one of the biggest challenges for farmers in the United States, including those in Idaho. The issue of agricultural labor is complex both in terms of the physical labor involved and the regulatory requirements.

Various organizations, including the Farm Bureau, have been actively working for many years to find a fair and practical solution that ensures a consistent and skilled workforce while providing fair wages and a safe working environment for our valuable agriculture workers.

While exceptions will always exist, farmers have worked diligently to provide fair wages and a safe environment for their workers.

Back to numbers: U.S. Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, who has been a

champion for ag labor for years, recently cited that in Idaho's dairy industry, there were 6,000 job openings and only three applicants for those jobs were U.S. citizens.

Idaho agriculture does not function without labor; much of that labor is foreign-born.

The issue of foreign agricultural labor is often oversimplified by its opponents with statements like "pay more, and American workers will come."

However, the reality is far more complex. Most agricultural workers in Idaho earn between \$15 and \$25 per hour, and many also receive free housing.

Moreover, U.S. citizens are given priority for these jobs, but most of the time, no one applies. Ultimately, the farming industry is

complex and demanding and requires a lot of work.

Many armchair quarterback experts suggest investing in technology to make agriculture less reliant on foreign workers. However, they seem to forget that the number of American workers in agriculture has decreased from 80% to less than 2%.

At any agricultural meeting, the most discussed topic is new technology. It's a catchy phrase, but it's also ridiculous to suggest that agriculture hasn't consistently been searching for ways to reduce its labor needs.

While technology will continue to advance, and one day, agriculture may become fully automated, this is not the

case today.

All humans want plentiful, affordable, and nutritious food. Farmers take pride in providing that value package, and all those involved in agricultural labor are crucial to providing that package.

Addressing our labor issues is a complex challenge. If you closely observe the farmers, ranchers, policymakers, and advisors genuinely willing to work toward finding practical and effective solutions, you will probably notice that they exhibit qualities like grit, curiosity, perseverance, and patience.

I admire those willing to do the hard things to harvest actual results, honestly. Perhaps labor reform is like farming. If it were easy, everyone would work on it. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

It's during the fall season that Idahoans begin to see more and more harvesters and other farm equipment on the roads as they travel from field to field.

This equipment is a very visual symbol of harvest season. What is not so visible is the thousands of hours of hard work that has gone into getting those crops ready for the harvest.

The harvest means long days with many obstacles in the way.

Needless to say, farming is hard work. Even people with no involvement in agriculture understand that.

But maybe what they don't quite grasp is the tremendous risk, and worry that goes along with that risk, that every farmer and rancher faces each year in producing this state and nation's abundant food supply.

Farmers are the ultimate gamblers. They invest a lot of money in the seed, equipment, labor, land rent or payments, power, and other inputs needed to plant and harvest a crop. They do this not knowing how that year's weather or markets will turn out.

Will there be enough water to finish the crop? Will a brutal summer heatwave mess things up? Will an untimely weather event, such as a hailstorm or late-season monsoon-type rains, destroy the fruits of their efforts?

They also don't know how the market will play out. Will developments in distant parts of the globe cause ag commodity prices to tank?

There are so many other factors farmers and ranchers have no control over.

Will government add yet another regulation, rule or requirement that adds additional expense to their overall production costs, or impede their ability to compete with producers in other nations?

This year alone, the U.S. Department of Labor has sprung on farmers two different rule changes to the H-2A agricultural guest

worker program, with no warning or input, which affects the way they do business.

The challenges a farmer or rancher face every year are plentiful.

Will a plant disease or pest rear its ugly head and reduce yields or destroy a large part of their crop?

Will a strong U.S. dollar make their commodity uncompetitive in other nations?

Will fertilizer and other important crop inputs spike in cost to levels that make them uncompetitive?

Labor is a major issue that farmers and ranchers in every state face and have faced for a lot of years. Many producers each year don't know for sure whether they will have enough labor to bring in the harvest.

Idaho farmers are among the best in the world. They know how to raise a crop and they do that very well. That's something they have control over.

But they also are at the mercy of the many things they do not control.

Agriculture is truly a gamble and farmers and ranchers to a large degree roll the dice every year.

That they do this while producing among the most abundant, affordable and reliable food supplies in history is worthy of celebration.

And why do they do this? Because they love it and love the outcome of providing food and fiber. When you're in the store purchasing food, please remember the risk, work, and gamble that went into growing a safe supply of food.

Farmers and ranchers are passionate about what they do. Agriculture is not for the faint of heart.

I encourage each of you to take a moment this autumn to be grateful for the 25,000 Idaho farms and ranches and 2 million U.S. farms and ranches that take a big gamble each year to bring food to your table. ■



Photo by Sean Ellis

The Bear River runs by Preston Sept. 26. A recent public meeting hosted by Franklin County Farm Bureau addressed many of the questions and concerns area residents have about the Bear River Basin Adjudication.

Meeting addresses questions about Bear River water adjudication

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

PRESTON – The Bear River Basin Adjudication is officially underway and people still have a lot of questions about the process.

Many of their questions and concerns were addressed during a Sept. 26 Bear River Water Adjudication Information meeting in Preston.

About 50 people, most of them agricultural producers, attended the meeting, which was hosted by Franklin County Farm Bureau.

The purpose of the adjudication, which began in July 2021, is to make a complete and accurate accounting of existing water rights in the Bear River basin.

The Bear River runs through part of Wyoming, Idaho and Utah and the adjudication process affects Bear Lake, Caribou, Franklin and Oneida counties and part of Power and Cassia counties.

The Idaho Department of Water Resources is acting as an independent expert and technical assistant in the process.

A water adjudication in the basin was finalized in 1920 but since then, many farms and ranches have changed ownership and those

water rights have been fragmented over time, state Sen. Mark Harris, a rancher from Soda Springs, told participants at the Sept. 26 meeting.

At the same time, fast-growing Utah has its eyes on water from the basin, added Harris, who sponsored the 2020 bill that got the Bear River water adjudication process rolling.

“The demand for water is going to get worse and worse, so we need to know what we have,” he said. “It’s extremely important we get that straightened out and know exactly what we have as a state.”

“We’re concerned about what’s going to happen in the future with Utah and the Great Salt Lake,” Pocatello water rights attorney TJ Budge told meeting participants.

There was a lot of discussion about starting a Bear River basin water adjudication, he said.

“Most people eventually came to the conclusion that if we don’t do it now, we’re going to regret it in the future,” Budge said. “We just have to buckle down and push through it and we’ll be better in the end.”

Former state lawmaker Marc Gibbs, who also sponsored the bill that started the Bear River adjudication process, said there will be some pain involved in the process but he believes in the end it will prove to be a big benefit for all water users in the basin.

“It’s going to be a long process and it’s not going to be easy for some people ... but in the end, I think we’re going to be happy with adjudication because we will know what water rights we have,” said Gibbs, a member of the Idaho Water Resource Board.

The Snake River Basin Adjudication, which began in 1987 and officially ended in 2014, decreed 158,600 water rights in southern Idaho.

The Bear River adjudication is expected to last about 15 years and determine thousands of water rights.

The Idaho Department of Water Resources created a field office in Preston specifically to help people get through the adjudication process, said Christopher Holmes, an IDWR water rights supervisor in the Preston office.

He encouraged people to contact the office and work with IDWR staff to ensure their water rights are recognized and decreed.

“The whole purpose of (the adjudication) is to protect your water rights going forward,” he said. “For us to protect your water rights, we need to know what they are. The whole purpose of this office is to help people file claims. We’re here to help you get through it.”

Holmes said the vast majority of claims will go through the process easily with no objections.

Budge said less than 1 percent of water rights claims during the SRBA involved attorneys.

“Most of you will be just fine meeting with (IDWR) staff,” he said.

Franklin County farmer and rancher Dan Garner said a lot of people still have concerns about the adjudication process.

“I felt the meeting ... went a long way toward clearing up the fears and concerns that the citizens of Franklin County have

about the adjudication process,” he said. “I am optimistic that the meeting helped clarify and simplify some of the questions” that people have about the process.

Franklin County farmer and rancher Jason Fellows said that although the adjudication will benefit farmers and ranchers by making sure their water rights are secured, there are still many valid questions and concerns about the process.

“These types of meetings I think help take away that concern,” he said.

IDWR has already begun accepting water rights claims in Water District 11, which includes the Montpelier and Soda Springs areas, and will soon begin accepting claims in Water District 13, which includes Preston and Grace.

Then it will begin accepting claims in Water District 15, which includes Malad, and then Water District 17, which includes Oneida County and part of Power County and Cassia County.

The water department held a public meeting to discuss the process in district 11 and will hold similar meetings in districts 13, 15 and 17. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



“Your Joe is a salt-of-the-earth guy ... a real pillar in the farming community.”

Word Search

Thanksgiving

Answer key on page 42

M	M	A	C	A	R	O	N	I	Y	D	A	E	H	C	M	B
A	C	N	U	E	K	J	W	F	L	R	O	C	F	R	A	R
C	G	R	E	E	N	B	E	A	N	G	L	O	C	A	C	U
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T	R	R	D	E	V	I	L	E	D	E	G	G	S	M	N	S
H	S	E	D	M	A	S	H	E	D	P	O	T	A	T	O	J
C	A	S	S	E	R	O	L	E	R	A	K	T	W	R	G	G

Turkey
Green Bean
Yams
Mashed Potato
Gravy
Stuffing

Cranberry
Pumpkin Pie
Sweet Potato
Rolls
Macaroni
Corn

Carrots
Brussell Sprouts
Deviled Eggs
Casserole

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Inaugural Potato Days festival draws 12,000

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MERIDIAN – An estimated 12,000 people showed up to celebrate the famous Idaho potato in the heart of Idaho’s main population center Sept. 22-23.

The goal of the Potato Days event was to eventually hold the largest public celebration of the potato in Idaho and it may have come close during its inaugural year.

Shelley Spud Days attracts a similar number of people in Bingham County, which is the epicenter of potato production in Idaho and the United States.

That event is held in the rural town of Shelley, while the goal of the Potato Days event was to allow city folks to celebrate the state’s most iconic product as well, according to organizer Thomas Watson.

“We just wanted to emphasize the potato in the city and treat it the same way we treat the tech industry and other big industries,” he said.

After doing an internet search, Watson, co-owner of Roots Family History, a Boise print and frame shop, realized there were no potato celebrations in the Boise area.



People attending the Potato Days festival in Meridian have their picture taken in front of the Big Idaho Potato. Photos by Sean Ellis

“I think people take it as a source of pride that we’re famous for our potatoes.”

- Jamey Higham, IPC President and CEO

“We need to celebrate the potato right here in the city,” he said. “We need a huge celebration, right here, of the potato, the thing that produces almost more income for the state than anything else.”

Watson said the potato industry may not be as flashy as the high-tech industry but it’s just as important and brings in billions of dollars to the state each year.

“I just don’t think we think about the potato the same way we do (about the high-tech industry) but we should,” he said. “The potato is a tech company. A really, really big tech company. A \$13 billion a year tech company and we don’t think about it like that at all. But it is.”

The event was held in Kleiner Mem-

orial Park just across from The Village in Meridian.

Potato Days included dozens of potato-themed games such as potato sack races, potato limbo, potato darts and potato trick shots, and potato dishes, and the free prizes awarded for playing the games were potato-oriented.

The Big Idaho Potato Truck, which hauls a gigantic potato around the nation, was parked at the event and a constant stream of people had their pictures taken in front of it.

The giant potato used in the Idaho Potato Drop on New Year’s Eve was also there, and Spuddy Buddy, the Idaho Potato Commission mascot, attended the event as well.

It included potato sidewalk chalk art by dozens of local artists, a French-fry competition, live bands, carnival games, a vendor area, bubble garden and bouncy houses.

“It’s new to this side of the state to be celebrating the Idaho potato like this, but this event is exciting,” IPC President and CEO Jamey Higham said while attending Potato Days. “We’re big supporters of it.”

He said it’s a good sign to see the spud being celebrated in the middle of Idaho’s largest population center.

“I remember about 20 years ago there was a bit of a movement by some people to ... distance ourselves from the potato,” he said. “But it’s made a resurgence lately. I think people take it as a source of pride that we’re famous for our potatoes.”

Watson grew up near Kimberly in southcentral Idaho and was surrounded by potato fields but wasn’t involved in farming himself. However, he recognizes the important contribution that potatoes make to the state’s way of life and economy.

He believes the potato isn’t getting the recognition it should in the Boise-Meridian area, which is one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States on a percentage basis.

“We just don’t appreciate what we actually have and that’s a sour point for me,” he said. “We need to make the potato cool in the city. We want the industry to be as cool as the tech industry.”

Watson said the event was one that needed to happen in the Boise area, whether it was him or someone else organizing it.

“I don’t deserve to be doing this,” he said. “The reason I am doing this is because nobody else is.

Watson said he and others involved in organizing the event would have been happy to have drawn 1,000 people during the event’s first year.

But as thousands of people began flowing into Kleiner Memorial Park shortly after the event started on Sept. 23, a Saturday, it became apparent Potato Days had taken on a life of its own during its first year.

“This has been a crazy undertaking; way beyond what I imagined,” Watson said, adding that the 12,000 attendance total is “way more than we expected on year one and it’s all because this is a potato event. I think had we called it something else and been



The inaugural Potato Days event in Meridian included dozens of potato-themed games, including this potato sack race.

celebrating something else, this wouldn’t have happened. The community wants a potato days event.”

He credits the state’s potato industry, including the Idaho Potato Commission, for helping make the event a success. The IPC and industry made substantial donations to Potato Days, including providing the potato-related prizes given away for free.

“The donations are insane. We got way more than we expected,” Watson said. “The potato industry really came through for us.”

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle applauded organizers of the event and was happy to hear it will be an annual celebration.

“Wow! What an incredible event,” said Searle, a potato farmer from Shelley. “We applaud the people who created this family-oriented celebration of the humble potato. It’s incredibly satisfying to see city folks embrace the Idaho potato.”

Watson said a main focus of Potato Days was free family fun, all centered around a gigantic celebration of the Idaho potato.

“If you live in the city, this is not the kind of thing kids see a lot,” he said. “This is a chance to get them off (of video games and the Internet) and come to an actual event where everything’s free and they’re all having fun.”

“I would have been just as happy if someone else had done this event,” he added. “I just want it to exist.”

He said the event in future years hopes to add other traditional events like arm wrestling and log-pulling and next year it will attempt to break the world record for largest pinata ever built.

“We want this to feel like good, old-fashioned family fun, but all in celebration of the potato,” Watson said. ■



LEFT: Potato Days organizer Thomas Watson hands out potato-themed prizes to participants of the inaugural Potato Days event held in Meridian Sept. 22-23.



Photo by Toji Sakamoto

A couple thousand people attended Idaho Cider Fest Oct. 7. It was the state's first-ever cider-specific festival.

A lot of excitement around Idaho's first cider festival

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – A few minutes after Idaho's first-ever cider festival began at noon, the venue hosting the event was jam-packed.

The excitement surrounding the inaugural Idaho Cider Fest had been building, both among cideries and participants, organizers said.

Once the "gates" were opened, it exploded.

A couple thousand people attended the Oct. 7 festival and sampled a wide variety of ciders from Idaho and other regional cideries.

"People were just absolutely pumped about it," said Molly Leadbetter, owner of Meriwether Cider, which hosted the event in downtown Boise. "It was fun to see that. I was just blown away by it."

Idaho's cider industry is still a burgeoning one but the turn-

out for the state's first cider festival is a good indication it will continue growing, according to representatives of cideries that attended the event.

"It's kind of a small industry right now but there's mighty force behind it," said event co-organizer Jana Daisy-Ensign, deputy director of the Northwest Cider Association, which is based in Oregon. "It has not been a big, established industry but we are seeing some real traction."

"People are really excited about this festival and really interested to learn about cider," she said shortly before Cider Fest kicked off.

New to Idaho

Cider, which generally has an alcohol content between 6 and 7 percent, is relatively new to Idaho and the more people here

are exposed to it, the more growth the industry will experience, said Alex Perez, who owns Highpoint Cider in Victor in southeast Idaho.

“People in Idaho really haven’t been exposed to all these different craft cider options in the same way that people on the East Coast have,” he said. “In particular for Idaho, you’ve recently had this big swell in popularity for ciders.”

Idaho has nine cideries and that number is expected to grow as more Idahoans are exposed to the drink.

There is a lot of excitement building in Idaho around cider, said Emily Mason, owner of Cedar Draw Cider in Buhl.

“The Pacific Northwest cider culture has grown so much in just the last 10 years and Idaho is always a little behind and we’re now starting to see a lot more cider in stores here and a lot more options and there’s a huge market for it,” she said.

Idaho cideries have for the most part had to teach the state’s residents about cider, Mason said, and the more people learn about it, the more popular it becomes.

“A lot of people don’t have any idea what cider is,” Leadbetter said.

What is cider?

Leadbetter said cider undergoes basically the same production process as wine does. “Cider is a lot like wine. Wine is fermented grapes. Cider is fermented apples.”

Cider starts with apples.

It’s what can be done with cider after the apples are fermented that makes it a fun and exciting drink, cider makers told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

“Cider makers can also add other fruit, hops, spices, berries, you name it,” Daisy-Ensign said. “That’s what’s kind of fun and innovative about cider. It always starts with apples but from there, it’s a pretty wide open palate. There are so many different directions a cider maker can take.”

“We can do anything we want with cider,” Leadbetter said. “Your imagination is the limit on what you can do with cider.”

Daisy-Ensign said federal data shows Idaho retail sales of cider totaled \$3.4 million for the 52-week period ending Sept. 9. That represents year-over-year growth of 10 percent.

Three Idaho cideries won a total of five medals at this June’s Northwest Cider Cup, an annual celebration and contest of the

best ciders in the Pacific Northwest region.

“We’re getting some really good ciders from Idaho,” said Mason, who won a gold and bronze medal at the cider cup. “I think you’re going to see some more award-winning ciders coming out of Idaho.”

Leadbetter said cider was very popular in colonial America and the Mayflower had a cider press onboard.

The country’s cider industry was knee-capped by Prohibition, she said, because a lot of cider apple orchards were taken out due to the high cost of maintaining them with no market.

Cider revolution

“The second cider revolution in America started about 20 years ago and it’s been growing exponentially since then,” Leadbetter said.

Cider hasn’t grown as fast as some other beverage industries, such as craft beer or seltzers, but the growth has been steady, Perez said.

“Cider hasn’t had this meteoric trajectory but it’s just been slow and steady growth and it’s been on the rise,” he said. “Cider is here to stay.” ■



Photo by Sean Ellis

A few minutes after Idaho Cider Fest began, the venue hosting the event in downtown Boise was already packed.

Job openings far exceed available workers



By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

There are way more job openings than job seekers right now in Idaho and around the United States.

For example, there were 9.8 million job openings in the U.S. in July but only 5.9 million unemployed workers available for those jobs.

That means there would still be almost 4 million unfilled jobs even if every unemployed person in the country found a job.

Available workers are defined as those who are unemployed and actively seeking work.

In Idaho, there were 56 available workers for every 100 job postings in July.

That data comes from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and was reported in a story at visualcapitalist.com.

This difference between the number of available job seekers and job openings has made the employment scene a job seekers market.

Traditionally, employers have vetted workers to see if they want them to work at their business, says Jan Roeser, a labor economist for the Idaho Department of Labor.

“Right now, many job seekers are vetting businesses to see if they want to work there,” she says. “It’s a really good market for the workers.”

But that’s not such a good thing for employers.

Some businesses in Idaho have had to close certain days of the week because they can’t get enough labor, and others have had to close temporarily while they re-evaluate things and explore more automation, Roeser says.

“I think most employers have had someone accept a job and not show up or take the job and jump ship to another one they’ve been waiting for,” she says.

“It’s not just an Idaho issue,” she adds. “It’s an issue that is hitting across the U.S. Our labor supply is tight but so is the rest of the nation’s and it’s a global issue as well.”

Because of the difficulty in finding workers, Moon’s Kitchen Cafe in downtown Boise is now open five days a week instead of seven and it closes earlier also.



Since the COVID outbreak, “we lost a bunch of people and I really don’t even know where they went,” says manager Christy McDaniel. “Now we have people come to work here for a few days and then they just stop showing up, or they ... stay two to three months and then leave.”

McDaniel says she’s not sure what the reason is.

“I don’t know where they went or who’s paying them but I wish somebody would tell me,” she says. “Before COVID, we turned people away and we had staff who had been here a long time. Now, if you walk in here, as long as you have clothes on, I’ll keep ya.”

There were 938,000 employed people in Idaho in August, according to the Idaho Department of Labor. The mean wage for those workers was pushing \$20 an hour.

The higher wages now compared to even a few years ago are still not enough to attract available workers to many job openings.

Idaho’s population is among the fastest growing in the nation but the state also continues to attract plenty of businesses and as of right now, there are still plenty more job openings than people actively seeking work.

“We’re an extremely attractive state to businesses with our pro-business policies,” Roeser says. “We’re also an attractive state to live in. We’re getting jobs and people.”

Matt Hunter, president and CEO of the Greater Pocatello Chamber of Commerce, says there are currently about 1.8 job postings per unemployed person in Idaho.

“It is a changed job labor market; it really is,” he says. “That’s almost two jobs for every person looking for employment.”

But that number had been up to 3 job postings for every job seeker.

“It’s getting better but it’s still not a great situation for employers,” Hunter says.

“Economic development right now is more about finding people to come to your community to work.”

For some businesses, it has become a “poaching market,” he says. In other words, businesses offering an employee of another business more money to come work for them.

Labor availability has been a major challenge for farmers and ranchers for



Photo by Sean Ellis

Moon’s Kitchen Cafe manager Christy McDaniel works the cash register during the breakfast rush Oct. 12. Just like a lot of other businesses in the state, the Idaho restaurant is having a hard time finding enough workers.

many years and the increasingly tight labor supply only exacerbates that challenge.

If non-agricultural businesses are having a difficult time finding labor, farmers and ranchers are going to feel the challenge also.

That’s especially true in the Treasure Valley area of southwestern Idaho, where the bulk of Idaho’s rapid population growth is occurring.

“I can go get a construction job now, with no experience, that pays \$25 an hour,” says Meridian farmer Neil Durrant. “We’re competing with everyone else for workers.”

“It’s harder getting skilled guys I can trust putting in a tractor or truck to help with harvest,” he says. “I’m trying to find ways I can be a little more efficient with the guys I have.”

But finding enough labor to fill Idaho’s roughly 58,000 ag jobs is not just a Treasure Valley problem. It’s a statewide issue.

Idaho Falls farmer Andrew Mickelsen says he has seen a slight easing in the ability to find workers.

“However,” he adds, “It’s still hard to find people that want to do the jobs that we have. It’s been very difficult over the last couple years to find the help that we need.”

Mickelsen says the farm has a particularly hard time finding people to fill warehouse jobs on its potato boxing lines, despite higher pay for those jobs.

“We’re just not seeing people jumping up and down to go hop in those jobs,” he says. ■

U of I researchers lending a helping hand to huckleberries

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

Idaho's state fruit isn't commercially produced, nor are there any domesticated huckleberry varieties available.

Native to the Northwest, huckleberries are mostly harvested from wild plants growing within Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Montana public lands.

University of Idaho Professor Stephen Cook, head of the Department of Entomology, Plant Pathology and Nematology, has been working to overcome significant hurdles to huckleberry propagation.

Cook is in the fourth and final year of USDA-funded research to organically protect greenhouse-raised huckleberry starts from a destructive pest, called the black vine weevil, in addition to studying ways to boost survival when those potted plants are transplanted into residential yards or the wild.

The research team also includes Randall Brooks, a UI Extension forestry professor, and Andrew Nelson, director of the Franklin H. Pitkin Forest Nursery, which is located on the Moscow campus and operated by the UT's College of Natural Resources.

Cook is also leading a second huckleberry project that started in 2022 with funding from a three-year USDA grant.

He'll be testing how the addition of biochar, which is a type of charcoal produced from plant matter, affects huckleberry starts planted in the wild, as well as which pollinating insects are drawn to them.

One of the reasons huckleberries have been so difficult to domesticate is because they are finicky about their growing environment, preferring acidic soils and partial shade.

They're often found in clearings within conifer forests, which have been growing denser due to decades of fire suppression.

"We are starting to see a decline in the



University of Idaho photo
This photo shows huckleberries from a University of Idaho greenhouse and transplanted in Sandpoint for research.

stands and the harvest," Cook said. "Some of that is due to the changing of the forest canopy above them, which may also impact pollinators' ability to find those plants."

The Pitkin Forest Nursery, which is Idaho's state nursery, produces roughly 500 huckleberry plants per year, most of which are purchased directly by homeowners for landscaping.

It sustains significant losses in many years to black vine weevils, invaders from Europe that also target many hardwoods, conifers and shrubs propagated at the facility.

Weevil larva feed on roots, and greenhouse plants may be unsalvageable by the time they are discovered.

"We've had years where we've found thousands of them," Nelson said. "They can easily decimate the crop."

At the request of regional greenhouse growers, Cook began studying three different organic methods for controlling black vine weevils in the U of I nursery starting in 2020.

Treatments of neem oil, which is an insect growth regulator that prevents immature weevils from molting, and a type of fungus that attacks weevils both controlled about 85% of the pests in the pots.

Introducing a type of nematode that feeds on weevils was the most effective treatment in his study, controlling about 95% of the weevil population.

All three treatments are commercially available.

Simulating varying degrees of weevil damage, Cook and Nelson removed 25%, 50% or 75% of biomass from huckleberry starts and planted them outdoors to assess their health and survival.

Cook and his team have also planted huckleberries both with and without biochar added to the soil at the U of I Sandpoint Organic Agriculture Center.

Cook hypothesizes that the biochar will lend nutrients and improve soil-moisture retention, boosting survival in a Sandpoint environment with less soil acidity and more direct sunlight than huckleberry bushes can typically endure.

They'll be monitoring survival, plant chemistry and color of the samples.

The second project, which runs from 2022 through 2025, entails planting greenhouse-raised huckleberry starts adjacent to wild stands throughout Idaho's northern Panhandle.

Cook will plant the greenhouse-raised huckleberry starts with biochar. He'll be comparing the color, chemistry and future pollination of transplanted huckleberry plants with the wild ones.

Periodically he and his students will be netting insects to identify direct associations with insect pollinators. Cook will keep a close eye on the huckleberry blossoms to determine if biochar causes them to change color, which could affect insect pollination. ■

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Selecting the right equipment for your forestland management needs

By Randy Brooks
University of Idaho

My daughter and son-in-law just moved from the city and bought some land with timber on it. My son-in-law wants to become a “hobby” logger/farmer.

In addition to buying a portable sawmill, he told me he intended to purchase a piece of equipment that could serve several purposes, including some light log skidding, snow plowing and trench digging, among other things.

He didn't think he could afford a new piece of equipment and was in the market for a good used four-wheel-drive tractor or Cat. After giving it some thought, I did a little research for him and here is what I came up with.

To properly select equipment, you must predetermine a number of factors, including size and/or number of machinery/equipment needed, features needed, and where to buy equipment. You should also be aware of some of the pitfalls you may encounter when purchasing equipment.

The advantages of buying new machinery include income tax considerations and new technology, resulting in increased efficiency, productivity, etc. Financing also may be easier to obtain on new purchases.

Small



Photo by Audra Cochran

When considering purchasing used equipment, check to make sure all gauges are working and equipment starts and runs smoothly.

operations might find advantages in buying used equipment if the owner wishes to maintain control over certain functions but finds that a new purchase is not economically viable.

Used equipment would also be appropriate when buying a back-up unit. Used tractors are useful for small-scale logging jobs or to tow equipment during harvest when the tractor will run a few hours seasonally.

Used equipment can also be used for less critical or low annual usage tasks.

When you purchase used equipment, you are buying the remaining, unused service life of the

apparatus. All equipment is designed with a certain number of hours of life in it.

Depending upon how it is used, maintained and repaired, the equipment will use up these hours at a faster or slower rate. Wear-out life is the point at which it is not typically economically feasible to continue repair of the equipment.

What's going on before the wear-out life of a tractor? Engine overhauls. A minor overhaul would generally consist of new rings, grinding the valves, etc.

A major engine overhaul would consist of new pistons, new sleeves (liners), new bearings, new injectors, etc. New tires are necessary approximately every 2,000 to 4,000 hours, depending upon use and soil/ground/road conditions.

Batteries should be replaced approximately every three to four years.

LEFT: This skidder was purchased in used condition. When buying used equipment, try to check hours of usage, maintenance records, and tire conditions, among other things.

Photo by Audra Cochran



Be cautious of smaller utility tractors that have been used with front-end bucket loaders. These types of tractors generally perform a lot of stop-and-go usage that is hard on the transmission and clutch mechanisms. Front-end loaders also are hard on front axles and front tires.

Beware of farm tractors that have been previously used for logging or in the construction industry. Farm tractors usually are not built to withstand the rigors of heavy skidding or for construction.

Stay away from fire, water, flood or accident damaged machinery unless it is being bought solely to sell for parts. It is difficult to determine the extent of damage of such equipment, as the damage may be hidden.

For example, seals (as in sealed bearings) that keep oil in won't necessarily keep water out. Internal components (bearings, gears, etc.) can be overheated and distorted from a fire and will be difficult, if not impossible, to see.

Machinery that has experienced serious accidents, such as rollovers, also can have serious damage or distortion to internal components that cannot be seen.

Beware of buying any equipment from manufacturers that have gone out of business. The price may be right, but parts may be a problem. Also, later trade-in value will be much less.

Some equipment makes, models, and sizes hold their market value better than others. This means that you might expect to pay more when compared to a similar item from another manufacturer.

In return, you would also expect more on the trade-in when that time comes. Much of this is due to durability and brand name marketing.

Many "new" models of equipment are not that different from last year's model. Look closely at technical specifications between model years. It is not uncommon to find that the old model will give you similar performance specifications at a fraction of the cost of the "new" model.

Different models from the same manufacturer (particularly tractors) may not be substantially different. For example, the same engine may be used in several different tractor models, but the horsepower is increased by using turbochargers, intercoolers, etc.

The same extends to other components such as transmissions, frames, final drives, etc. This means models at the low end of the family may be over designed and should give longer service life with less trouble from major components.

The machine's age and its hour meter should be reasonably in balance. General guidelines for typical average annual usage in hours

are as follows: tractors, 1,000 hours (400 to 1,600 hours annually); crawlers, 1,200 hours (600 to 2,000); and combines, 300 hours (200 to 350).

Bear in mind these are typical values.

Machinery average annual



Photo by Stewart Rouse

This four-wheel-drive tractor was bought new and is used for trenching, moving small logs, spreading gravel, and snow plowing. Beware of pitfalls when sizing equipment with desired usage.

usage far in excess of the typical values given above should be priced lower than the going rate for the same equipment.

Machinery with average annual usage far lower than the typical values given above should be priced higher than the going rate for the equipment with more use.

There are several "Blue Book" resources on the internet for equipment (equivalent to the automobile blue book). Try typing "farm equipment blue book values" in your search engine, and you will find a variety of websites to choose from.

In general, the used equipment market tends to weight the age of equipment more than accumulated hours of usage of the equipment, so the lower hour machine is usually the better buy.

When you have narrowed your choice down to a particular unit, the first thing to find out is the asking price. It is no use going to the trouble of mechanically evaluating the equipment if the asking price is too high.

However, be cautious of deals that are drastically below market value. Dealerships know the real value of machinery. If equipment is below market value, there is probably a good reason.

Keep financing separate from the purchase decision. Great financing terms will not make your equipment run any better.

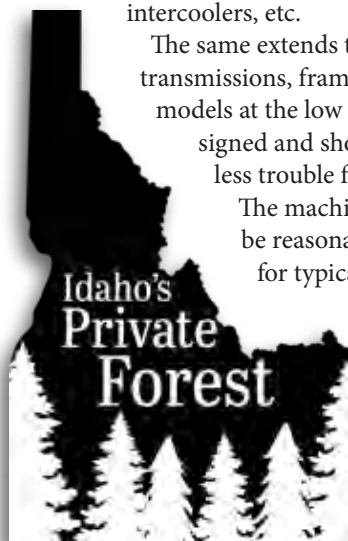
Before buying used equipment, contact the previous owner if possible. Determine characteristics of machine operation that would be advantageous or disadvantageous to your position.

And, whenever possible, bring the equipment home for a trial run.

Getting back to my son-in-law. After much thought, discussion and weighing all the pros and cons, he decided to purchase a new four-wheel-drive tractor with a front-end loader and backhoe attachment.

He really liked the great financing terms the dealer gave him and the fact it came with a warranty and a new ball cap. He did appreciate my efforts, however, and I was rewarded with a ride on his new tractor while spreading gravel out in my driveway. ■

Randy Brooks is a University of Idaho Extension forestry specialist. He can be reached at rbrooks@uidaho.edu.



Quagga mussels pose a major threat to Idaho water

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

TWIN FALLS – Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, the state’s largest general farm organization, is supporting the Idaho State Department of Agriculture’s all-out effort to stop quagga mussels from gaining a foothold in Idaho waterways.

The ISDA on Sept. 18 confirmed the presence of quagga mussel larvae in the Snake River near Twin Falls.

As a result, a small stretch of the river was closed off while ISDA teams conducted surveys to determine the scope of the impacted area.

The mussels are an invasive species and the ag department immediately unleashed a rapid response team to deal with the issue and explore potential control strategies.

“We’re going to throw at this everything we possibly can; every resource,” ISDA Director Chanel Tewalt told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation two days after the mussels were detected. “We have solicited every ounce of help we can get from every other agency, federal, state and local.”

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, a farmer from Shelley, said Farm Bureau applauds the ag department’s aggressive approach to this issue and stands ready to assist ISDA in getting the word out about the issue and encouraging all Idahoans to do their part in helping eradicate the mussels.

IFBF represents about 11,000 people directly involved in Idaho’s agricultural industry.

“This is a really serious issue,” Searle said. “We’re talking about a species that has the potential to really wreak havoc on the state’s water infrastructure.”

The quagga mussel larvae were detected in the Centennial Waterfront Park area of the Snake River and ISDA closed off public access to the river between Niagara Springs and Twin Falls.

Quagga mussels are not a threat to human health but they could potentially cause a lot of damage to the state’s waterways and water infrastructure.

The freshwater mussels, which are native to Eastern Europe, can rapidly colonize hard surfaces. They can clog water-intake structures such as pipes and screens and can accumulate in great numbers on docks, buoys, boat hulls and beaches.

“These invasive pests will clog pipes that deliver water for drinking, energy,

LEFT: An Idaho State Department of Agriculture employee decontaminates duck decoys Sept. 23. The department quickly unleashed a rapid response team following the detection of quagga mussel larvae in the Snake River near Twin Falls on Sept. 18. The invasive species can wreak havoc on waterways if left unchecked.
ISDA photo



agriculture and recreation,” Gov. Brad Little said during a press conference Sept. 19. “This is a very high priority for Idaho and for me, given the gravity of the risk.”

If the mussels take hold in Idaho, they could cause great harm to the state’s agriculture industry.

“I can’t imagine how much this would complicate the work of our agricultural producers in terms of cost, in terms of irrigation availability and in terms of costs to irrigation districts of trying to manage them and cleaning pipes,” Tewalt said. “Just the physical part of getting mussels out of infrastructure is incredibly difficult.”

An estimated \$500 million a year is spent managing them in the Great Lakes.

“What’s different in the West, though, is that you take whatever you have in the Great Lakes and complicate it by the fact that we also use our water for power generation and irrigation,” Tewalt said. “So, you can imagine how that cost can potentially multiply in the West and how important of an issue this is.”

Idaho ranks second in the nation, behind California, in the total amount of water withdrawn for irrigation. Most of that water is used for agriculture, which is still the biggest part of the state’s economy.

“This could have a severe impact on Idaho,” Tewalt said. “We heard with a clear voice how quickly we need to react and that’s what we’re doing.”

Fortunately, the mussels found in the Snake River near Twin Falls are the larval form of the mussels, which are basically a free-floating baby in the water.

The problem is that as they grow, they want to attach to something and when they start doing that, they can colonize an area to the point they take over pipes and entire ecosystems.

“They are really, really efficient at creating monocultures, choking out other plant and animal life,” Tewalt said. “So, in addition to restricting water flows, they can also choke out the plant and animal life that we care about.”

She said the state still has a fighting chance to eradicate the mussels but it will take an all-out assault from the state, its partners and the general public.

“We have a chance to get rid of them but this is certainly a potential crisis,” Tewalt

said. “We have a very narrow window to try to mitigate this issue.”

After consulting with local, state and federal stakeholders, the ISDA began a control strategy on Oct. 3 that included treating a six-mile section of the Snake River with a copper-based product, Natrix. The chemical treatment is intended to eradicate quagga mussels in the river at all life stages.

The treatment was finished Oct. 13 and ISDA officials say it will be a while before they know for sure whether it worked.

ISDA officials said the treatment was applied at a rate that will eradicate mussels but is below the drinking water standard for humans.

The treatment was expected to cause mortality in fish, aquatic plants and algae in a six-mile stretch of the river from the Twin Falls pool above Shoshone Falls downstream to Auger Falls.

While the treatment will impact other animal and plant species, the risk of doing nothing and allowing the mussels to take hold in Idaho is too severe, Tewalt said.

“We want to protect as many species as we can and have a treatment that is as direct and effective and timely as we can make it to protect the river as a whole,” she said.

“A small ounce of prevention in this case is worth that pound of cure,” Tewalt said. “The good outweighs the bad, potentially.”

The department and its state, federal and local partners will do all they can to try to mitigate the problem, Tewalt said. But any successful effort will also require the widespread participation of the public.

“If you are in the invasive species world, you know about the issue,” she said. “But we also need the general public to understand.”

The ag department is asking all Idahoans to “clean, drain and dry” all watercraft and equipment before putting them back in the water. That includes kayaks, canoes, paddleboard, boats and other possible conveyances such as duck decoys, waders and fishing tackle.

If a watercraft has been on the Snake River in the Centennial Park area of Twin Falls recently, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture is asking people to take it to an ISDA hot wash station in Twin Falls for

proper treatment.

The department is asking these people not to attempt to decontaminate the watercraft themselves. You can call (208) 332-8620 for location information or visit <https://agri.idaho.gov/main/plants/snake-river-quagga-mussel-veligers/> for more information.

Tewalt said it’s important for people to stay completely out of the water in the impacted area.

“The general public needs to know it’s not just boats,” she said. “It’s paddleboards, it’s kayaks, it’s literally anything that would go into the water, including your pets and shoes. All of those things are conveyances and we need people to realize that’s what we mean by staying off the water.”

“We need everyone to help with our really acute efforts in this impact zone,” Tewalt added. “But it is also a broader message to all Idahoans to have an increased level of vigilance about this in every part of the state.”

The ISDA has had a program in place for many years to try to prevent quagga mussels from appearing in Idaho waterways and state legislators have approved millions of dollars toward the program.

The regular water sampling that resulted in the mussel larvae being detected Sept. 18 was part of the state’s quagga mussel program.

“It’s because of (the legislature’s) investment over these many years that we have the resources and personnel today to move so quickly,” Tewalt said. “Those water samples are what allowed for the early detection of this situation.”

If the mussels end up spreading unchecked in Idaho, it could cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in actual and indirect costs, said Braden Jensen, director of governmental affairs for IFBF.

“If they become established here, they will have an extreme cost to deal with,” he said. “I think it’s incumbent upon all of us to do our part to be really conscientious of what we’re putting into the water, and where our watercraft and other possible conveyances have been before. I would really encourage people to take heed to the state’s campaign: clean, drain and dry these things that go into the river, every single time.” ■



Cornbread Dressing

Ingredients :

- 1/2 Cup butter
- 6 Cups crumbled cornbread
- 6 Cups soft bread crumbs
- 1/2 Cup of fat or drippings
- 1 Cup diced celery
- 3 Medium onions minced
- 1 Cup chopped green pepper (optional)
- 2 Teaspoons of salt
- 1/2 Tablespoon of pepper
- 1 Tablespoon of poultry seasoning
- 2 Beaten eggs
- 1 1/2 Cups of water

Directions :

Cut butter into small pieces, mix with cornbread and bread crumbs. Melt fat, add celery and onion. Cook five minutes, and to crumb mixture. Add green pepper and seasonings. Mix thoroughly. Add well-beaten eggs, sprinkle water over surface, stirring slightly until dressing is of desired moistness. Stuff lightly into neck region and body cavity of bird.



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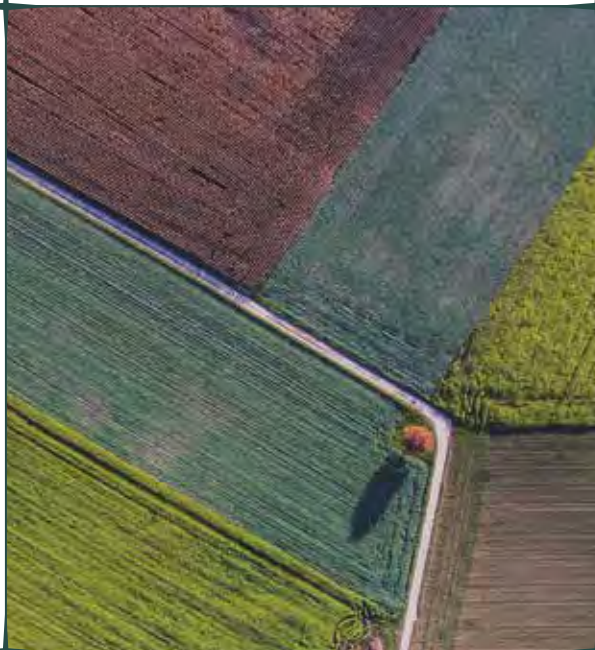
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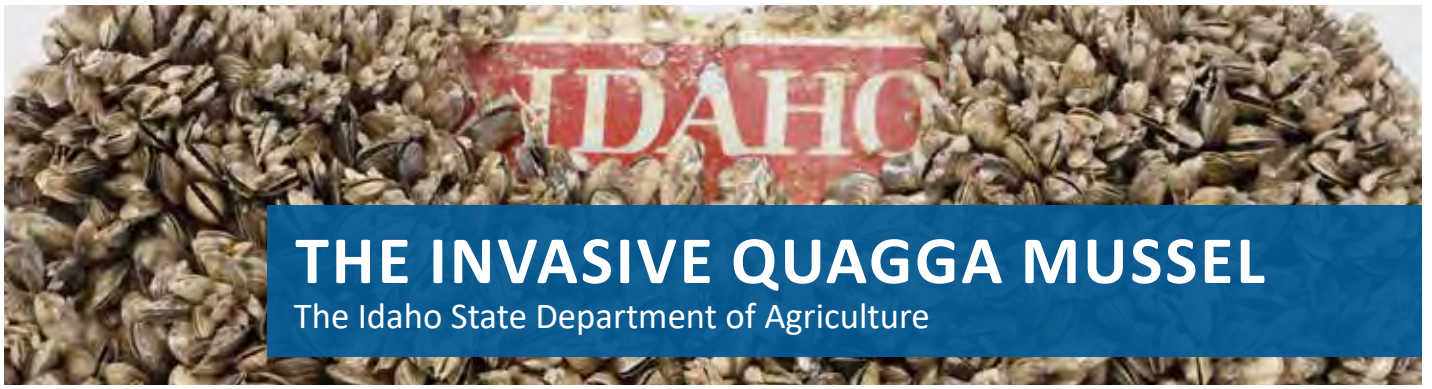
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THE INVASIVE QUAGGA MUSSEL

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Quagga mussels have the potential to destroy what we know and love about Idaho’s waterways and way of life. So what are these invasive critters and what makes them so destructive?

The quagga mussel is a freshwater mussel that is one of the most aggressive invasive species infecting the United States. Quagga mussels reproduce by eggs that free float in the water until fertilized, then the microscopic larvae, called veligers, surface after three to five days. Veligers are free swimming in the water for up to a month until they are large enough to attach to a hard or soft surface in freshwater. They then grow an adult shell.

Adult mussels are two-shelled, shaped like the letter “D” and vary in color from brownish yellow to black. They easily attach to hard surfaces, grow very quickly and can accumulate huge colonies of thousands of mussels. Just one single mussel can reproduce over 1 million eggs per year. Once introduced, the mussels reproduce exponentially to the point that they out compete native species for resources.

As filter feeders, the mussels remove phytoplankton and other organic matter from the water. Phytoplankton are the primary food source of another type of plankton called zooplankton. Many native aquatic species rely on zooplankton, resulting in quagga mussels having an indirect impact on fish and other aquatic species.

Not only do these non-native mussels destroy native species and habitats, but they also directly impact water delivery systems. Quagga mussels quickly spread and clog pipes that deliver water for drinking, energy, agriculture, recreation, and a variety of other uses. An established population of quagga mussels has the potential to cost Idaho hundreds of millions of dollars in actual and indirect costs, resulting in a potential increase in your taxes and bills.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES?

Aquatic invasive mussels spread easily to new areas due to movement of watercraft and other equipment. To protect our waterways, we must be vigilant in following the preventive measures of CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY. These steps apply to all watercraft and conveyances including boats, kayaks, paddle boards, duck decoys, waders, fishing tackle, lifejackets, and anything else going in and out of the water.

CLEAN - Before leaving any waterbody, always inspect equipment for visible plants and animals.

DRAIN - Eliminate water from all equipment, including motors, live wells, wakeboard ballast tanks, boat hulls, scuba gear, bait buckets, waders, and boots.

DRY - Clean and dry anything that came in contact with water (boats, decoys, trailers, equipment, dogs, etc.).

In addition to CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY, do not forget to stop at ISDA Watercraft Inspection Stations. When passing an inspection station during hours of operation, make sure to stop for an inspection and decontamination. After visiting waters that have confirmed quagga mussels or any out of state waterbody, ensure that your boat has been inspected or allowed dry time of at least 30 days prior to launching in Idaho waters.

For more information on quagga mussels and the current situation on the Snake River, visit idaho.gov/quagga.



CLEAN > DRAIN > DRY





Photo by Joel Benson

Potatoes are harvested in a Bonneville County field in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. There is still plenty of agricultural production occurring in the county despite its rapid population growth and development.

Ag still strong in Bonneville County despite rapid growth

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

IDAHO FALLS – Many of Idaho’s top agricultural commodities are produced on a large scale in Bonneville County.

But the Idaho Falls area is also experiencing rapid population growth and development and some areas around the city have lost a significant amount of farm ground.

Ensuring that growth is as orderly as possible and has as little of an impact on agriculture as possible is one of the main focuses of the Bonneville County Farm Bureau.

The rapid development happening near Idaho Falls “is a daily conversation. It comes up in every meeting we have,” says BCFB President James Williams, who farms near Idaho Falls.

Especially east of Idaho Falls, near Ammon and Iona, “a lot of that farm ground has been chewed up,” Williams says. “The growth in Bonneville County is truly exceptional.”

He says the Bonneville County Farm Bureau board of directors invites county commissioners and other elected officials and leaders to meetings to discuss the development.

“Those are constant concerns and we have constant conversations with the county to try to make sure that growth happens in a

responsible way and in a way that supports agriculture,” Williams says.

The loss of farm ground is one of the reasons that Bonneville County feedlot owner and farmer Scott Steele is in the process of building a new feedlot west of Rigby in Jefferson County.

His current feedlot is north of Idaho Falls.

“I’m moving a lot of my stuff to Jefferson County,” says Steele, a member of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s board of directors. “That’s the only place we can find enough farm ground put together to actually ... feed cattle, which is our business.”

Staying in touch with elected officials and on top of the development issue is a main focus of Bonneville County Farm Bureau, board members say.

“In Bonneville County ... and this entire side of the state, we’ve seen a lot of development pressure,” says Bonneville County farmer and BCFB board member Andrew Mickelsen. “We’re trying to make sure we can keep laws and policies in place that support agriculture, but it’s definitely a struggle as there are more and more non-farmers.”

Despite the rapid development going on in parts of the county, a lot of agricultural production is still occurring there.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 1,109 farms and 419,000 acres of land in farming in Bonneville County during the 2017 census year.

“I think most people in the county recognize that we’re still an ag-based community and ... we try to maintain a good presence in a community that is becoming more and more urban.”

- James Williams, BCFB President



Photo by Sean Ellis

Potatoes are harvested in a field near Idaho Falls in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. A lot of farmland near Idaho Falls has disappeared in recent years but there is still a significant amount of agricultural production occurring in Bonneville County. Wheat, barley, hay, potatoes and cattle are some of the county’s top ag commodities.

ville County during the 2017 census year.

The county’s farmers and ranchers brought in \$168 million in farm-gate revenue in 2017, according to the ag census.

According to the census, 68,414 acres of barley were grown in Bonneville County in 2017. Most of that is malt barley used in the beer-brewing process.

“It’s a great spot to grow malt barley, for sure,” Williams says. “That area produces some of the very best malt barley anywhere in the world.”

According to the ag census, there were also 49,387 acres of wheat, 28,922 acres of hay and 16,708 acres of potatoes grown in the county in 2017.

There were 58,072 cattle and calves in Bonneville County in 2017 and the county’s cattle and calves industry brought in \$54 million in farm-gate revenue in 2017, making that one of the county’s top agricultural commodities.

“A lot of farm ground is being gobbled up for development, but there’s still a lot of farming going on in the county,” says potato farmer Ray Searle, a member of the BCFB board of directors.

“There is still a pretty strong agricultural influence in the county,” Williams says.

With so many non-farmers moving to the area, a main focus of the BCFB is on maintaining a good presence in and relationship with the community, Williams says.

“We’ve got a good functioning board

that is very involved in the community,” he says. “I think most people in the county recognize that we’re still an ag-based community and ... we try to maintain a good presence in a community that is becoming more and more urban.”

One of the ways the county Farm Bureau organization does that is by helping out the community when it can, says Mickelsen.

As an example, when the county fairgrounds relocated, BCFB sponsored one of the new buildings at the new fairgrounds.

The BCFB also puts a lot of focus on educating students about the important role agriculture plays in the county and state.

That includes taking a Farm Bureau Moving Agriculture to the Classroom trailer to schools to provide kids a hands-on learning experience about some of the different agricultural commodities the state produces.

The county Farm Bureau board also donated \$7,000 to Skyline High School to help its FFA program get up and running again, Searle says.

The board is always looking for opportunities to support agriculture in Bonneville County, says Mickelsen.

“As you look at Bonneville County, we have been a very strong advocate for agriculture,” he says. “We have done a good job of making sure we keep our finances strong ... so we can support different projects as they come up. We are always looking for those new opportunities.” ■

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Turkey prices drop just in time for Thanksgiving

By Bernt Nelson

American Farm Bureau Federation Economist

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has had a long hold on poultry and egg farmers in the United States.

The H5N1 outbreak that began in January 2022 spanned almost 19 months with over 800 confirmed detections affecting nearly 59 million birds in commercial and backyard flocks.

The resulting supply concerns and record turkey and egg prices during the 2022 holiday season caused problems for both consumers and farmers.

With economic concerns still looming, consumers are wondering if Thanksgiving dinner will cost as much as last year. As we head toward the holidays, this Market Intel evaluates how the H5N1 avian influenza virus might affect prices this year.

HPAI

The status of HPAI is much different now than it was just a year ago. Migratory birds are a major vector of this virus, which naturally makes spring and fall migration high risk times.

Detections from the current outbreak peaked during March 2022 with 20.96 million birds affected before gradually falling to just 540 birds in September 2023.

This can be compared to 8.15 million birds affected in September 2022. June marked the first month with no detections since the outbreak began in February 2022.

Will supplies and prices be more stable in 2023?

Turkey supplies have recovered since the HPAI outbreak began. Due to the time it takes for poults (young turkeys) placed on feed to be ready for market (about 14 weeks), poults must be placed on feed in July in order to be ready to market by Thanksgiving.

According to USDA's September 2023 Livestock, Dairy and Poultry Outlook, July 2023 turkey production was 432.3 million pounds.

This is 9.7% above July 2022, but still about 6% below pre-2022 HPAI outbreak levels, with 457.9 million pounds produced in July 2021. Much of the increase in production is attributed to live weights (the weight of a market ready bird) rising 3.8% above last year and higher processing numbers.

USDA's Turkey Hatchery report, released monthly, indicates there were 26.8 million eggs in incubators on Aug. 1, up 1% from 2022. Poults hatched during July were up slightly from 2022 at 22.5.

Net placements of poults on feed in July were 21.9 million, down slightly from last year. May and June placements of poults on feed were well above average and make up for lower placements in July.

USDA's annual Turkeys Raised report estimates that 219 million turkeys were raised in 2023, an increase of 4% from 2022 and 1% above pre-HPAI outbreak levels in 2021.

This increase in the number of turkeys raised along with strong

FIGURE 3: Average Monthly Turkey Price

Frozen, Grade A Whole Young Hen, 8-16 pounds




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Source: USDA AMS

FIGURE 4: National Average Monthly Retail Egg Price

Large, Grade A Eggs



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Source: USDA ERS

placements of poults on feed in May and June is a good indication of lower consumer prices ahead of Thanksgiving.

Prices and demand

Turkey prices gave consumers quite a shock in 2022. Driven largely by inflation and the effects of HPAI, prices reached a record \$1.72 per pound for an 8–16-pound, frozen, Grade A, whole young hen, 20% higher than the previous year.

These higher prices, caused by HPAI induced supply depletion, led to lower demand, with USDA estimating a decrease per capita demand of 2% in 2022, dipping from 14.9 lbs. per person to 14.6 pounds per person.

Average turkey prices in 2023 have fallen due to growth in production. The average price for the 8–16-pound turkey typically served for Thanksgiving was \$1.27 per pound in August 2023, 22% lower than August 2022.

Some of the more specialized products have come down even more since last year. Boneless, skinless, tom turkey breasts, for example, have declined by 61% from the near record \$6.65 per pound to \$2.59 per pound in August 2023.

The September 2023 USDA World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report forecasts per capita demand for turkey to increase by 6% to 15.5 pounds per person in 2023 in response to lower prices.

Eggs

Egg production began a downhill slide due to HPAI in March 2022 that lasted 12 months with the first monthly increase in production occurring in April 2023. During this time, the effects of HPAI combined with inflation rates to send egg prices skyrocketing to record levels.

USDA's September Chicken and Egg report estimates total egg

production was 9.38 billion eggs, up 2% from September 2022. There were 386 million total layers in the United States on Sept. 1, which is 3% greater than September 2022.

This represents a recovery in the egg sector from last year's HPAI outbreak. USDA states in the previously referenced September outlook that egg production for the second half of the year is expected to slow due to stagnant flock growth.

This brings the projection for 2023 egg production to 7.885 billion dozen eggs, up 1.3% from 2022.

Demand/prices

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service describes egg demand as "fairly good" in the Sept. 25 Egg Market News report, with regional wholesale prices for large shell eggs gently falling 10-35 cents with most prices between \$1.19-\$1.23 per dozen.

USDA's Economic Research Service estimates the national average retail price for shell eggs was \$2.04 per dozen in August 2023, down 30% from \$3.11 in August 2022. This is nearly 60% lower than the record average price of \$4.82 set in January 2023.

Retail egg prices have come down a great deal from 2022 but the lower forecasted production for the second half of 2023 may cause a slight increase in egg prices.

Will there be enough turkey to go around for Thanksgiving?

Farmers and consumers alike should receive some turkey price relief for Thanksgiving. With very few HPAI detections, turkey and poultry supplies have recovered over the last year.

This means there is plenty of turkey – and the lower prices that come with strong supplies – to go around for Thanksgiving.

Consumers can get full details about turkey prices and more on Nov. 15 when the American Farm Bureau Federation releases the results of its annual cost of Thanksgiving dinner survey. ■

This harvest season, thank an Idaho farmer

By Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke

Fall is a season of transition.

The summer heat and longer days start to fade, and the crisp air and changing leaves begin to arrive.

The kids are back in school, football is back on weekends, and the holiday season is right around the corner.

While all of this is true, to me, fall also means the start of another endeavor: harvest season.

Idaho has been, currently is, and will always be an agriculture state. It is what we are known for.

Ask anyone what they think of when they think of Idaho – more than likely their first response will be potatoes.

This is understandable, as each year Idaho grows roughly 14 billion pounds of potatoes, enough to earn us the No. 1 spot for potato production in the country.

But contrary to popular belief, Idaho is also a top contributor of more than just potatoes. Idaho is:

- Ranked No. 1 in barley, peppermint oil, and alfalfa hay production.
- The second largest grower of sugar beets and hops.
- The third largest producer of milk and cheese.
- Ranked fourth in the production of onions, peas, spring wheat, and lentils.

The Gem State ranks in the top 10 in the nation for 30 different agriculture commodities.

Our farmers are the top exporters of many products that Americans rely on. The Idaho potato is world-famous for a reason – our potato farmers help feed the world.

It's also important to note that unlike many of the traditional farm states in the Midwest, most of Idaho's farms are not owned by a single entity.

Idaho is home to nearly 25,000 individual farms and ranches. I am among that number – as a fourth-generation cattle rancher, my family is still running our cattle ranch in Oakley that was first established in the 1800s by my great-grandfather.

Our mom-and-pop operations are the backbone of our agriculture industry; they have a direct or indirect effect in nearly every avenue, from our state economy to our everyday way of life.

Idaho's farming operations equate to more than 11.5 million acres of Idaho land that is used to raise cattle and grow crops for our country. These acres make an impact – 18% of Idaho's total economic output is from agribusiness alone.

Idaho's ag industry is only getting better. Last year, Idaho's net



'The importance of agriculture in Idaho cannot be overstated. Our farmers work hard year-round, from sunup to sundown, to feed our growing population.'

farm income was estimated to be more than \$4.3 billion, the highest net income Idaho has seen in recorded history.

2022 also saw the highest milk revenues in the state ever at \$4.3 billion, as well as cattle revenues, which came in at \$2.3 billion.

We depend on our farmers and ranchers for more than food, too. One out of every eight jobs in Idaho is related to agriculture, whether it's direct or indirect, and one out of every six dollars in sales in our state is related to agriculture.

The importance of agriculture in Idaho cannot be overstated. Our farmers work hard year-round, from sunup to sundown, to feed our growing population.

Idaho's elected leaders understand the value of our farmers. Idaho continues to be proactive in supporting programs that improve the quality of our soil, water, and air, to ensure a sustainable, resilient, and economically viable agricultural system.

Idaho has been discovered. There are people moving to the Gem State every day who like the way we live and want to be a part of it.

But what we all must keep in mind is that while growth is necessary, so is maintaining a viable industry and a historic part of Idaho's identity. Our farm acres should be respected for the bounty they provide.

We need our farmers and ranchers – the world needs Idaho ag producers.

So, this harvest season, let's keep our agribusinesses in mind. Next time you gather friends and family for a backyard barbecue, thank an Idaho rancher.

Next time you're pouring your kids a glass of milk, thank an Idaho dairyman. Next time you're enjoying a hot, fresh French fry – thank an Idaho farmer. ■

Grant allows U of I economists to develop tools to help producers better manage market risks

By **John O'Connell**
University of Idaho

University of Idaho agricultural economist Xiaoli Etienne has been shocked by the number of large-scale grain farmers throughout the region who acknowledge having no formal plan for managing risk and marketing their commodities.

To help farmers address what she considers to be an essential and often overlooked aspect of running a farm, Etienne and colleagues from her department are starting a two-year, USDA-funded project aimed at understanding how the most successful farms manage risk.

Findings will guide development of strategies and tools to aid farmers in crop marketing and risk management.

“I was surprised to see a lot of them have no risk-management strategies. They don't have any plans to sell their crops at all,” said Etienne, Idaho Wheat Commission endowed chair in commodity risk management. “They just basically sell at harvest at whatever price the elevators or the co-op quote them, and by doing this they are missing a lot of opportunities to have higher prices.”

Etienne will hire a graduate student who will start this fall semester to help with the project.

Farmers will participate in five- to eight-member focus groups covering the state's northern, southern and eastern regions, tasked with coming up with questions for a statewide survey regarding marketing and risk-management strategies.

Her team will work with leaders from the Idaho Wheat Commission, Idaho Barley Commission and Idaho Grain Producers Association to identify participants, with the goal of getting 500 surveys returned via mail or online.

Surveys will be conducted in 2024. Etienne aims to get a proportional number of returned surveys with the population of farmers in each Idaho county. Extension



Submitted photo

University of Idaho agricultural economist Xiaoli Etienne, shown here, and colleagues from her department are starting a two-year, USDA-funded project aimed at understanding how the most successful farms manage risk.

outreach materials will also be developed from the project.

Andres Trujillo-Barrera, director of U of I's Agricultural Commodity Risk Management Program, will help design the survey and will analyze how producers select risk-management strategies.

UI Extension economists Pat Hatzenbuehler and Brett Wilder will host Extension workshops and help develop an online risk-management resource center linked to the university's Idaho AgBiz website.

Etienne hopes to develop several strategies and tools that will help producers select the best risk-management practices based on the level of risk they are willing to endure by the end of the grant period in the summer of 2025.

One tool that is envisioned will be an online dashboard. Producers will input details of their operation such as planted acreage, historical yields, break-even price and risk tolerance to generate a personalized marketing plan.

“Producers focus a lot on the production side and getting the maximum yield, but getting the right price is also critical, if not the most important thing for the farm to continue to grow,” Etienne said. “Having

this tool available to help producers have a better understanding of managing risk allows them to sleep better at night.”

Etienne advises producers to have a written plan outlining their approach to marketing and risk management.

A good plan identifies the lowest tier target price necessary to cover expenses, adding in a small profit per bushel. Producers may wish to spread out their sales and set a goal of selling portions of their crop at various tiers.

“Some of the research has shown that's the most reliable way,” Etienne said. “It's not guaranteed to have sales occur at the highest price, but it will be the best one to make sure you can at least cover the bare minimum – that you can survive.”

Farmers may also opt to participate in futures trading – selling futures contracts that are agreements to deliver commodities at a specified delivery date. Furthermore, having crop insurance sets a floor that limits a grower's losses after a tough season.

Etienne advises growers to evaluate their plans at the end of each season to assess what worked well and what didn't and identify opportunities for improvement. ■

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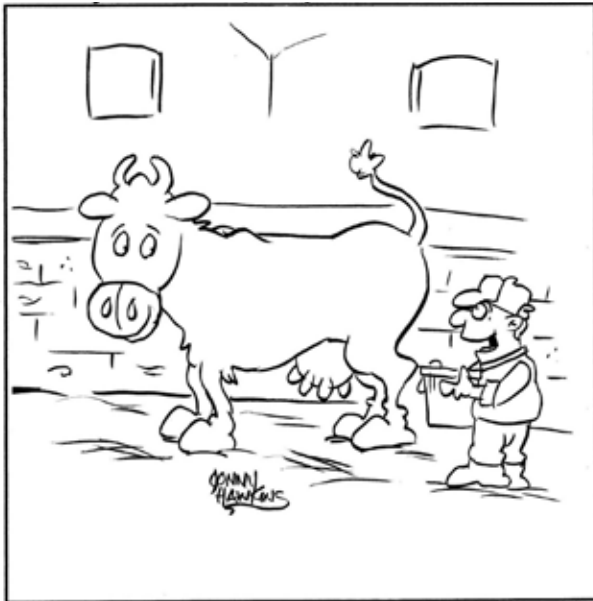
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Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"Ready? The meteorologist called for lots of precipitation today."

Anser key for page 10 Word Search

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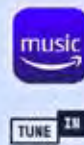
DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS

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Episode 42: Yakety Yak DO Talk Back

YAKS CAN'T WAIT FOR THE FIRST DAY OF WINTER! THEY GET GIDDY AS THE FIRST SNOWFLAKES HIT THEIR NOSES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR KENT SUTTON'S YAK FARM IN ARCHER, IDAHO. NOT MEANT TO BE A COW RANCHER, KENT DECIDED TO BECOME A YAK FARMER AFTER WATCHING BRAD PITT IN "SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET". AFTER MANY YEARS AND ADVENTURES WITH THESE CHARISMATIC ANIMALS, HE HASN'T REGRETTED HIS DECISION.

LISTEN AND LAUGH AS HE TELLS HIS STORY.



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